

Simple Things You Can Do Today to Control Stress

Simple modifications in posture, habits, thought, and behavior often go a long way toward reducing feelings of stress and tension. Here are eight simple things you can do immediately to help keep your stress level under control.

1. Watch for the next instance in which you find yourself becoming annoyed or angry at something trivial or unimportant, then practice letting go - make a conscious choice not to become angry or upset. Do not allow yourself to waste thought and energy where it isn't deserved. Effective anger management is a tried-and-true stress reducer.
2. Breathe slowly and deeply. Before reacting to the next stressful occurrence, take three deep breaths and release them slowly. If you have a few minutes, try out a relaxation technique such as meditation or guided imagery.
3. Whenever you feel overwhelmed by stress, practice speaking more slowly than usual. You'll find that you think more clearly and react more reasonably to stressful situations. Stressed people tend to speak fast and breathlessly; by slowing down your speech you'll also appear less anxious and more in control of any situation.
4. Jump start an effective time management strategy. Choose one simple thing you have been putting off (e.g. returning a phone call, making a doctor's appointment) and do it immediately. Just taking care of one nagging responsibility can be energizing and can improve your attitude.
5. Get outdoors for a brief break. Our grandparents were right about the healing power of fresh air. Don't be deterred by foul weather or a full schedule. Even five minutes on a balcony or terrace can be rejuvenating.
6. Drink plenty of water and eat small, nutritious snacks. Hunger and dehydration, even before you're aware of them, can provoke aggressiveness and exacerbate feelings of anxiety and stress.
7. Do a quick posture check. Hold your head and shoulders upright and avoid stooping or slumping. Bad posture can lead to muscle tension, pain, and increased stress. If you're stuck at a desk most of the day, avoid repetitive strain injuries and sore muscles by making sure your workstation reflects good ergonomic design principles.
8. Plan something rewarding for the end of your stressful day, even if only a relaxing bath or half an hour with a good book. Put aside work, housekeeping or family concerns for a brief period before bedtime and allow yourself to fully relax. Don't spend this time planning tomorrow's schedule or doing chores you didn't get around to during the day. Remember that you need time to recharge and energize yourself - you'll be much better prepared to face another stressful day.