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Article 27

100 Ways to Reduce Stress: Making the Balancing Act More Manageable

Paper based on a program presented at the 2008 Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, October, 2008, Houston, TX.

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100 Ways to Reduce Stress

Between 70 and 80% of all diseases and illnesses are stress related, and the leading causes of death are lifestyle diseases (Seaward, 2006). Yet we do not need statistics to tell us that we feel stressed, exhausted, and creatively depleted when we do not care for ourselves. Below is a list of 100 ways to reduce stress.

Environmental Strategies

The first domain to examine for ways to reduce stress is the space around you. What can you see, smell, hear, touch and taste? What makes you drop your shoulders and say, "Ahhhh"? Look for ways to bring beauty to your environment. Here are a few things to get you started:

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|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Enjoy being | 7. Buy a bouquet for yourself |
| 2. Light a scented candle | 8. Create a collection of things you love |
| 3. Try aromatherapy | 9. Put up a birdfeeder and watch it |
| 4. Bake bread or cookies | 10. Read in the sunshine |
| 5. Adjust lighting | 11. Sip a hot drink/ iced drink |
| 6. Plant flowers | 12. Snuggle under a blanket with a book |

Cognitive Strategies

The second domain to address when reducing stress is how you think about and perceive information. Mental interpretations determine your emotional reaction, so dwelling on problems, thinking of the worst case scenarios, and berating yourself over mistakes will all increase your levels of stress. Alternatively, allowing yourself to make mistakes and move on, thinking of the best possible scenarios, and interpreting mistakes

as necessary growth opportunities will reduce your stress load. Here are some cognitive strategies to reduce stress:

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|---|--------------------------------------|
| 13. Reframe the problem | 18. Have realistic expectations |
| 14. Choose positive thoughts | 19. Visualize the outcome you desire |
| 15. Meditate on positive words | 20. Post affirmations on a mirror |
| 16. Practice positive affirmations | 21. Work a puzzle/game |
| 17. Take responsibility for your thoughts | |

Creative Strategies

Creativity is a great way to channel stress into beauty. Use the arts to relax and process your challenges at the same time. Product is not as important as process. These are some creative strategies to alleviate stress:

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|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 22. Journal Write | 29. Stroke a pet |
| 23. Write a letter | 30. Listen to/compose relaxing music |
| 24. Paint | 31. Play an instrument |
| 25. Draw | 32. Attend a concert |
| 26. Spend an afternoon in photography | 33. Start a new hobby |
| 27. Create pottery/work with clay | 34. Garden |
| 28. Knit/Crochet/Needlework | |

Physical Strategies

Often, you will feel stress in your body through tight muscles, nervous movement, and stiffness. To reduce stress, move your body through stretching, aerobic exercise, or rhythmic motion. Care for your body by making healthy nutritional decisions. Try the following to reduce stress physically:

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| 35. Dance | 45. Soak your feet in warm water |
| 36. Bicycle | 46. Enjoy a steamy bubble bath |
| 37. Run | 47. Take a yoga class |
| 38. Take a nature walk/hike | 48. Practice t'ai chi |
| 39. Walk the dog | 49. Do progressive muscular relaxation |
| 40. Train for a walking/marathon fundraiser | 50. Frequently practice deep breathing |
| 41. Swim | 51. Check out an exercise video |
| 42. Snorkel | 52. Choose a healthy diet |
| 43. Get a massage | 53. Drink pure water |
| 44. Give yourself a foot massage | 54. Take a multivitamin |

Humorous Strategies

A saying we have around our house is that in some situations you just have to laugh or cry, and we like to choose to laugh. Laughter diffuses tension. Have you ever

said, “I needed a good laugh”? Do something humorous to chuckle away your serious stress:

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|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 55. Go see a movie comedy | 58. Laugh out loud |
| 56. Watch a funny sitcom | 59. Tell a friend a new joke |
| 57. Read a book of comics | 60. Giggle with a girlfriend |

Spiritual Strategies

We are holistic beings, and the spiritual part of us can help soothe stress, too. Try these spiritual strategies as a preventative measure for stress:

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|---------------------------|--|
| 61. Pray | 64. Participate in a religious service |
| 62. Meditate | 65. Sing joyful songs/hymns |
| 63. Practice gratefulness | 66. Seek to serve others |

Management Strategies

Some stress is created or increased because of procrastination, disorganization, and inattention to details. By managing time, money, plans, and clutter, you can make a difference in how you feel in as little as 15 minutes. Some management strategies are:

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|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 67. Manage time | 72. Clean a room |
| 68. Prioritize tasks | 73. Organize a closet/cabinet |
| 69. Delegate | 74. Set goals |
| 70. Make and follow a budget | 75. Make a life list |
| 71. Problem solve one dilemma | 76. Use mental imagery of success |

Relational Strategies

As long as we interact with people, we will have relational stress. This is even more important in relationships that are meaningful to us. But, just as relationships may create stress, they are also a source for reducing stress. Try these relational strategies to decrease stress:

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|---|----------------------------------|
| 77. Cook a special meal for a loved one | 84. Email an old friend |
| 78. Be kindly assertive | 85. Join a social-support group |
| 79. Vent to a friend | 86. Join an exercise class/group |
| 80. Meet someone for lunch/coffee | 87. Forgive a hurt |
| 81. Call a friend | 88. Volunteer |
| 82. Get a manicure | 89. Do something just for fun |
| 83. Get a haircut and enjoy the wash | |

Outdoor Strategies

We began with environmental strategies, and we will end with outdoor strategies. Being outside can adjust our attitude by, quite literally, giving us a new perspective. No matter what the weather or temperature, you can implement outdoor strategies for a quick or leisurely stress reliever. Some outdoor strategies that might be helpful are:

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| 90. Sit on a park bench and use the senses | 95. Build a sandcastle |
| 91. Stroll through a zoo or aquarium | 96. Build a snowman |
| 92. Star gaze | 97. Listen to the crackle of a campfire |
| 93. Spend a few hours boating/yachting | 98. Picnic near water |
| 94. Take a scenic drive | 99. Go out to dinner |
| | 100. Window shop |

Conclusions

Now you have 100 things that you can do to reduce stress, but they will not help if they are simply ideas on paper. Choose at least one and try it now. Make a plan (a management strategy) to incorporate one stress management strategy every day for the next week. Step outside for a brisk 10 minute walk and combine both a physical and an outdoor strategy.

Post the handout at the end of this article where you will see it often as a reminder to care for yourself. Finally, use these ideas to generate other ideas that work well for you.

References

Seaward, B. L. (2006). *Managing stress: Principles and strategies for health and well-being* (5th ed.). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm

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