

Short Term "Stress-Busters" For Easier Living

What pushes your stress buttons?

A situation that causes one person to stress out may be energizing to another.

Oral presentations, high school reunions, even wallpapering the bedroom are examples of either opportunities or dreaded events, depending on your perspective. Recognizing what pushes your buttons can help you learn how to either cope or avoid stressful situations.

But then there are those times, unplanned and unexpected, when stress just attacks. It may be at home, in your car, or while waiting on line at the supermarket. Your fingers feel cold; your palms feel wet. At those moments when anxiety threatens to ruin your day, these short term "stress-busters" can quickly lower your stress level.

At Home:

1. *Take time out for a treat.* Read a magazine; watch a TV show that has no redeeming value; call a friend to catch up on the latest gossip; read sections of your newspaper you never have time to read.

Away from Home:

2. *Stuck in traffic?* Carry a tape of your favourite music and pop it in. Have you tried listening to a book on tape? If you can't concentrate and feel like - you're wasting precious time, a portable cell-phone maybe an appropriate stress buster (but be careful while driving!) Finally, learn to remove yourself mentally from the bottleneck. Let your mind take you to another time, another place- a favourite vacation spot or a recent pleasurable activity. Enjoy the memories. Or, use your mind for something productive: Plan the guest list or an upcoming dinner party; decide what you have to pack for an upcoming vacation.

3. *Trapped in a waiting room or on line at the bank?* Always carry something with you that's enjoyable to read or do. It may be a good novel, a book of crossword puzzles or even a needlepoint project.

4. *Delayed on a plane or stuck overnight because of bad weather?* Plan ahead with back-up systems in place: a goody bag of munchies for travel, an extra set of clothes for unplanned delays.

Anywhere

5. *Add pleasure to your day.* It's sometimes hard to remember that simple pleasures can rejuvenate the soul. But you owe it to yourself to inject a little whimsy into your schedule. You might: do something silly and out of character (eat a giant chocolate bar or sing along at top volume with the radio); treat boredom as the enemy and defeat it by doing the same old thing in a new way (watch the news on a different channel, change your routine and go to a movie in the middle of the day, or try preparing a brand new dish for dinner); con a loved one into giving you a massage-then return the favour.

6. *Try something new.* Choose an activity that you think you really might enjoy, not that you think other people want you to pursue. Want to learn to knit? Go fly fishing? Take a course in Chinese cooking? Be daring, creative or just try something that you've always wanted to.

7. *Exercise!* Nothing you introduce into your life can break up and dissipate stress as efficiently as finding the right exercise program. Whether you choose an activity that's long and repetitive

(walking, swimming) or one that engages concentration and activates the body (tennis, jazzercise), depends on your personal preference, but any choice or combination releases stress.

8. *Meditate.* At home, at work, even in your car in the quiet corner of a parking lot. Close your eyes, shut out the day. Picture yourself lying on a beach, in a hammock, any place you associate with peacefulness. Breathe deeply and let your mind relax for 10 minutes. Remember, this is a gift you've earned.

9. *Find reasons to laugh.* Laughter has been documented to have a wondrous healing effect. Whether it's movies or the comics, tickling or giggling, laughter is a great defence against a demanding world and is one of the best ways to release stress and feel good all over.

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