

Stress Management on the Run

It's no secret that an afternoon spent in a spa, a hike on a beautiful day or curling up with a good book are all great ways to relax and recharge.

Taking a break from a stressful situation or getting a change of scenery helps you gain new perspective, feel calmer and provides physical benefits as well.

An important component of creating balance in your life is to regularly schedule time for fun and relaxation. But what do you do during those hectic times when it just isn't possible to get away for an hour or two?



Taking mini breaks throughout the day can provide the same kinds of benefits. Multiple studies have shown that taking breaks throughout the work day can actually boost productivity.

In a 2015 study conducted at Baylor University, author Emily Hunter, associate professor of management, described this phenomenon: unlike cell phones that can run optimally until their batteries die, people “have to charge more frequently before we deplete all the way.”

Great information, but not always easy to manage.

Much like finding ways to add extra physical activity to your day, or packing healthy snacks to have on hand, there are strategies that can help create a few moments of sanctuary wherever you are. Here are a few suggestions to begin creating a stress management “tool kit.”

First and foremost, your breath is your best tool. Just pausing and breathing deeply for a few minutes helps slow your heart rate, gets oxygen into your system and allows you to automatically relax.

Any time you feel stressed, try this technique: Breathe deeply through your nose to a count of four. Pause for a count of four then slowly exhale to a count of six. Do this for three or four cycles and feel your body relax. Practice this a few times to see how it feels.

Deep breathing is a great stress management technique and can be done by anyone, anywhere.



Stress Management

If your workplace allows, create an environment that helps you connect to things you value. A few family photos or scenic pictures, a plant or even a few toys can provide a few moments of diversion at work.

For those working in less controlled environments, a minute or two of deep breathing and visualizing a loved one or favorite place can provide a mini get away.

Taking a moment here and there to remove yourself mentally from a chaotic or stressful situation allows you to refocus and gain control.

Stuck in traffic? Surely a common stressor! Again, take a few deep breaths and change your environment. What's on the radio? Loud music or negative news may just add to your level of stress.

Bring your heart rate down by bringing the volume down, maybe switching to some mellow music or listening to comedy to lift your spirits. You may not be able to control what is happening outside the vehicle, but you can create a mini sanctuary inside your car.



Stress is going to happen to all of us, and learning how to create balance is important. The big things like, health, finances, relationships and work are all likely to be issues at any given time. We all have heard that chronic, unrelieved stress contributes to poor health.

Learning how to cope, asking for help, even seeking counselling or medical support are important when things feel out of control. Learning how to create balance through social, recreational, spiritual or other means are ways that give meaning and personal satisfaction to our lives. Certainly, the steps outlined here don't eliminate the big issues in our lives, but they do help to "not sweat the small stuff." Being able to manage the small stuff leaves you with more resilience when it comes to dealing with the big stuff.

It's all about control. So breathe in, breathe out and smile.

Ultimately, stress management is about getting your emotions in check and feeling in control.

Fragrance is another tool that can help relax or energize. Lavender for example, is widely recognized as a soothing fragrance, but really, any scent that is personally appealing can be beneficial.

Humans are hard wired in such a way that our sense of smell evokes strong memories and emotions. So the smell of fresh cut grass, a loved one's cologne or a camp fire may be scents that trigger feelings of wellbeing.

Carry a bit of that good feeling with you in the form of essential oils, fragranced lotions or air fresheners. Adding a pleasing scent may give an added boost to your deep breathing.



Humor and games are great diversions. A shared laugh can ease tensions and create camaraderie. Likewise, a quick game of trivia with a co-worker can be a fun way to spend a break and recharge. And when humor may not seem appropriate or welcome, just smile.

The act of smiling releases the "feel good" neurotransmitters of dopamine, serotonin and endorphins into your system, giving you a boost. Smiling helps those around you feel better as well.



Home Cooking

While today's cooks are armed with the latest appliances and gadgets, it seems like the most heavily used appliance is our power window as we pull up to our favorite fast food restaurant's drive-thru. Eating out may be fast and convenient, but cooking at home costs a lot less and is healthier. Here are a few tips to help you watch your wallet and your waistline while you become reacquainted with your kitchen:

- Each week take a look at the grocery fliers to see what's on sale and in season. Let this be your guide for your weekly meal planning.
- Look ahead at your family's schedule and then plan your meals accordingly: a crock pot meal may be what is cooking the night you have less time to spend in the kitchen. An evening that isn't as busy is good time to make a roasted chicken dinner.



- Cook with leftovers in mind. Turn that roasted chicken into chicken quesadillas for tomorrow's dinner when the family is going in different directions. When you make macaroni, cook extra for those hungry teenagers who need a substantial snack until the next meal. And when preparing meatloaf, it takes minimal additional effort to make double and freeze one for later in the month.
- Encourage support and involvement from your family. When family members help out with meal planning and preparation, they're more likely to eat healthier foods. Children often mirror their parents eating habits, so make sure you're setting the right example for your kids.

With a small investment in time and energy from all, the results will be a fatter wallet, a slimmer waistline and a healthier family.

Roasted Chickpeas and Green Peas

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (15 oz.) can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ cup frozen green peas, thawed
- Kosher salt
- Ground cumin
- Black pepper, freshly ground or cayenne pepper

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Place chickpeas in a bowl and pat dry with paper towels. Add olive oil and toss to coat. Place mixture on a rimmed baking sheet and bake for 25 minutes. Add green peas to pan and bake for an additional 5 to 6 minutes until both types of peas are crispy. Toss with spices to taste.

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