

Stress Relieving Tools to Quiet Your Mind

In today's stressful world of bigger-better-faster, the demands can be overwhelming. Finding a way to unplug from the demands of work, school, family and everything else is crucial if you want to remain healthy and productive.

When stress builds up without a release valve, the results can be ugly.

Just about every illness is either directly caused or made worse, by stress--and that includes:

- Depression, anxiety and moodiness
- Immune dysfunction
- Weight gain or loss
- Cardiovascular disease
- Sleep problems
- Stomach and digestive problems
- Headaches and back pain

One way or another, your body will force you to slow down at some point--and you certainly don't want to wait until a major illness leaves you with no choice in the matter.

Tools for quieting your mind--tools you can use to step away from the chaos for at least thirty minutes every day.

1. Sorting Out Priorities and Learning the Value of NO

A good place to start is by taking an honest look at your priorities.

When you don't set priorities, you tend to follow the path of least resistance, which often means "same old, same old." If you find that you end up daily in a frenzy of activity, increasing your stress and your blood pressure every afternoon--you probably need to prioritize.

One trick I recommend is sitting down in the evening, before you go to bed, and writing down the three most important tasks to get done the next day. In the morning, take out your list and tackle the first task right away. Then knock off the second, and then the third.

Once you've finished the big three, you can start on the little things, already having a sense of accomplishment that you got the most important things done.

Another common problem people have is disorganization. There are many great tools out there to help you be more organized--developed by people who have a knack for organizing. So take advantage of their expertise! The better organized you are, the more time you'll have available to relax and recharge.

There is also great benefit in learning to say "NO"

Part of the problem people have is that they keep their schedules SO jammed full, there is never any way to say "yes" to a spontaneous activity--especially a fun one!

Saying "no" to others is really saying "yes" to yourself.

2. Rejuvenation through Meditation

One of the best activities for reducing stress and improving health is meditation. Before you derogate meditation to the realm of Buddhist monks or hippies, let's take a closer look.

At its most basic level, meditation helps you take a deliberate break from the stream of thoughts that are constantly flowing in and out of your mind. In so doing, your pulse, breathing and heart rate begin to slow; your muscles relax, and your mind enjoys the peace that comes from the silencing of racing thoughts.

Some people use meditation to promote spiritual growth or inner peace, while others use it simply as a relaxation and stress-reduction tool.

But research shows it does much more than reduce stress:

Meditation has been shown to produce beneficial brain changes, both short and long term, such as improved attention span and better focus, even amidst distractions.

A recent study published in the *American Journal of Hypertension* showed that meditation can lower your blood pressure and protect your heart.

Meditation can boost your immune system. Researchers found that people who completed eight weeks of meditation training produced more antibodies to a flu vaccine and showed signs of increased activity in brain areas related to positive emotion than people who didn't meditate.

While it's not unusual for the most experienced meditators to have spent decades or even a lifetime perfecting this art, you can gain benefits from meditating for just 20 minutes a day. It might be helpful to begin with five minutes, and work your way up to longer periods as your meditative skills develop.

3. Meridian Tapping Technique/Emotional Freedom Technique (MTT/EFT)

One of my favorite tools for stress reduction is MTT/EFT, which involves simply tapping with your fingertips on specific meridians while voicing positive affirmations.

MTT/EFT is based on the same energy meridians used in traditional acupuncture to treat emotional and physical ailments--but without the needles! It is basically "psychological acupressure." It allows you to clear out the negative emotional energy from your system, thus restoring balance to your mind and body.

MTT/EFT is easy to learn--in fact, so simple that children are using it. And it takes just 3 to 5 minutes for an effective session. Please look it up on the web there are many videos available showing this fabulous technique.

4. The Free Three

A great way to take a rejuvenation break is to engage in one of the "free three," to borrow Dr. Richard Swenson's term.

Dr. Swenson's books (*Margin and Overload*) contain some of the best antidotes to burnout I've ever read because they help you create time in your life for the things you consider most important.

The free three are:

- Laughter
- Music
- Nature

Laughter is of particular note because there are scientific studies that lend support to the notion that laughing is beneficial for your health. In one such study, Japanese researchers discovered that **diabetics** enjoyed a significantly

smaller spike in blood sugar after a meal when they watched a comedy show, compared to listening to a "boring lecture."

Listening to relaxing music or taking a short walk outdoors are also effective ways of unplugging from the chaos of daily life.

5. Making Time for Family--and Pets!

It goes without saying that making time for your family is important and should be a priority.

But did you know that having a dog as a companion could add years to your life? Two studies have shown that owning a dog can play a significant role in survival rates for heart attack victims.

Other studies have shown that the presence of animals reduces the anxiety you feel when facing stressful situations.

And there have been numerous studies demonstrating that petting a cat can improve your mental and physical health, including lowering blood pressure. One study from the University of Minnesota found that cat owners are less likely to die by heart attack or stroke than cat-less people--by 30 to 40 percent!

So, don't discount the importance of taking time out of your day to play with Fido or Fluffy. Not only will it benefit your four-legged family members, but your own health as well