

Coping with stress

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Stress is defined as a reaction to continued excessive pressure or responsibility when you feel inadequate or unable to cope. It is inevitable that we all get stressed out at some point throughout our lives. It could be due to our personal life, professional life or both. Since we all have problems and get stressed at some point, why do some people respond better than others under stressful situations? Why do some people seem to have no problems at all while others just carry that 'I'm having a bad day' look almost all the time?



The key is the way we respond and cope with stress. It's right that a little stress is good as it makes us work harder and gives us a sense of achievement however too much of stress could be detrimental to one's health and might also indirectly affect one's loved ones. How do you know when the stress is affecting you or your loved one in a negative manner? A few signs are:

- **Being easily irritable, angry**
- **Looking visibly tired and exhausted**
- **Getting headaches, stomachaches and other physical ailments more easily**
- **Frequent Insomnia**
- **Depression, not being interested in the things that one normally likes for a period of time**
- **Sudden change in eating habits, either overeating or eating less than one normally would**

Fortunately, there are various methods that one could adopt in order to manage stress. Here are some very useful tips:

1.) Breathing Exercise:

The way to breathe in order for one to really get the full benefit of each breath is to practice 'belly breathing'. We have been taught to breathe through the mouth deeply and raise one's shoulders as we do so. However the more effective method would be to breath in deeply first through your nose. As you do so, feel your belly rising as your shoulders remain as they are. Hold your breath for a count of 5, and then breathe out through your mouth. As you do so, your belly retracts. In this method of breathing, more oxygen enters the lungs and would thus put us in a more relaxed frame of mind. Although ideally done lying down, it can be done standing and sitting as well.

2.) Acupressure Techniques:

Acupressure is the ancient technique of applying pressure using the thumb and fingers to various points in the body in order to stimulate it and improve the overall well being. It's just like acupuncture but without using the needles! Acupressure is a very beneficial form of natural therapy as it can assist in healing a huge variety of common ailments and especially those that are very closely associated with stress such as headaches,



stomachaches and shoulder strain. The method of applying the pressure to the points are as follows: Apply pressure to the points mentioned using the thumb and /or finger of the hand that you are not working on and apply it to the other hand/part of the body that you are trying to stimulate. Apply firm pressure for 30m seconds. After which, stop the pressure and relax for about a minute. After which, carry on another 30 seconds of pressure and repeat until the ailment subsides or when you feel a little better.

There are hundreds of points that one could use but here are some acupressure points (plus some hand reflexology techniques) for various common ailments that are closely related to stress:

i) Migraine- Use your thumb or the end of a blunt object (e.g. the eraser end of a pencil) and apply pressure to the centre of the thumb of the other hand. Start with the left hand and after one 30 second repetition, do it on the thumb of the other hand.

ii) Eye Strain- Apply pressure using your thumb on the web (space between your pointer and middle finger) on your hand that corresponds with the side in which you have the eye strain (or watery eye or any other eye irritation). Remember, right hand stimulation for right eye and vise versa.

iii) General Anxiety- Press the tips of your fingers together. For this condition, it's ideal to hold in this position for about 5 minutes but if you have trouble holding on, relax and carry on once you feel comfortable.

3.) *Listen to music:*

It does not just have to be your favourite instrumental music or 'sounds from the ocean' CDs. It can be from any of you're your favourite artist from a variety of genres including country, classical, pop and oldies. Music relaxes the mind and puts one in a calm state. But stay away from alternative music as it puts one in a more 'aggressive' state of mind.

4.) *Laugh:*



Yes, never underestimate the old saying that laughter is the best medicine. An it's free too! You could read a simple comic strip from the papers, watch a short animation clip or just have a chat with someone who cracks you up with their good jokes. It's advisable for everyone to laugh for at least 15 minutes in a day. Laughter reduces at least four of neuroendocrine hormones (epinephrine, cortisol, dopac, and growth hormone) associated with stress response. Believe it or not, laughing equivalent to "an internal workout/jog".

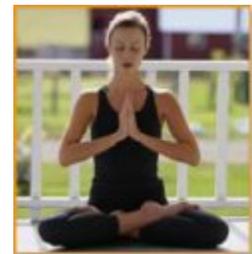
Thus laughter can provide good cardiac conditioning especially for those who are unable to perform physical exercises. In addition, laughter decreases stress hormones that constrict blood vessels and suppress immune activity thereby boosting the immune system.

5.) *Visualization:*

Close your eyes breathe deeply and imagine yourself in your favourite place. Places that make you feel feelings of true joy; it could be the beach, your usual food centre, friends meeting place or just a quiet spot in your neighbourhood. Pretend that you're there at that point in time, seeing your favourite things, smelling the smells, hearing the sounds associated with the place. Do this for about 10 minutes. After which, open your eyes. You should feel a whole lot better.

6.) *Do some simple stretching:*

Spend about 5 minutes doing some simple stretching activity. Firstly, rotate your head from the right, all the way to the back, to the left, down and then back. Do it very slowly and feel the stretch in your neck. Secondly, shrug your shoulders all the way up; pretend that you are trying to make it touch your ears. Hold the stretch for a few seconds and relax. Next, rotate your wrist in one direction slowly. Do about 10 rotations then rotate the other direction. Lastly, rotate the left ankle slowly about 10 rotations. Repeat with the right ankle. These stretching should stimulate blood flow throughout your body, making you feel more refreshed and relaxed.



7.) *Care for a pet:*

It's a great way to unwind after a stressful day! Relax, play fetch with your pet and enjoy the unconditional love that a pet would shower over you. Studies have shown that caring for a pet relaxes the mind and create a sense of personal satisfaction seeing the pet so happy. But remember, keeping a pet comes with great responsibility so please consider all aspect before rushing to the pet shop or SPCA to adopt a pet. For more information about the responsibilities that comes with pet ownership, please view the SPCA's website at www.sPCA.org.sg.

