

Become a list-maker. The simple act of writing your worries down on paper will allow you to put those thoughts out of your head (and get a good night's sleep) until you're ready to address them. By keeping a notepad at your bedside and making of list of what's bothering you – along with possible solutions – you're developing a concrete plan of action. It puts you back in control of your thoughts and gives you a tangible to-do list to work from.

Learn to add and subtract. You don't need to be a mathematician to reduce stress, but there are things that you can do (and not do) to help you on your journey to be stress-free. Fine-tune your approach by experimenting with the many options to find the perfect method that works for you. **Add:** Deep breathing, meditation, yoga, massage, laughter, playing with pets, aromatherapy, nutritional supplements, and more sleep. **Subtract:** Unrealistic expectations, caffeine consumption, negative people, perfectionism, junk food, over-scheduling, withdrawal from others, pessimism, and procrastination.

Exercise regularly. Not only does exercise keep your body healthy but it also helps you get rid of nervous energy and pent up frustrations. Staying physically active can create a wonderful sense of calmness by initiating the release of endorphins, the brain's feel-good neurotransmitters. New research shows that regular exercise can even increase your self confidence and lower the symptoms associated with mild depression and anxiety too.

Take the day off. If you're feeling really frazzled, change your routine. Call in sick to work, find a babysitter; do whatever it takes to give yourself some much needed down-time. Then make it a priority to indulge yourself in all of your favorite things. Don't feel guilty – consider it a prescription for good health! Go to an amusement park, take a bubble bath or play your favorite sport. Reconnecting with your joy helps you to rejuvenate and recover some much needed energy. Although taking the day off may seem counter-productive, it isn't – the more energy you have in reserve – the more you have to give.

Shift your focus. When our time is limited we naturally choose to focus our attentions on the things that are screaming-out the loudest – the things that are wrong with our lives. This fact can cause us to lose touch with our appreciation of everything that's right. Make a list (yes, another list) of the things you're grateful for. Seeing all of your blessings in black and white can reaffirm that your situation really isn't as bad as you thought.

Release it. Once you've acknowledged the issues at hand and made a list of possible solutions, let the worry go. In truth, worry never helped anything anyway. The freedom you gain when you concede that everything really isn't in your control is liberating, and will allow you to find that much needed peace of mind.

Consciously choosing to reduce stress assures both the quality and quantity of our days. Changing the way we react to stressful situations reaffirms that happiness is one of our greatest priorities. It's time to take back our power, by taking back our time. If we'll just slow down and appreciate the many blessings that our modern lives have given us, we can experience joy and contentment despite the chaotic world around us. And after all, isn't that why we're doing all this?

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