

Calm, Relaxed & Confident



Introduction

What prevents us from feeling Calm, Relaxed and Confident?

Stress

Stress simply means pressure. It is a natural part of life and can provide energy which motivates us to act, helping us through our more challenging moments. It is only a problem when there is *too much* of it from *too many* directions at the same time, stress becomes strain.

Chronic Stress can cause a decline in physical health, emotional stability and mental well being. Research claims that up to 80% of all illness is stress related.

The degree of stress experienced depends on:

- Perception of the situation
- Personality or 'type'
- Accumulated stress from past experiences
- Learned responses to situations

This booklet provides a range of techniques and coping strategies which can be used safely as a first-aid tool. Techniques should be practised for at least a month in order to assess effectiveness.

It is advisable to check with your doctor before trying any of these methods.



Stress Check

Causes

- Health problems – personal or family
- Relationships – partner, children, family, neighbours
- Bereavement – divorce, redundancy, retirement
- Physical, emotional or mental abuse
- Financial difficulties, moving house etc.
- Marriage or pregnancy
- Sexual problems
- Personal achievements – promotion etc.
- Changes coming too rapidly

If you have suffered more than one of these factors over the past two years it would be advisable to take a little more care of yourself.



Symptoms

What Stress Does

Stress causes tension which activates the *Flight or Fight (Adrenalin) Response* – a natural reaction to dangerous situations. When it has become chronic the unreleased stress chemicals may turn against your body's defences and attack the immune system:

- Increased heart rate to increase blood flow (may feel palpitations)
- Increased blood pressure to ensure good blood distribution (may feel dizziness, ringing in the ears)
- Faster breathing to take in more oxygen (may feel like gasping or choking)
- Muscles tense, ready to move (may feel fidgety or restless)
 - Sweat more to lose excess heat generated (may feel inappropriately hot)
 - Stomach stops digesting & prepares to empty itself (may feel butterflies, knots, feel sick or have diarrhoea)
 - Focus of attention on the body, which may cause loss of concentration & memory
 - It can lead to panic attacks



Signs and Symptoms of Chronic Stress

PHYSICAL

- Headaches • Sweating • Indigestion • Stomach Problems • Difficulty with swallowing • Muscular Aches and Pains • Skin Irritations
- Allergies • Migraine • Irritable Bowel Syndrome • Constant Colds/Infections • Heart Palpitations • Chest Pains

EMOTIONAL

- Losing Self Esteem • Inability to Relax • Losing Enthusiasm • Making Mistakes • Becoming Resentful • Loss of Sense of Humour
- Feeling Helpless • Giving Up • Lethargy • Reduced Control • Taking Offence Easily • Flying off the Handle • Sleep Disturbances

BEHAVIOURAL

- Talking – Eating – Walking Quickly • Increased Drinking, Smoking • Fidgeting • Procrastination • Being less Co-operative
- Showing Disapproval • Accidents and Clumsiness • Interrupted Conversations • Taking Time off Work • Nervous Habits
- Poorer Personal Presentation • Moodiness and Grudges • Obsessions

MENTAL

- Poor Memory • Reduced Concentration • Increased Worry • Negative Self-talk • Repetitive Thoughts
- Confused Thinking • Momentary Amnesia • Unreasonable Anger • Exaggerated Imagination
- Obsessive Thoughts • Irrational Decisions • Bleak Outlook • Tendency to Paranoia



Relaxation & Breathing

Learning to relax is vital to the management of stress symptoms. Relaxation allows the body to rest and heal itself both physically and psychologically.

Tension and relaxation cannot exist together – try tensing your fist and relaxing it at the same time! Sometimes holding on to tension becomes a habit, and we do it long after its purpose has been served. Have you ever caught yourself frowning, clenching your fist or jaw without any reason?

Listening to your body and becoming aware of your own particular tension collecting spots (trigger points) is the first step in the process of dealing with unnecessary stress. By working *with* your body, you can learn how to tap into the natural chemicals that reduce pain and anxiety.

Breathing

Breathing is a good indicator of your emotional state. Breathing and emotions are inextricably linked together. Observe your breathing rhythms at different times of day, after different food and drink or in different situations over a period of a week.

Notice whether your breath is shallow or deep, fast or slow, regular or irregular. Learning how to breathe properly will help you oxygenate your system, clear your head and generally feel better by taking more control of your life.

The recording which accompanies this pack is designed to teach you some simple relaxation techniques. Listen to it each day for a month. You will be surprised at how quickly you can generalise and practise your skills as you go through the day.

Warning

Do not listen to the recording whilst driving or operating machinery.

Try doing a few deep breathing exercises before attempting relaxation techniques.



Deep Breathing Exercises:

Stand with heels, shoulders and head touching a wall. Step away and see how this compares with your normal posture.

1. Rest fingers lightly on your stomach. Take a deep breath, breathe out and pull your stomach in, pushing all the air out. Now breathe in and expand your stomach, do this 3 times.
2. Inhale to the count of 4 heartbeats, exhale to 6. Do this 7 times in the morning and whenever you have time during the day.
3. Clasp your hands behind your back. Take a deep breath, push your hands down, bring your shoulder blades together, expand the chest and let your head fall back. As you breathe out, bend forward until your spine is parallel with the floor, arms up. Breathe in again and come up as you breathe out. This is very good for asthma, but go gently.
4. Take a deep breath and hum as you breathe out. Practice increasing the length of the exhalation.
5. Take time to be alone. Deepen your breath, quieten your mind and think of sunshine and blue skies. Imagine yourself sitting in the sunlight. Do this for about 5 or 10 minutes a day.

If you feel pain or discomfort, more than you would feel with a gentle stretch, stop and check with your doctor before you continue



Body Language

Stress can bring stagnation and lethargy. Normal motivation and interest can be diminished. It is important to try and do some gentle exercises and stretching to keep circulation going at every level.

Points to remember:

- Keep posture open and responsive, flexible and relaxed
- It has been said that over 80% of communication is non-verbal. Just as people read your facial expression they can read your body language
 - The body has its own wisdom and can often be trusted more than the brain, which enjoys making up stories! Your body talks with feelings and sensations – its sounds are ‘mmmm’ or ‘aaaaggh’ and many other murmurs in between!
 - Awareness of physical responses is part of the spectrum of self awareness. Notice ‘clues’ such as *tension: changes in breathing; recurring aches and pains, stiffness, infection.*

The mind and body are not separate – consider words and phrases such as ‘grim-faced’; ‘square jawed’; ‘stiff necked’; ‘weight of the world on your shoulder’; ‘spineless’ etc.



Reading the Body

Your body ideally should have an upright posture with as much flexibility as possible. Keep yourself relaxed and alert, ready for life's adventures.

Good posture means making the most of what you have. Balanced, relaxed, flexible bodies move more gracefully conserving energy for other matters.

Back

Spinal posture is enormously important for your health and well being. A rigid back will hinder flow and movement to the rest of the body, e.g. lower back pain can indicate 'holding back'.

Legs

Can be stiff, Let your limbs relax as you walk swing legs from the hips not the knees.

Hands

Are they expressive, fluid, held open or shut

Shoulders

If shoulders are hunched or raised it will affect your ability to breathe correctly and oxygenate the system

Beware of trying to interpret other people's body language, after all they may just have a stomach ache.



Exercise

Practise some gentle exercise. Take a walk and get some fresh air for 10 minutes a day.

1. Stretch and yawn every morning when you wake
2. Lie on your back, bend legs and take 10 pulse breaths: as you exhale, lift the lower back gently off the bed. This is very good for back pain
3. Take 7 deep abdominal breaths stretching your arms above your head as you breathe in.
4. Toxin release – either lying down or standing, start with your toes and work up the body wriggling and circling all the joints 3 times in each direction.
5. Screw your face up tightly, wriggle your nose, move your jaw from side to side. Grimace, yawn and stretch your tongue out. (You may prefer not to have an audience for this)
6. Stand with your feet under your hips, toes pointing forwards. Let your spine become erect and your head balance on top. Be aware of distributing weight evenly on the soles of your feet. Feel your body balancing and becoming symmetrical.



Massage

Massage is an ancient art, used to assist in the healing of the body and mind. It is extremely important and valuable in the management of stress.

Self massage can be taught, as well as techniques such as dry skin brushing, which stimulates the lymphatic system, speeding up the elimination of toxins, and therefore working towards a reduction of stress. All forms of massage are useful, choose the one that suits you best. Here are a few of the more common types:

Aromatherapy

The use of essential oils for different conditions – in a bath for inhalation, as well as forming part of the massage routine – has marvellous benefits to body, mind, emotions and spirit. Add one or two drops of lavender or rose to an almond or grapeseed carrier for a simple relaxation massage. Try to have a massage by a trained professional at least once a month. Use essential oils to fragrance your home.

Shiatsu (*Japanese pressure point therapy*)

There are various pressure points on your body which can help to unblock areas of tension. These are released to allow the natural flow of energy assisting the healing process:

Press gently for a minute the point on the back of your hand where the bases of your thumb and first finger join, this can help release pain.

Reflexology

The theory is that the whole of the body is represented in certain areas of the body, such as the ear, the face, the stomach, the hands and feet. Reflexology is usually the treatment of the feet.

Do-in Self Massage

Gentle tapping of the whole body with finger tips or a soft fist.

Skin brushing

Use a dry bristle brush, brush over the whole body briskly every day. It will get rid of dry skin cells and leave your body feeling tingly and alive.



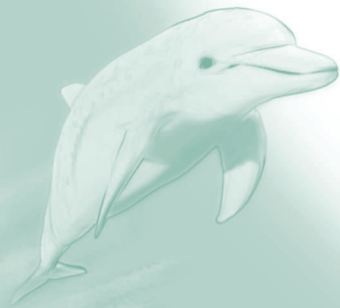
Diet and Environment

Food Sensitivity and Allergy

Many people now think that what we eat and drink can affect how we feel, behave and learn. The increased use of chemicals, salt and sugar in food processing combined with loss of soil nutrients due to intensified farming, results in a reduction in the general nutritional value of food. Under stress we may become less able to process the cocktail of chemicals – in our food, and we consequentially experience a range of unpleasant symptoms.

Specially trained nutritionists can advise individuals. General guidelines could include:

- Increased intake of water - 2 litres per day
- Reduced intake of tea and coffee
- Reduced reliance on fast or processed foods
- Increased consumption of fresh food and vegetables
- Reduction in use of carbonated drinks, sweets and crisps
 - Possible supplementation with vitamins and minerals



Working with Allergy and Sensitivity:

What is the difference between Allergy and Sensitivity?

Allergy: usually brings an immediate effect e.g. rash, swelling, vomiting etc.

Sensitivity: can have more gradual long term effects, causing toxins to build up in the system and bring symptoms of tiredness, aching, learning difficulties etc. The main clue to an allergy/sensitivity is the 'craving', usually it is your favourite food or drink. Common 'triggers' of sensitivities or allergies are: *Dairy produce; sugar; caffeine, particularly cola and chocolate; artificial flavourings and colourings; citrus fruits; wheat.*

Factors that would alert you to the possibility of sensitivity are the same as stress.

What should you do?

1. Cut down on suspect food
2. Eat plenty of fresh and dried fruit
3. Eat fresh raw vegetables, or cook very lightly (except for meat)
4. Drink plenty of water
5. Eat breakfast
6. Eat sensibly and regularly
7. Use fresh juices
8. Cut down on tea and coffee
9. Cut down on white sugar and change to raw cane
10. Eat as little refined foods as possible

Remember: all things in moderation



Assertiveness

Assertiveness comes from a sense of quiet inner confidence and self respect. There is a feeling of, at all times and in all places, doing the best that you can. It includes an expression of the ability to learn and be open to new information; to be flexible and aware, adaptable and able to function more successfully in all aspects of your life. It is the ability to say no – to state your truth quietly and with gentle strength; to know yourself a little and your own issues, leaving guilt trips and emotional blackmail aside. Assertiveness is not aggression, it is knowing where you stand, being sensitive to other's circumstances and as open and clear as possible.

How?

1. *Problem ownership* – Be honest with yourself and take responsibility, there are always two sides.
2. *Reflection* – when you go to bed, scan your day without judgement like the director of a film
3. *Perspective* – change your inner experience of parts that weren't successful
4. *Blueprint* – imagine how experiences could have been better and rehearse future actions
5. *Time* – never enough or sometimes too much – blueprint ways of managing your time better – parcel it out appropriately, home and work in order to keep a balanced and real perspective on all that is important to you
6. *Music* – use relaxing music to help your brain quieten down so you can re-programme the new positive behaviour patterns.



Watch your words

Language is very powerful. It reflects our thought processes, and has an impact on our feelings and behaviour. By becoming aware of the language patterns we prefer, we gain an awareness of the way we think, and power to influence the way we feel. Listen to the words you use. Note favourite words and repeated phrases. Watch for:

Assumptions: the tendency to attribute our thoughts, feelings and behaviour to others.
What evidence is there?

Clairvoyance: the expectation that others should know how we think, feel and act without telling them. *Tell people quietly how you are feeling.*

Generalising: This means making life judgements based on an occasional emotionally charged experience. *e.g. Watch words like 'all, always, everyone'*

Rules: Some rules are useful as we have to live with other people, some are long past their 'sell by' date.
e.g. Who said you must, ought, should, have to?

Words to avoid:

- 'Expect' - it only leads to disappointment
- 'Try' - it implies failure - and there is no such thing as failure, only feedback
- 'Yes, but' - excuses
- 'Only'; 'Sorry'; 'Can't' - challenge yourself constantly when you hear these words
- *Emotionally charged word* - Some words will trigger negative states
- *Put downs* of yourself and others.

Remember: If you allow others to upset you, you are giving them power over you! Take responsibility for your own feelings and words - retain your own choices and energy.



The Power of Thought

Many of our thoughts have been programmed by other people in childhood – parents, teachers, peers, church, society, etc. Whilst this is not in itself wrong, becoming aware of these inner ‘drivers’ allows choice and puts us back in charge of ourselves and our lives.

Fostering Right Thinking:

1. Spend a couple of days simply ‘listening’ to your own internal dialogue. Make a note of recurring conversations, words and phrases both positive and negative.
2. List the good things you have done. Praise yourself.
3. Choose a quality you would like for yourself, e.g. *Confidence*, *Calm*, *Courage* – say the word silently to yourself as often as you can in rhythm with your breath.
4. There is a lovely old Indian saying “Don’t criticise me until you’ve walked a mile in my moccasins” Choose one positive and one negative thought. Is it self critical or judgmental of yourself or others? Whose voice is it? If it isn’t any you know, what kind of a person would it belong to? From which direction is the voice coming? Are there any background sounds? Sometimes altering the direction of the sound, adding music or re-writing the script may help you feel better.



5. Laughter is the body's best medicine
6. At the end of the day, spend a few minutes reviewing your day's experiences, event by event, as if you are replaying a video tape. Release all negative emotions you have harboured (anger, insecurity, anxiety). Relish all good energy or emotion (love, praise, self respect). Reach a decision about unfinished events or file them in a box for later review. Release mental and muscular tension. Now you will be ready for a relaxing, rejuvenating and emotionally healing sleep.
7. Take a short period of time away from situations which you experience as stressful.
8. Practice relaxation on a daily basis. As you become more proficient, you will be able to become calm in almost any situation or environment
9. Focus on the glass that is half full, rather than half empty!



Natural Remedies

Interest in Complementary Medicine is increasing as people take more responsibility for their own health and well-being, working in partnership with health professionals.

Here are just a few suggestions that may help you begin to investigate the world of complementary medicine without doing any harm. These natural remedies are not intended to replace medical treatment, but rather to complement traditional medical advice.

It is always best to consult a qualified practitioner.

Homeopathy

The principle of homeopathy that 'like cures like' has been known for thousands of years. It is completely safe, working not only on physical symptoms but also on emotions and thought processes. Homeopathy seems to act rather like a protective cushion allowing the body's natural healing process to take place. Mineral salts are readily available and useful to cover a whole range of symptoms. Arnica is a must in every household for bumps, bruises and after operations.



Herbs

There are many herbal remedies in health shops – always follow advice carefully with these, do not mix your own.

Vitamins and Minerals

Sometimes under stress or for a wide number of reasons the body does not absorb or process food correctly and may need supplements. Many good health shops will advise you on a multi-vitamin and mineral tablet.

Some people have an underlying malabsorption problem, this means that goodness from food or vitamins is not absorbed, and this will affect your ability to benefit from food supplements. Professional advice is recommended.

Bach Flower Remedies

These are remedies which may help in many areas of emotional difficulties.

Rescue remedy is a very useful all overall remedy for any kind of shock and distress for people, animals and plants!

It is always advisable to check with your doctor before using herbal preparations or supplements, particularly if you are on prescribed medication.



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