



MORE TOOLS

Theresa Drescher's Four-Step Strategy for Reducing Stress

1. CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON STRESS

When you change your mindset from "All stress is bad" to "Stress can get me what I need," then it doesn't have the same negative effect on you. Benefits to stress: You become focused when confronted with a threat; you maintain clarity when solving a crisis; you find courage to take on a challenge; you are motivated to flee a predatory situation; you become protective of yourself; your resilience shines through. Learning to deal with stressful situations can make future ones easier to manage.

2. DEVELOP QUICK STRESS RELIEVERS

Count: Find something specific in your environment to focus on, then count how many there are. For example, think of the color red. Put all your attention on counting how many items in your environment are red. If you run out of colors to tally, look for shapes and patterns: circular, triangular, stripes, dots. Take deep breaths, and keep counting colors or objects until you feel calm again. This action will disrupt the energy fueling the negative or scary thoughts leading to an anxiety attack and give you moment to regroup.

Mantras: A mantra is a word, words or a sound you repeat, silently or aloud, to aid in meditation. Repeating a mantra silently or chanting it out loud can take your focus off your surroundings, center your thoughts and calm you down. It can be as simple as "I'm okay" or "I have everything I need." It can be the sound "Om," which is believed to be the original vibration of all life.

Positive self-talk: Say encouraging words to yourself when stressed, "I've got this," "I've been through this before and can do it again" and "I'm scared, but I can do this."

Simplicity: Stop, pause and relax into the moment. Let go of the list of things you must get done, and focus on the one thing you need to do right now.

Breathing exercises: Begin by breathing in through your nose. Count to four as you breathe in. Hold your breath for two seconds, then breathe out through your mouth, counting to five. Increase the count with the next breath: five as you breathe in, six as you breathe out. Increase the numbers until you can't take in anymore air, then start over again: four in, five out. Relax your shoulders, and feel the weight of your body sink into the chair each time you breathe out. Listen to the sound of air entering and leaving your body. Continue until you calm down or feel relaxed.

Write it down: Write down on paper or type on your computer everything you are feeling when triggered. Once you have written down your frustrations throw out the paper or delete the document on your computer. Getting the feelings and thoughts out of your head and onto paper helps relieve the tension that is building in you.

Minute-long meditation: Focus on a sound in your environment: hum of an air-conditioner, clicking of a radiator, purr of a cat. Close your eyes, and zero in on that sound until it is all you are aware of. Empty your brain of thoughts, and just listen. Relax your shoulders, take slow deep breaths and concentrate on that one simple sound for as long as you can. This exercise will occupy your mind with something simple instead of chaotic thoughts and allow you to calm down, relax and regroup.

Visualization: A technique for creating images to communicate a message. Begin by clenching your hands into a tight fist. Imagine that the issue you are dealing with is in your hands. Picture putting your hands under running water. Notice that the water cannot get into your hands; it rolls over the top and falls below. Slowly open your hands. See the water now pouring into your palms. Imagine the water is the solutions and guidance for your issues now pouring into your life.

3. ESTABLISH LIFESTYLE STRESS-RELIEVER HABITS

Practice one thing a day: Drink one cup of tea, do a breathing exercise, read one positive quote, listen to one relaxing piece of music, take a walk around one block. At the end of seven days you will have taken seven steps to address your stress, at the end of two weeks you will have taken fourteen steps. Continue adding small steps every day. This approach makes it easy to incorporate changes into your life.

Keep a stress diary: It will help you identify triggers so you can address them. Regularly record information about the stresses you are experiencing. This diary will allow you to analyze the triggers and create a plan to manage them.

Show gratitude: Verbalize your gratitude. It is more effective and has a positive impact on your consciousness when you say what you are grateful for out loud.

Create a Yay! jar: Look for a positive moment every day; write it on a piece of paper, and put it in a jar. It could be finding a quarter, someone letting you pull in front of him on the road, a friend calling just when you needed to talk to someone, a promotion or meeting someone new. At the end of the year, go through your Yay! jar. This habit will accomplish two things: It will encourage you to look for a positive moment in every day; it will serve as a reminder of all the positive things, big and small, that happened over the year.

Meditate.

Practice yoga.

Exercise: Walk, swim, take an exercise class.

Get involved with your community: Volunteer for a favorite cause. Outside activity helps you direct your attention somewhere other than to your stress.

Practice mindfulness: Focus your awareness on the present moment. Calmly acknowledge and accept your feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations.

Create a motivational environment: Post encouraging and inspirational notes and images around you. Post them on the refrigerator, the bathroom mirror, the dashboard in your car, your desk. Say them out loud to yourself.

4. BUILD YOUR PERSONAL RESOURCES

The stress response can be triggered when you feel you don't have the resources to manage a challenge you face. Building personal resources can alter your response or eliminate this trigger.

With more personal resources to draw upon, you develop a greater trust that you can handle whatever comes your way.