



Hints to Avoid Harmful Stress

1. **Work out priorities**

Keep a list - make the tasks possible. Prioritise the tasks in order of importance and tick off when done. Include the important people in your life as priorities and attend to these relationships.

2. **Identify your stress situations**

Make a list of events that leave you emotionally drained, with one or two ways to reduce the stress for each. When they occur, use them as an opportunity to practise your stress reduction techniques, then, keep notes on what works for next time.

3. **Learn to 'reframe' statements: Don't react to imagined insults**

It is a waste of time and energy to be oversensitive to imagined insults, innuendo or sarcasm. Give people the benefit of the doubt, talk over the situation with someone you trust. They may have another spin on what was said.

4. **Think before you commit yourself to other people's expectations**

We can often perform tasks merely to feel accepted by other people. Practice saying "no" to requests that are unreasonable or more than you can handle at the time - rather than suffer subsequent regrets and stress. Consider whether you should learn to rely less on the approval of others, again, talk this over with someone you trust.

5. **Move on: Don't dwell on past mistakes**

Feelings of guilt, remorse and regret cannot change the past and they make the present difficult by sapping your energy. Make a conscious effort to do something to change the mood (eg mindfulness technique or something active you enjoy) when you feel yourself drifting into regrets about past actions. Learn from it and have strategies in place for next time. Learn to forgive yourself for past mistakes.

6. **Learn to defuse anger and frustrations rather than bottle them up**

Express and discuss your feelings to the person responsible for your agitation. If it is impossible to talk it out, plan for some physical activity at the end of the working day to relieve tensions. Let go of grudges –they do not affect the potential victim because he does not necessarily know about them. However, the grudge-bearer pays a price in energy and anxiety just thinking about revenge.

7. **Set aside time each day for recreation and exercise**

Gentle repetitive exercise such as walking, swimming, cycling are good to relieve stress. Meditation, yoga, pilates and dance are also excellent. The trick is to find what suits you best. Hobbies that focus attention are also good stress relievers. Take up a new activity unrelated to your current occupation, one that gives you a sense of achievement and satisfaction. Establish new friends in your newly found interest. There are handouts with a range of techniques for relaxation and mindfulness on the website that you can use. The daily mood chart can be used to rate the impact of applying new strategies.

8. **Take your time: don't let people rush you**

Frenzied activities lead to errors, regrets, stress. Request time to orient yourself to the situation. At work, if rushed, ask people to wait until you finish working or thinking something out. Plan ahead to arrive at appointments early, composed and having made allowances for unexpected hold-ups. Practice approaching situations 'mindfully'.

Written by Kay Wilhelm: some material adapted from Hints to Avoid or Manage Stress (National Heart Foundation) and Ten Hints to Avoid Stress (Mental Health Foundation)

9. **Take your time on the road: Don't be an aggressive car driver.**

Develop an "I will not be ruffled" attitude. Drive defensively and give way to bullies. Near misses cause stress and strain, so does the fear of being caught for speeding. If possible avoid peak hour traffic. If caught in it, relax by concentrating on deep (stomach) breathing or 'mindful driving' (using mindfulness technique, also available on website). Advanced driving lessons can be useful.

10. **Help children and young people to cope with stress**

Children need the experience of being confronted with problems to try out, and improve their ability to cope. By being overprotective or by intervening too soon, parents may prevent young people from developing valuable tolerance levels for problems, or from acquiring problem-solving skills.

11. **Think positively – you get what you expect**

Smile whenever possible –it's an inexpensive way of improving your looks and how you feel. Try and find something positive to say about a situation, particularly if you are going to find fault. You can visualise situations you have handled well and hold those memories in your mind when going into stressful situations.

12. **Cut down on drinking, smoking, sedatives and stimulants**

They only offer temporary relief and don't solve the problem. They can create more problems in terms of physical and mental health. Consider the effects you are looking for (sedation or stimulation) and how else you can achieve them.



Useful Resources

Barlow David H, Rapee Ronald M (1997), **Mastering Stress: A Lifestyle Approach**. Lifestyle Press. *Contains practical suggestions for handling stress.*

Church M (2003), **Adrenalin Junkies - A Guide to Life in the Fast Lane**, also **Serotonin Seekers**. Sydney: ABC Books. *Two local booklets in an easy to read format with plenty of information on dealing with sadness and irritability from an Australian context.*

Davis M, Eshelman E, McKay M (2000), **Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook**. New Harbinger. *Very useful self help workbook covering topics like worry control, coping skills, time management, assertion training, nutrition and exercise.*

Holmes R, Holmes J (1993), **The Good Mood Guide**. Dent. *A great little book with a Zen twist, describing the moods we experience and with strategies for dealing with them.*

O'Hanlon, Bill (1999), **Do One Thing Different: Ten Simple Ways to Change Your Life**. Quill. *A very useful book with practical solution-focussed strategies to think and act differently.*

Parker G (2004), **Dealing with Depression: A Common sense Guide to Mood Disorders**. Allen & Unwin. *A comprehensive overview of depression with an Australian perspective.*

Tanner S, Ball J (1989), **Beating the Blues: A Self-help Approach to Overcoming Depression**. Doubleday. *A step-by-step program based on CBT to help overcome depression. Very readable and informative book with questionnaires, self-tests and case studies – aimed more at depression but will help deal with psychological vulnerability.*

Wilson P (1995), **Instant Calm**, and **Calm at Work**. Both by Penguin. *Comprehensive look at relaxation strategies written by a man who wanted to understand the field for himself. There is something for everyone.*

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