



EAP Educates: Stressed Out (Bringing About Stress Relief)

We have looked at what stress looks like, and the psychology of stress over the last two months. The question really, is what are we going to do about it? The foundations of stress relief are relaxation, restorative sleep, nutrition and lifestyle balance. In the same way that the experience of stress and stressors is very individual, so too is the reduction of stress. What works for your friend or colleague, may not work for you, so if you try one method and it doesn't work, take heart and try another. Often it is a combination of stress management techniques that works best.

Techniques to de-stress

The best defence against stress is a healthy lifestyle. You will need to review the habits you have fallen into and see what changes you can make to give yourself the best chance at managing the stress you experience on a daily basis. Achieving a good work/life integration is very important, and you need to take into account your career, and what is expected of you when you are not at work. You need to look closely at how you spend your time; perhaps start a journal. Learning *time management skills* can go a long way to reducing your stress levels especially when you feel you are about to spin out of control.

Be aware of how you spend your time – you cannot change something of which you aren't aware.

You get to pick the A list – what in your life really is a priority. Do those things on your to do list that are important and don't sweat the small stuff.

Streamline your life – simplify your life and things become so much easier.

The importance of connection – be around positive people and people who make you feel good. You can choose to spend time with people who quiet your stress response, and avoid people who aggravate it.

Quick fixes for calming down – any one of a number of things can help to calm you down. Be creative – you'd be surprised what you come up with. Read a book, watch kittens or puppies at play, help someone, exercise, build a puzzle The list can be endless.

This document will focus on a few concrete things you can do to manage your stress levels. There are many more techniques, and if you are interested in exploring options other than those listed here, please speak to your EAP practitioner, and get hold of the list and additional ideas. The main areas outlined here follow the *RED techniques* to manage stress (rest / exercise / diet) and include the importance of talking and the benefit of engaging the spiritual element of your life as is dictated by your beliefs.

Rest / Relaxation

- Schedule specific times away from your work for real relaxation.
- Find a certain amount of private time when you can be absolutely alone.
- DO NOT change any of your medications without your doctor's consent.
- Think positive – program your thoughts with positive images of relaxation and pleasant relations with others.
- Develop a habit of self-monitoring. Pay attention to your body signals as you go about the day's activities and frequently calm your internal stress level and relax your muscles. (Stretching, deep breathing, going for a walk etc.)
- Watch less television and read interesting books more often.
- Find a place like a park that you can visit for short periods of time to help you to be close to your own thoughts.
- Start rethinking time priorities and make time for regular periods of solitude and relaxation.

Exercise

- Make sure you are in reasonably good health before increasing exercise activities.
- If you are over 35 and have not exercised much, you might want to have a thorough medical examination and clear an exercise programme with your doctor.
- Take your time getting into shape. It won't happen overnight and if you push things too quickly, you risk injury. Make exercise a pleasant growth experience.
- Give exercise the same priority as any other routine activity. It is just as important as grocery shopping or cleaning or repairing the house.



- Think about exercise as a long term investment. Set goals that are attainable over 1 and 3 months.
- Exercise with other people if it helps you make time to exercise. Associate with people in good health and with good fitness levels. Put yourself in situations that will encourage you to exercise, engage in and enjoy physical activities.

Diet / Healthy eating

- The focus here needs to be on healthy eating and ensuring that you give your body the best chance of coping with what life throws at you.
- Read literature on nutrition and supplementation and get advice on using supplements in your diet to give your body a boost.
- Make sure you eat plenty fibre in your daily diet.
- Pay attention to how you feel and your feelings after meals.
- Include fresh fruit and vegetables in your diet
- Keep careful tabs on the amount of junk food you eat. When we are highly stressed, it is easy to skip meals and then snack on junk food on the run. This does not help you cope with stress.
- Start letting go of super sweet snacks and desserts. You don't have to go cold turkey, but reduce your intake steadily replacing it with fruit and other healthier snacking options.
- If you drink lots of coffee or tea or soft drinks high in caffeine, start reducing your caffeine intake.
- If you smoke, make a plan to minimise or quit. There is support out there if you are serious about kicking the habit.
- If you drink heavily, reduce your alcohol intake and find out about other things you can do to help you to relax.
- If you use recreational drugs, tranquilizers or patent medicines more often than rarely, see someone who understands stress reduction and find other ways to relax in place of using chemical controllers.
- If you are extremely overweight, speak to your doctor before you embark on a weight loss programme. Find someone to help you work out a sensible diet.
- If you are moderately overweight, consider losing weight as a long term process. Crash dieting is not good for your overall health and does not help to keep the weight off that you do lose.
- If you do need to lost weight, consider a sensible weight reduction programme and combine it with an exercise programme. They complement each other and are likely to have better results than working in isolation.

TALK / JOURNALING

- If you are highly stressed, it is really important that you can talk about how you feel and your concerns.
- Find a person who can be a sounding board for you who can be objective and just listen to your concerns. That person may be a counsellor, a close friend or a family member.
- Journaling – this is a wonderful technique that helps to connect your feelings to your physical expressions of emotion. It is private, non-threatening, and is often a good way to start the process of enabling yourself to express what is going on more verbally

SPIRITUAL

- There is a broad spectrum of faiths and beliefs out there, many of which promote prayer, meditation, and quiet time to connect with a Higher Being. Faith can be a very powerful source of connection and inner peace and seeking assistance from your pastor, minister or priest in travelling this journey can be a wonderful way to gain some perspective when life seems to be a little out of control.

Negative stress that goes unmanaged can wreak havoc on both your personal and work life, but if checked and brought under control, will relieve anxiety and many of the physical fallouts that come about from being too stressed. If you are feeling that things are too big for you and you just can't cope, seek help. You can bring it back under control with guidance.

Contact your EAP for more information or confidential assistance.