Top 10 List to Beat the Stress

Everyone feels stress. *In small doses, stress may be good for you when it gives you a burst of energy. But too much stress or stress that lasts for a long time can take its toll on your body. Stress can make you feel run down, sad, nervous, angry or irritable. It can cause headaches, muscle tension, upset stomach, nausea, dizziness or feelings of despair, and may cause you to eat more or eat less than normal. In the long-term, stress can raise your risk of high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes and reproductive problems and weaken your body's ability to fight disease. The following steps will help you learn to not only beat stress but thrive in stressful times.*

1. Give Yourself a Break

Relax your mind. Stop and breathe. Slow the bus down. Get some perspective. Watch your negative self-talk. ***Try NOT to put yourself down.***

2. Connect with Others

You are not alone. You don't have to cope with stress or other issues on your own. Talking to a trusted friend, family member, support group or counselor can make you feel better. Spending time with positive, loving people you care about and trust can ease stress and improve your mood. ***It's ok to ask for help.***

3. Get Physically Active

Exercise increases endorphins, the feel good chemical in our bodies. Exercise can help relieve insomnia and reduce depression, increase your energy and strength and helps you cope better. Try taking a brisk walk or use a stationary bike. When you walk outside you also connect with nature. See what it takes for you to feel better. ***Just Do It.***

4. Write It Down

Worrying can be helpful when it spurs you to solve a problem. But if you're preoccupied with "what ifs", worry becomes a problem of its own. Writing down your thoughts can be a great way to work through issues. When we're stressed, we don't process information as well and don't remember as well. Some researchers have reported that writing about painful events can reduce stress and improve health. ***Keep a journal.***

5. Eat Well

Eating healthy food and regular meals can increase your energy and influence your mood. Adopt healthy eating habits. Start the day right with breakfast, and continue with frequent small meals throughout the day. Going too long without eating leads to low blood sugar, which can make you feel anxious and irritable. Eat plenty of complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables which stabilize blood sugar and boost serotonin, a neurotransmitter with calming effects. ***Eat well to live well.***

6. Get Enough Sleep

Getting enough sleep helps you recover from the stresses of the day. However, worrying and anxiety trigger the "fight or flight" mechanism in the body, releasing chemicals that prepare us to be alert and ready for action. This can make it difficult to fall asleep. Try to get 7-9 hours of sleep every night. Avoid the computer or TV at least one hour before bed. Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate) and nicotine (cigarettes, tobacco products) or alcohol close to bedtime. Exercise regularly, but complete your workout at least 3 hours before bedtime. Establish a regular relaxing, not alerting, bedtime routine (e.g. taking a bath or relaxing in a hot tub). ***Count sheep.***

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7. Take Care of Your Spirit

People who have strong spiritual lives may be healthier and live longer. Spirituality seems to cut the stress that can contribute to disease. Two of the best ways to cultivate your spirituality are to improve your self-esteem and to foster relationships with those who are important to you. Whether you find spirituality in a church, mosque or synagogue, in your family, or in walks with a friend through nature - *stay connected to your inner spirit.*

8. Help Others

One of the best ways to overcome stress is to do something to help someone else. People who consistently help others experience less depression, greater calm and fewer pains. Helping others builds social networks, improves self-esteem and can give you a sense of purpose and achievement. Helping others brings good feelings to the "giver," positive support to the "receiver." Reach out and lend a hand or a shoulder. *Do Good, Feel Good.*

9. STAY POSITIVE

People who regularly focus on the positive in their lives are more likely to cope better with the daily ups and downs and more serious life challenges. Positive emotions can boost your ability to bounce back from stress. Discover the areas of your life that you are grateful for and grow them. Stop from time to time during the day to evaluate what you're thinking - if your thoughts are mainly negative, try to apply a positive twist. *Practice positive self-talk.*

10. Laugh, Laugh Often

The average preschooler laughs or smiles 400 times a day. That number drops to only 15 times a day by the time people reach age 35. Every time you have a good hearty laugh, you burn up 3 1/2 calories. Laughing increases oxygen intake, thereby replenishing and invigorating cells. It also increases the pain threshold, boosts immunity, and relieves stress. *Laughter really IS the best medicine!*

About Jefferson Center

Celebrating its 61st year, Jefferson Center helps to bring hope for a brighter future to thousands of community members who struggle with mental health and substance use disorder challenges. As the community's nonprofit mental health center, Jefferson Center serves people throughout Jefferson, Gilpin and Clear Creek counties at over 23 locations, as well as in schools, nursing homes, senior centers and other community settings. Last year Jefferson Center served more than 34,000 people in need. Center staff has expertise in numerous areas including children and family issues, adults with serious mental illness, substance use disorders, suicide prevention, early intervention, juvenile justice, and trauma treament. For more information about Jefferson Center, visit jcmh.org.

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