



HEALTHY and EMPOWERING
LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

for
YOU



OUR ENTRE to RELAXING & RENEWING ...

REDUCING STRESS THROUGH LIFESTYLE CHOICES

- ♥ **WHAT IS STRESS AND WHAT DOES STRESS FEEL LIKE**
- ♥ **HOW WE REACT TO STRESS ... in a GOOD WAY and in a BAD WAY**
- ♥ **NON-PRODUCTIVE STRESS COPING BEHAVIORS**
- ♥ **RESULTING INFLAMMATORY REACTIONS and DISEASES DUE TO STRESS**
- ♥ **FLIPPING THE STRESS COIN and REDUCING STRESS**
- ♥ **STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES**
- ♥ **HEALTHY DESSERT ... PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION and IMAGERY**

WHAT IS STRESS AND WHAT DOES STRESS FEEL LIKE

Stress can be defined as the response of the human organism to any change or demand. Whether the demand or stress is positive or negative, the body responds automatically. The stress response is coordinated in the body by a part of the nervous system called the autonomic (or automatic) nervous system. This system has two divisions, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. The sympathetic nervous system controls the stress response and the parasympathetic nervous system controls the opposite or relaxation response.

HOW WE REACT TO STRESS ... in a GOOD WAY and in a BAD WAY

When you experience a life change or demand, the sympathetic nervous system sends messages to muscles, organs and glands, which help the body react. Powerful chemicals like adrenaline, cortisol and aldosterone, and other neurotransmitters released by the adrenal glands and other organs, have multiple effects on the body:

- increased blood pressure (increased tension in blood vessel walls)
- blood vessel spasming
- heart rhythm disturbances
- increased stomach acid which can lead to stomach pain, indigestion and heartburn
- decreased blood flow to the stomach and intestines with decreased ability to digest foods
- increased muscle tension which can lead to headache, neck and backaches

Find me at LorraineDAversa.com; Lorraine@LorraineDAversa.com; Twitter: [@LorraineDAversa](https://twitter.com/LorraineDAversa);
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lorraine.daversa>; YouTube: bit.ly/11leRDF; 609-502-0880



HEALTHY and EMPOWERING LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

for
YOU



- increased blood clotting and thickness
- increased cholesterol
- increased blood sugar
- short, shallow breathing
- abnormalities in immune functioning
- fluid retention

RESULTING INFLAMMATORY REACTIONS and DISEASES DUE TO STRESS

- Anti-Inflammatory Diseases
- Coronary heart disease and associated symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, palpitations and coronary artery spasm and sudden blockages of coronary arteries (i.e., angina, irregular heartbeats or a heart attack).
- Other stress- related illnesses, such as insomnia, sexual dysfunction, hyperactivity, ulcers, chronic headaches, backaches and high blood pressure.
- Psychological and mental reactions to stress:
 - anxiety, acute or chronic
 - depression (especially when stress is chronic)
 - anger, hostility and rage
 - irritability
 - decreased concentration and memory

NON-PRODUCTIVE STRESS COPING BEHAVIORS

Finally, stress, especially the chronic variety and its associated symptoms and reactions, leads to behaviors to cope with stress, and often those coping measures increase stress. We end up caught in a vicious cycle.

Here are some ways we don't want to handle stress:

- overworking
- overeating
- Isolation
- Inactivity
- lack of sleep
- exhaustion
- addiction to substances such as drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine

FLIPPING THE STRESS COIN... REDUCING STRESS

The parasympathetic nervous system undoes the effects of stress on humans, and brings about a relaxation response and restoration in the body. Some of these effects include:

Find me at LorraineDAversa.com; Lorraine@LorraineDAversa.com; Twitter: [@LorraineDAversa](https://twitter.com/LorraineDAversa);
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lorraine.daversa>; YouTube: bit.ly/11leRDF; 609-502-0880



HEALTHY and EMPOWERING LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

for
YOU



- decreased blood pressure
- decreased heart rate and strength of contraction of the heart muscle
- less oxygen demand, lessening workload on the heart
- decreased rate of breathing
- increased lung capacity
- better digestion
- increased hemoglobin (ability of blood to carry oxygen)
- feelings of calm and tranquility
- healthy immune system

There are two basic ways of dealing with stress.

- One way is to avoid it. Reduce external stressors when you can, but this is not always possible or even desirable.
- The other way is to manage stress by changing how you react to a situation. The circumstances don't change, you do.

Stress management techniques can help you react to potentially stressful situations in more healthful and productive ways. Your ability to handle stress increases. In other words, your short fuse gets longer.

STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

HEALTHY DESSERT ... PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION and IMAGERY

... WORK ON PRESENTATION FROM THIS POINT FORWARD

- Stress management techniques can help you react to potentially stressful situations in more healthful and productive ways. Your ability to handle stress increases. In other words, your short fuse gets longer.

Stretching, Meditation, Deep breathing, Progressive relaxation, and Imagery

These techniques are much more than simple strategies to help us cope with or manage stress. They are designed to increase our awareness of what is happening inside us — physically, emotionally and spiritually. Increasing our awareness extends our capacity for control over what is happening within us. As a result, we are better prepared to recognize the symptoms of stress and make changes before we develop unhealthy conditions such as heart disease.

A number of the practices described here are derived from the ancient system of yoga. They have been popularized in recent decades by medical researchers, psychologists and others who have rediscovered their benefits. Yoga is not a religion. It is a system of powerful tools for achieving union, and healing, within us, with others and with a higher force. In this sense, yoga techniques not only calm the body, but also are a means of healing the sense of isolation that can lead to stress and illness.



HEALTHY and EMPOWERING LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

for
YOU



Here are some general instructions for beginning the regular practice of these stress management techniques. Before you begin, it is important to consult your health care provider to be sure that the practices are safe and beneficial for you. It is also very important to find a qualified yoga teacher to work with, rather than trying to teach yourself from a book. In the resource section below, we offer some suggestions for finding a teacher.

Daily Practice:

Consistency is one of the most important aspects of developing a personal practice. Stress management relaxation techniques are a form of physical and mental training. They are far more effective when done regularly and correctly. There is no magic to learning how to relax. Training your body to enter a deep, regenerative state takes time. Some people will learn quickly, while others may need more time and individual instruction.

For the first several weeks, do yourself a favor and do not focus too much on the effects of the stress management techniques, or your own performance. The gains may not be apparent until you have practiced for a while. If you have any problems during the first few sessions, difficulty concentrating, or feeling some momentary discomfort, discuss this with your instructor.

Develop a Routine:

Habits, good or bad, are developed over time. If you choose a regular time and place to do your relaxation, you will be creating a habit you soon will look forward to.

To help you develop a routine, you may want to keep a relaxation log, which you can fill out briefly before and after each of your relaxation sessions. Keeping a chart for the first several weeks is a useful incentive and allows you to watch your progress.

A Safe Place to Relax:

An important part of developing a routine is to create a safe and quiet place to relax. This may mean asking for cooperation from the other people around you, maybe explaining to them that you need to be alone so you can just concentrate on relaxing. Disconnecting your telephone and putting pets out can help guarantee quiet time alone. Do whatever you think is necessary to ensure you will not be disturbed. Try to keep your special place orderly and full of fresh air so it is always a pleasure to go there.

Timing

The best time to do stress management is an individual decision based on your schedule and lifestyle.. It's important to have an empty stomach, so be sure to wait at least an hour after a meal. Many people choose to do relaxation techniques early in the morning to set the tone for the day, or just before dinner. It can also



HEALTHY and EMPOWERING LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

for
YOU



be done after vigorous activity. Another good idea is to do your relaxation techniques before going to bed, which will help ensure a restful night's sleep.

Mental Attitude:

The mental attitude required for relaxation and meditation is different than the mind-set required for most task-oriented activities. Sometimes it takes awhile to become comfortable with the attitude of "passive attention." Do not push yourself or try too hard to concentrate. Rather, let your attention focus on your breathing, an object such as a flower or candle, a pleasant mental picture, whatever technique you find best. If your mind wanders (and it surely will many times in the course of each exercise), simply finish the thought and then bring your mind back to your object of attention. Do not be critical of yourself, or try to keep your mind from wandering. This will only defeat you and may make you tense up while you are trying to relax and meditate.

Passive attention is best described as paying attention to the process, rather than the goal. Do not think about getting relaxed, which is your goal; pay attention to whatever sensation you are having at the moment, no matter what it is. If you find it hard to do the exercise or to relax, pay attention to your body and try to find out why. You may need to change your position, write something down, make a phone call, or finish a task before you are fully ready to relax.

Problems and Discomfort:

Because we all have expectations about the benefits of relaxation, many people begin to practice stress management and feel they are not doing it right. It seems too simple! Their experience does not fit their expectations, however vague and unrealistic these expectations may be. Trust yourself.

Sometimes a person will experience some discomfort, either physical tension or anxiety, during or after stress management. This is because in relaxing you may become aware of tension in your body that you had ignored or not even realized you had, or you may be letting feelings or thoughts into conscious awareness that you had previously repressed. In most cases the solution is to wait for a while and then continue the exercise; however, if discomfort or anxiety persists, it is wise to consult with a professional.

Meditation Hints

Physical

- Avoid meditating immediately after a meal. Wait at least one hour.
- For early morning meditations, do a few stretches and splash some cold water in the face to help you fully awaken.
- A straight backed chair, a firm cushion or pillow or a folded blanket placed under the buttocks helps to make sitting more comfortable.



HEALTHY and EMPOWERING LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

for
YOU



- Make sure your clothing is comfortable and sufficiently warm (the body will cool down as you relax).
- Meditate in a well-ventilated room.
- Decorate the meditation room with pictures, candles, inspirational books, sacred objects, etc. – anything that would remind you of your purpose in meditation.
- It's best to meditate in the same place, at the same time every day.
- Two sittings daily of 15 to 20 minutes is a good start for meditation practice; sit in the morning when you get up and in the evening before retiring. Very early in the morning (4:00 to 7:00 a.m.) is an especially good time to meditate.
- Breathing practices help to center the mind and relax the body in preparation for meditation.

Practical

- Meditating regularly is very important. It is through regularity that the habit of meditation can be cultivated. Thus, when meditation becomes a habit, “second nature” to you, it will actually be harder for you to skip your meditation than to meditate.
- Don't be anxious or disturbed over distracting thoughts coming into your mind during your sitting. Simply try to ignore them. Know that your intention is meditation — if these thoughts want to sit for awhile in your mental “room,” that's up to them. Don't try to force them out — you'll create an enemy. Learning to LET GO of these distracting thoughts is a valuable technique.
- Tend to the PROCESS of meditation rather than the goal. If you do it properly, you will get results.
- Sometimes it may seem that your mind is more disturbed in meditation than during other times. Usually this is because you've never been still or quiet enough to notice all the “static” on your mental radio. It's all always been there — it's you! Enjoy the “music” — all the drama, romance, intrigue, comedy—it's all there, in you. Listen to the show as it goes by, but don't get caught up in any of the scenes, no matter how dramatic. Remain as a witness. Use your object of meditation as your anchor.
- Be loving but firm. Don't make your mind afraid of you. After all, it's just doing the best it can under the circumstances. Let it know WHY you want to meditate.
- Approach your practice with a sense of fun and adventure.
- If possible, be around others who meditate; you will inspire each other.

The stress management program at an Ornish Retreat derives from common sense and the historical source of yoga: stretches, breathing practices, deep relaxation and meditation techniques. Yoga encourages comfort, healing and mental poise. Many styles and schools of classical yoga exist, and many variations for stress management are developing. Some emphasize physical practice, some meditation, others relaxation, etc. Some styles are more physically vigorous, some more contemplative.

When searching for a stress management specialist, interview several yoga teachers to find someone you trust. Describe your health profile, including your physical condition and experience with yoga and



HEALTHY and EMPOWERING LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

for
YOU



exercise, sharing any perceived or diagnosed limitations. Be sure to mention that you are on a comprehensive lifestyle change program.

- Ask if the teacher has had experience with yoga as stress management for people with heart- health considerations.
- Ask if the teacher would have a student with heart disease call you to talk about his or her reactions to the class, and if yoga has helped in managing stress.
- Ask yourself if you have confidence and trust in the teacher and feel the experience of working with this teacher will benefit you.

Here are some suggestions to follow in your search for a yoga teacher specializing in stress management:

- Search online or in your local Yellow Pages under “yoga” for gentle or restorative yoga classes.
- Check bulletin boards in health food stores, book shops, YWCAs and YMCAs, community and recreational centers, local colleges, adult education programs, etc.
- Ask friends for references.
- Browse the shelves at your library and video stores, and you may find yoga audio and video tapes. More new and improved yoga material is coming out all the time. You can usually rent and review tapes before buying them.
- Two excellent yoga magazines that provide directories of teachers & studios, as well as workshops, retreats & conferences are: [Yoga Journal](#), and [Yoga + Joyful Living](#).

On this page:

- [Approaching Stress](#)
- [Basic Stress Management Guidelines](#)
- [Hints and Resources](#)
- [Find a Teacher/Specialist](#)

The Proven Program:

- [The Proven Program](#)
- [The Research](#)
- [Nutrition](#)
- [Fitness](#)
- [Love & Support](#)
- [Stress Management](#)