



## ***Stress Management: The Effects of Stress***

**Health Effects of Stress:** Stress is a natural and essential part of life. Our stress response is designed to protect and preserve our lives. Our bodies are constantly responding to positive and negative stress. Positive stress motivates and drives us. Negative stress affects our physical and mental health and can rob us from experiencing real happiness. If you want to experience living an intentional life of true happiness you can't run from stress or avoid it. Stress is as much a part of life as breathing, eating and drinking water. Stress discovers our dark places and brings them to our attention. Each stress that we perceive as an obstacle is actually an opportunity. Denying stress, like denying a wound, can make you rot on spiritual, psychological and physical levels.

**Acute Stress vs. Chronic Stress:** Acute stress is anything you perceive as an immediate threat. Our response to the immediate threat is referred to as the "fight or flight response." This is a pattern of physiological responses that prepares you to respond to an emergency. Acute stress can be caused by any sense of danger, noise, crowding, hunger or infection in your body. More blood is pumped into your muscles, sending more oxygen to your muscles, brain, heart and lungs. Your blood flow may increase 300%-400%, preparing your lungs, muscles and brain for added demands. The amount of sugar or glucose increases in your blood, which accelerates your metabolism, so you can take immediate action in an emergency. Your blood thickens as platelets prepare to stop bleeding quickly. As the blood thickens, oxygen increases in red cells and promotes better function of the white cells that prevent infections. The spleen discharges red and white blood cells, allowing the blood to transport more oxygen.

**Chronic Stress Affects Many Conditions & Diseases:** Research now shows making stress reduction practices the foundation of your self care prevents, slows or reverses a multitude of diseases and conditions. Below is a discussion of a few of the diseases and conditions affected by stress. The vast number of individuals with these common diseases and conditions is hard to comprehend. It is difficult to fathom the economic costs and the pressure these spiraling diseases and conditions have on our health care system, individuals, families and corporations. We can no longer wait for our failed health care system and flawed health education to help us out of this massive dilemma. It is time for each of us to take responsibility for our own self care. There is a vast amount of information today on self care, much of it confusing and incorrect. Simple stress reduction practices provide you with a simple, comprehensive and easy to remember format that you can easily assimilate into your busy life.

*Heart Disease:* Heart disease is the number one killer in America, affecting more than 80 million people. Heart disease kills one person every 34 seconds in the United States alone. Nearly 2,400 Americans die each day from this disease. Sadly, 250,000 people with heart attacks will die before they get to the hospital. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women over

40 years old, especially after menopause. More women die of heart disease than other cancers combined. Conclusive research maintains stress management, diet, exercise, and group support, not only reduce the risk of heart disease, but can actually reverse heart disease.

*Cancer:* Nearly 1.5 million people every year are diagnosed with cancer in the United States. Cancer accounts for 1 of every 4 deaths in America; 560,000 die each year, nearly 1500 per day. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer related death in both women and men. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among American women. Approximately 1 in 8 women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among women ages 35-54. Colon cancer will be diagnosed in 140,000 people each year. More than 180,000 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer this year and more than 30,000 men will die of the disease. All of these cancers are positively affected by practicing stress reduction and stress reduction practices help reduce the recurrence of cancers.

*Obesity:* Today 17 percent of all children and teens in this country are overweight and 66 percent of all people age 20 and older are overweight or obese. Excess weight and obesity are serious health threats because they are major risk factors for cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes and other serious health problems. The current generation of children may become the first in American history to live shorter lives than their parents. Medical expenditures attributed to both overweight and obesity has reached \$132 billion. Stress reduction provides the foundation for a healthy lifestyle for the individual and the entire family.

*Hypertension:* Over 70 million people in the United States have hypertension, or high blood pressure. One in three adults has hypertension, which is defined as systolic blood pressure over 140 and diastolic blood pressure over 90. Research shows that practicing stress management lowers blood pressure.

*Chronic Pain:* A new survey done by USA Today/ABC/Stanford University indicates 4 in 10 adults, say they suffer from chronic pain. Chronic pain costs an estimated \$100 billion a year in medical costs, lost working days, and workers compensation. Stress management has positive results in reducing pain when it is used to augment mainstream medical regimens.

## *Stress Management: Stress Reduction Tips*

- BREATHE:** This is the foundation to de-stress and heal. We usually take shallow breaths, especially when they are stressed or ill. This starves the body and brain of oxygen which directly affects our immune system and our cardiopulmonary system. When we are tired we might respond to someone in a negative way and later feel sorry for our words. Develop the practice of taking several deep diaphragmatic breaths before you answer someone in a tense moment. The breath clears the mind, body and soul. In the moments you want to react with a hostile comment that may cause anger, breathing creates space for you to make a decision before you react. Pick certain times during the day to practice taking a few deep cleansing breaths such as; a stop sign, before you answer the telephone, before you exit your car at work or home or before a your meals. An object can help you remember to focus on your intention.A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white tank top and a light blue cardigan, is sitting cross-legged on a sandy beach. She has her eyes closed and her hands resting on her knees in a meditative pose. The background shows the ocean waves and a clear sky.
- DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING:** Begin by putting your shoulders back, straightening your spine and lifting your chin up. If possible, breathe deeply through your nose into your lungs. Concentrate on filling your lower lungs with that glorious oxygen. As you fill your lungs slowly your belly should stick out and pull away from your spine. Hold those filled lungs a moment, belly out, and slowly release the breath through the mouth. Feel the exquisite energy, focus and joy in your body, mind and soul. Imagine you are breathing in what you need; power, forgiveness, love or light. Exhale what you choose to release; anger, fear, confusion, grief or sadness.
- QUIET TIME: MEDITATION- THE RELAXATION RESPONSE-CENTERING PRAYER:** We have great science about the health benefits of getting our mind, body and soul quiet. The practice of silence is referred to different names in different cultures and religions; meditation (Eastern roots), the relaxation response (medical roots) or centering prayer (Christian roots).
  - Find a quiet place
  - Relax, get comfortable
  - Focus on a 1-5 word relaxing phrase you like and repeat it over and over again, or surrender into the silence
  - Take deep diaphragmatic breaths, in and out, in and out. You may want to set a timer in the beginning for 10 minutes. This keeps you from worrying what time it is. You can just relax and the timer will let you know. Eventually you may want to increase your quiet time. This practice sends healing hormones into your body for relaxation and health.

4. **DISCOVER A MINI:** When you are waiting in a long line at a store, in a car in heavy traffic or on hold on your telephone, use this as an opportunity for a mini. A mini is a 1-3 minute short meditation. Take a moment, if you are able, close your eyes (not in traffic), or focus your eyes on something, take several deep diaphragmatic breaths, and repeat a 1-5 word affirmation with each deep breath. I like to say, "Keep letting go..." After just a minute or two you feel like a new person with a new sense of energy and clarity. Many tense moments are caused by simple exhaustion and this mini gives you immediate centeredness.
5. **GUIDED IMAGERY:** Is a great tool for stress reduction and your health. We use the power of your mind to create the mind-body connection. Guided imagery works exceptionally well to relieve the stress associated with illness such as heart disease, cancer, insomnia, obesity, hypertension, anxiety and depression. When the mind is quiet it opens to suggestions, relaxes and healing takes place. This practice has an effect on blood pressure, heart rate, body temperature and neurochemicals released into the body. Guided imagery helps focus your thoughts and images.

Guided imagery can be practiced with a therapist, trained professional or alone with a CD or tape. There are various guided imagery tapes that focus on many diseases such as cancer, heart disease, depression, weight loss, insomnia, anger and many more.

To practice guided imagery; go to a quiet place, relax and get comfortable and turn on your CD or tape and listen. It is that easy and wonderful.

Research tells us guided imagery:

- Reduces stress
- Decreases blood pressure
- Increases sleep
- Decreases pain
- Increases wound healing

6. **BEADS:** It's great to keep a set of some sort of beads with you at all times, in your car, your purse and by your bed. Stop for a minute, pick up your beads, and as you touch each bead, breathe, and say a 1-3 word affirmation or prayer. You will be surprised how calming this practice can become. When someone or a situation is stressing you out, make a round on some form of beads, repeating your own affirmation with each bead, and you will experience a sense of power and detachment from the source of anxiety. Most major religions and cultures since the beginning of humankind have used beads as a spiritual practice. Touching the beads, breathing and focusing creates immediate calm.



7. **PRAYER:** Research reveals that praying can not only boost our health and reduces stress, but also benefits the health of those we pray for. Prayer is a very individual practice. You can pray in silence, with words, with song, with a book, alone or in a group. Prayer is your connection with your Source, whatever that is to you.

8. **JOURNALING:** This practice has health benefits. Journaling reduces stress by removing the worry and thoughts racing over and over in your mind. You move these worries, concerns, hopes or dreams out of your body onto the paper. Journaling is very therapeutic, healing and rewarding to the individual.
9. **WATER:** Water has been used since the dawn of humankind for reduction of stress. We are composed mostly of water; we were created in our mother's womb in water. Water is our connection to life itself. Take long warm showers or a glorious long bath. Schedule a regular time to soak in the tub. Aromatherapy is very powerful for relaxation. Pick soaps and bath salts with the most relaxing smell to you. Light candles around the tub. This is one of the most powerful ways to relax and come home to your mind, body and soul.
10. **AFFIRMATIONS:** How your thoughts work. Research tells us every thought and emotion we have creates a chemical release into our bodies. These powerful chemicals affect our mental, physical and spiritual health and well being. Our minds believe what we tell them. Many of us live our lives with negative self talk. This self deprecating talk keeps us from living the authentic, intentional life we were born to live. Giving ourselves positive messages will combat negative self talk. You can choose to do this simple practice to create prosperity, balance and health in your life. Affirmation cards are available in many forms to suit your needs by offering help with specific virtues, inspiration, gratitude, daily concerns, and positive thinking.



### ***Stress Quick Tips: 101***

1. **Stress Reduction in a Minute.** (Meditation, deep breathing yoga,) 5 minutes twice a day (morning and evening). Studies show that this lowers blood pressure, releases healing hormones into your body, increases creativity, increases productivity and increases your ability to handle stressful situations.
2. **Exercise at least 30 minutes every other day.** Walk at lunch, or set a treadmill up in your television room and watch your favorite show while you give your body life. Discover new exercises such as; Pilates, Yoga, tai chi, or chi gong. Death rates from all causes, including heart disease and cancer, are much lower in people exercising 30 minutes a day. Exercise lowers the rise of stroke, diabetes, arthritis, cancer heart disease, and osteoporosis.
3. **Laugh as often as possible.** Laughter releases the healing hormones endorphins, the body's natural pain killers. Don't buy pills for your stress, go rent a funny movie, or go online to a humorous site daily and share it with your co-workers. Laughter lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormones and boosts your immune function.

4. **Play.** Re-establish "childlike" qualities. Science tells us when we play it increases our immune cells that combat disease. Playfulness also increases creativity and optimism at home and at work.
5. **Pay Attention.** When we daily pay attention and learn to live a life of awareness and mindfulness, we become aware of our emotions (stressors and calming forces), our choices, our relationships, our home life, our work, we can begin to live a rich life of awareness. Practicing awareness daily reduces anxiety and depression. Stop living in a fog. Wake up to your life.

6. **Eat Breakfast.** Breakfast eaters are healthier and live longer than non-breakfast eaters.



Research has shown that people who live to the age of 100 were consistent breakfast eaters or they consumed breakfast more frequently than non-breakfast eaters. People who eat breakfast consume less fat and had a higher intake of essential vitamins and minerals, and lower serum cholesterol, which leads to a lower instance of heart disease.

7. **Get a Pet.** Studies reveal there are benefits of owning a pet, such as reduction of blood pressure and inducing a relaxation response in our bodies. Pets are, emotional life savers, help people experience intimacy and also deal with changes and losses in their lives.
8. **You Need a Friend.** Friendships are strong indicators of mental, physical and spiritual health. Friendship is not a luxury, but is essential to work-life balance and your health. Studies show that isolation decreases immune functioning and increases mortality risk.
9. **Attitude of Gratitude.** It is physiologically impossible to be grateful and experience stress at the same time. Research shows grateful individuals report having more energy and less physical complaints than their non-grateful counterparts. Studies tell us daily gratitude exercises resulted in higher levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, optimism and energy.
10. **Altruism and Philanthropy.** A generous soul lives a rich, abundant life. Altruism neutralizes negative emotions that affect immune, endocrine and cardiovascular function. Altruism creates a physiological responses or "helpers high" that makes people feel stronger and more energetic and counters harmful effects of stress.