

13 Tips & Techniques to Thrive Thru' Stressful Times !

1. **Put things in context.** When things start to get out of hand and your stress starts to head for the stratosphere, put the breaks on runaway stress by identifying what control you do have, and what is beyond your control. Then put your energy into taking action on those things that you can affect, and use coping measures to deal with those that are beyond your control.
2. **Put in things in perspective.** Remember four very important words when things start to seem overwhelming - 'this too shall pass'. Some days I find it really helpful to remind myself that each day is only 24 hours long, and then it's over. Then I tell myself that I can handle the next twenty four hours. And I do.
3. **Find the trigger.** If you find people are starting to get 'under your skin' or your temper is rising, look for the unspoken belief or strongly held desire behind your reaction. Research by Dr. Steven Reiss identified 16 basic desires that people hold to varying degrees, resulting in a unique "desire profile" for each person which motivates their actions and defines their personality. Strongly held desires can result in unspoken expectations which, when not met, result in stress and strife. Are you putting undo stress on yourself because people aren't meeting your expectations which they, and even you, may be unaware of? Examine your assumptions and beliefs about the 'way things are supposed to be', then re-evaluate the situation in light of these new perspectives.
4. **Choose your battles wisely.** Too often we get caught up in the details and treat everything as a 'do or die' situation, increasing our stress levels significantly. Step back and assess the significance of what's going on. At the end of the day, is it really all that important? Is there another way to handle the situation - do you need to handle it at all? Conserve your energy for what's really important, which also means that you have to be clear on what's really important - to you.
5. **Create boundaries.** Too often we add to our stress because we can't say no, then we feel resentful. Before saying yes to a new activity, tell people that you will check your schedule. Then take time to evaluate how much time you have for yourself versus how much you have allocated to doing things for others. If you find you're short-changing yourself, say "no, thank-you, I'll have to pass on that for now." And remember, you don't need an excuse to say 'No'.
6. **Eliminate energy drains.** Identify activities or circumstances that drag you down or leave you feeling tired and depleted. Eliminate those that you can, and find ways to cope with those that you can't remove entirely, such as paying the bills!

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7. **Add 'joy breaks' to your day.** Make a list of activities that you find fun and energizing. Try to identify activities that take varying amounts of time (e.g. 2-5 min., 5-30 min., 30 min - ½ day, ½ day or more). Some activities, like reading a good book, can fit under several time slots. Keep the list handy, so when you need a pick-me-up, you'll have a menu of ideas to choose from.
 8. **Take a 'mini-vacation'.** Often when under stress it would do us a world of good to get away for a vacation, however we've conditioned ourselves to see vacations as extended periods away from work. Create your own 'mini-vacation' in your home or office by keeping pictures of a favourite spot, or dream vacation site, or mementoes of a favourite trip, then when you feel the need for a break, take these treasures out and picture yourself 'on-vacation'. Five minutes of relaxed mental vacation time can lift your spirits and reduce your stress level substantially.
 9. **Add humour to your day.** Begin a humour file with funny cartoons, pictures and short stories. When you need a lift, pull out a good joke and have a laugh - it's good for you. For the more ambitious, start a collection of funny movies and/or audio clips. Then after a stress filled week at the office or home, take time to unwind and watch/listen to one of your favourites.
 10. **Connect with nature.** Gardening is one of the most popular hobbies in North America and research has shown that it relaxes people. There's something very elemental and soothing about working with plants and soil. Often people will find that getting back to nature will help them re-charge and feel more relaxed and grounded.
 11. **Get physical.** Once again research has shown that exercise helps the body deal with stress. You don't need to join a gym either or take up an extreme sport. Go for a brisk walk in the park - it'll clear your head and help you work out your frustrations. It will also help you re-connect with nature.
 12. **Create a "Wow - I did that!" file.** Make a list of your accomplishments, skills, awards, unique talents - all of them (yes, even that certificate from Grade Two for completing the fitness run!). Too often we dwell on what we did wrong, or our weaknesses, and completely over-look or negate our strengths and talents. Actively gather a record of all the great things you've done, then when you're feeling under the gun and stressed out, pull the file out to remind yourself of how accomplished you are, and look to see how you might use these strengths to help you cope with what ever is creating the stress in your life.
 13. **Finally - practice 'Extreme Self-Care'.** Learn to relax and take time for yourself. Eat properly and drink adequate amounts of water daily. Be sure to get the amount of sleep that's right for you. And an occasional pampering would do you a world of good. Spend some time at a spa, go on a weekend retreat or have a massage. You deserve it!

*Interested in learning more about how to thrive in hectic times?
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