

# Ten Tips for Keeping Cool as Things Heat Up

Adapted from the EAP Toolbox



Between the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and uncertainty in the airline industry, it's all too easy for stress and anxiety to build up and become immobilizing. So much is unknown. So much seems beyond our control. It seems to be going on forever, with one uncertainty followed by another. All around, co-workers, friends and family, not to mention the media, are sounding off, each with their own views and speculations.

Whatever your own beliefs, it's hard to escape mounting anxieties about the future. You may find yourself experiencing difficulty concentrating on day-to-day tasks such as family and work responsibilities. Normal details may be more easily forgotten. Sleep may be impaired. Irritability may increase, with or without a feeling of being overwhelmed.

Relationships may become strained, whether by intense contact or by intense withdrawing. Physical symptoms, such as muscle tension, shortness of breath, stomach upset, rapid heartbeat, perspiration, or shakiness, may increase. All these, and more, are among the normal reactions to perceived threat or unrelenting stress.

With these times demanding so much of us, our loved ones and co-workers, it is still possible to find a sense of control and even safety. The following tips may assist in managing anxiety and stress.



**1. Keep it Simple.** Look at your immediate life needs and try to avoid making major, life-changing decisions at this time.

Remember that stress and anxiety can radically affect perception. Ask do I really need this now? Give yourself time each day

to be quiet: look at a view, listen to soothing music, pray or meditate. Even three minutes, morning and evening, will make a difference.



**2. Limit Media Exposure.** Keep informed, but do not allow yourself to stay glued to the TV or radio. The really important news will travel fast. Letting the repeating and re-combining "old

news" continue to flow over you will add to the stress load: although you may feel more with-it, it will actually add to the feeling of being overwhelmed and may prevent you from completing tasks and functioning in ways that support feeling more in control.



**3. Maintain Daily Routines.** Stay focused on doing what you can do and what you can control. Familiar activity patterns are especially reassuring for children, but they help

everyone stay grounded. Stick to schedules and plans as much as possible.



**4. Focus on the Present.**

Deliberately choose to concentrate on immediate needs and tasks.

Try not to get stuck dwelling on future problems that you can't control, or re-hashing the past,

which you can't control either since it already happened. Keep plans and goals manageable and reasonable.



**5. First Things First.** This is a time to prioritize and think what is the next thing that really needs attention. Decide what needs to be done RIGHT NOW. Ask what is the next right thing? Notice what first comes to mind. Whenever possible, choose

one task at a time and do what you can do gracefully. Make an effort to complete tasks when they are within reach. Taking action and accomplishing concrete goals will increase the sense of control.



**6. Reach Out to Others.** Helping others in need can be very therapeutic. You both benefit. It occupies your mind and your time and gives a sense of well-being and usefulness. Do a good deed, say

something kind, express an interest.



**7. Breathe.** Under stress, people often unconsciously hold their breath or breathe shallowly. Lack of oxygen can trigger chemical reactions in the body that push the “fight-or-flight” anxiety response even higher. Take deep, slow breaths to help the body calm down... In through the nose, out through the mouth. Whisper “I am...” as you inhale, and “relaxed” as you exhale. Try to make them longer and longer.



**8. Take Care of Your Body.** Drink lots and lots of water - it dilutes the stress chemicals in the body. Restrict caffeine to avoid over-stimulation.

Get some exercise to loosen tense muscles and speed up elimination of stress chemicals. Limit alcohol - it is a chemical depressant, it worsens and prolongs stress reactions by adding to the toxins the body must deal with, and it may lead to poor judgment and impulsive behavior. Rest - even if you can't sleep, lie down or do quiet, restful activities.



**9. Seek Support.** Deal with your strong emotions. Accepting and facing up to them is more than half the battle. Give yourself permission to be off-balance and vulnerable.

Talk things over with loved ones, friend, or a counselor. Spend time with positive people and avoid the negative ones. Share your feelings. Attend a workshop or spiritual activity. Consider professional help. You don't have to do this alone.



**10. Have Some Fun.** Good health is all about maintaining balance. Even in the toughest and most troubling times, we need to make time for pleasure. Do something you enjoy and find something to laugh about.

Only time will reveal what our future will be. Sanity lies in focusing on what we can control and letting go of what we can't. Give yourself permission: realize that much of what happens is really beyond your scope of influence. Expect that, as a human being, you will have some reactions as events unfold. While we may not be able to control things outside ourselves, we can control how we respond to things and how we take care of others and ourselves.

For additional help, contact your local or regional EAP coordinator

For a complete listing of IAM-EAP coordinators visit

[www.iam141.org/eap](http://www.iam141.org/eap)