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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:

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

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

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:

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

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:

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

55. Go see a movie comedy
56. Watch a funny sitcom
57. Read a book of comics
58. Laugh out loud
59. Tell a friend a new joke
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:

61. Pray
62. Meditate
63. Practice gratefulness
64. Participate in a religious service
65. Sing joyful songs/hymns
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:

67. Manage time
68. Prioritize tasks
69. Delegate
70. Make and follow a budget
71. Problem solve one dilemma
72. Clean a room
73. Organize a closet/cabinet
74. Set goals
75. Make a life list
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:

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

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


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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