

Stressbusting tips



Whilst some stress is healthy and motivating the pace of modern life, commitments and responsibilities to juggle, and the prevalence of social media and information overload can combine to leave us overwhelmed.

The bottom line is that we know that too much stress is bad for us and that we need to find ways of managing it. The good news is that there are many ways to reduce stress so that you can enjoy life more.

Twelve stressbusting tips

1

7/11 breathing

This is a simple exercise that you can practise just about anywhere when you need some calmness. Breathe in for the count of 7 and then exhale for the count of 11. Making the 'out' breath last longer than the 'in' breath will help the body to relax as it triggers the parasympathetic nervous system. It distracts our minds from our worries and gives us a moment of respite. At first it might seem difficult to breathe out for the count of 11 but don't worry, with time and practise it will become easier.

2

Pause

When we are frantically busy, put on the spot or caught up in a heated exchange it can be difficult to make good decisions or say the right thing. If you find yourself in this situation remember to pause. Take a moment to inhale and exhale as this will give you time to think. If this is not enough, ask for more time to reflect on what has been said so that you can think it through and come up with the best response. Agree a time to return to the conversation.

3

Have me-time

Allow time in your week for yourself. Think about what would be really nourishing or enjoyable for you and make time for it.

It could mean scheduling time with friends, doing something fun, attending a class, seeing a movie, giving yourself some quiet reading time, gardening or having some pampering.

Me-time doesn't have to be expensive. These moments will help to get you through a stressful period.

4

Disconnect

Thanks to technology and social media, we can make ourselves available to work, friends and acquaintances 24/7. While this has certain advantages if we

never remove ourselves electronically it can feel as if we never leave work or get a break.

Even if there are times when you need to be contactable make sure you designate at least some time that is free from electronic devices. Scheduling in blocks of time will alleviate stress without sacrificing responsibility.

Distinguish what is in your control and what is not. There will always be matters in life that are beyond our control and if we focus on these things we will wind up frustrated and stressed. In most situations there will be something within our control can – a positive action, or adjusting our personal response to it. Working with what we can influence gives us back a sense of control and can be both empowering and invigorating.

5

Take small steps

When we work towards goals it can be overwhelming if we focus on the end result. In the worst cases we may give up before we even begin.

Breaking things down into manageable chunks can motivate us to continue through each subsequent stage. As each chunk is finished we experience a sense of satisfaction from the knowledge that we are closer to achieving our ultimate goal.

6

Learn to say no and set boundaries

Many people find it hard to say no. Perhaps we worry that we won't be liked if we don't say yes to people, or as children we were brought up to be nice, obliging and helpful. Yet if we say yes to things we don't agree with, or want, we prevent ourselves from realising our true intentions.

Setting boundaries is about making your needs and wants clear to other people. This involves voicing what you accept and what you do not accept. Saying no doesn't automatically make you a bad or unhelpful person, it allows you to be more assertive and prevents resentment building up.

7

Challenge negative thinking

In difficult situations it is easy to think negatively, to predict the worst or tell yourself that things are hopeless. Finding alternative ways of viewing the situation can help to prevent you from spiralling into negativity and inertia.

Most of us have what Cognitive Behaviouralists refer to as Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs). These are habitual negative ways of perceiving what is going on and are based on belief systems rather than reality.



8

Allow yourself to make mistakes

As humans we all make mistakes. Despite knowing this many of us set high or perfectionist standards that we cannot possibly maintain. If we expect too much of ourselves the fear of making mistakes, or the emotional fallout from doing so, can have a damaging effect on our lives and create unnecessary stress. Aiming for high standards is not the same as being a perfectionist.

Making mistakes are a natural part of learning and allow us to improve and build on what we know. Allowing ourselves to make mistakes gives us the freedom to try new avenues and adopt a more experimental attitude, rather than approaching things rigidly and narrowly.

9

Express feelings

Everyone has feelings but if we fail to pay attention to them they can build up and become overwhelming, or we can wind up acting against our true intentions.

Think of feelings as important information about what is right for you.

10

Strengthen relationships

Quality relationships are vital to our mental wellbeing. Humans are social beings and having good connections with others enables us to feel happier, more secure and gives us a sense of belonging. Without these we experience loneliness and isolation.

Try to ensure you build stronger and closer relationships through family, friendships or colleagues. If you are lacking valued people in your life you can try broadening your circle by interacting with other members in the community.

11

Be active and eat well

Exercise is a great stress reliever as it releases feel good hormones such as endorphins. People often report that they come up with their best ideas whilst running, walking or other form of exercise. Without the usual focus on getting things done our mind is

free to wander and come up with more creative solutions.

A balanced diet provides the bedrock for our wellbeing. When we eat well we are more likely to feel well and have energy for the activities we enjoy.

12

Eliminate unhealthy coping aids

Reaching for a glass of wine, eating junk food or zoning out online when we feel stressed may make us feel better in the short term but if these become habits and continue long term they will create greater problems. Ultimately our health suffers and problems remain unresolved. We can rely on these habits as a way of escaping from uncomfortable feelings, instead of facing up to them. Although facing up to difficult feelings isn't easy it can help us to deal with the truth of what is going in our lives and, in so doing, allows us to make choices and take control over how to move forward.

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