

10 Best Ways To Reduce Stress Now

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INTRODUCTION

In my training workshops I often begin by asking the question, “How many of you have heard of this thing called stress?” There hasn’t been a time a person hasn’t raised their hand with intense vigor; it’s clear they understand the weight and pains of the condition.

Since 2007 the American Psychological Association has conducted a comprehensive survey of the American people to determine the impact stress is having on the lives, health, and wellbeing of our society. The Stress in America Survey is one of the leading studies experts rely on to gauge the level of chronic stress as well as stress triggers people experience.

In 2015, the survey shows:

● Adults are more likely than last year to report experiencing extreme stress (a rating of 8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale). Twenty-four percent of adults report these levels, compared to 18 percent in 2014. This represents the highest percentage reporting extreme stress since 2010.

● Significant percentages of adults report experiencing mental health-related symptoms as a result of stress: nervous or anxious (42% vs. 35% 2014), feeling depressed or sad (37% vs. 32% 2014) and constant worrying (33% vs. 28% 2014).

● 34% of adults report an increase of stress over the past year, whereas only 16% report decreased stress.

● 49% say they engage in stress-reducing activities a few times a month or less where 18% never engage in stress relief activities.

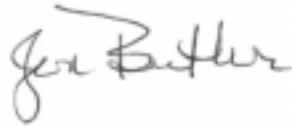
● 37% report daily irritability or anger as a result of stress.

In my 25 plus years of working under the S.M.a.R.T. (Stress Management and Resiliency Training) umbrella I’ve discovered people lack the resources to reduce stress in a given moment. They feel the strain of stress throughout the day, knowing it holds them back from achieving their optimal potential, and yet they think they have to wait until after work to address their stress levels.

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My hope is now that you know better, you will do better.

Kindly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon Butler". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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BREATHING

Breathing- number one, stress-reducing technique EVER! Most of the time you're breathing wrong. Yup, there actually is a right and wrong way to breathe. Under stress, our brain increases our heart rate which causes us to breath faster and more shallow. This then reduces the amount of oxygen getting to our brain for critical thinking and increases the volume of carbon dioxide in our lungs. It becomes a cycle of stress evoking systemic failure throughout your mind (cognitive), body, and soul (affective).

*“This is
only a
moment,”*

When feeling the signs and consequences of stress do the following immediately, I call it the 5-10-10 rule: 1) take a deep inhalation through the nose for a count of 5 letting your core (belly) extend as far as it will go; 2) exhale slowly through your mouth moving your belly all the way inward; 3) after each exhale think a positive statement to yourself such as, “This is only a moment,” or “Yes I can/will.” Repeat the above 10 times.

For an all day effect, deep breath for 15-minutes before you get out of bed, again at lunch, and another 15-minutes prior to going to sleep. The biological impact sustains you throughout the day and keeps your body's relaxation response alert.



HEALTHY NUTRITION

Stress directly impacts our ability to ward off diseases. Our immune system takes a serious beating when cortisol flows throughout our bloodstream. Ensuring you have a well balanced diet is vital to keeping your immune system at peak performance.

Do these for in the moment coping: 1) eat a healthy breakfast; 2) keep cut up veggies and fruit at the office, not sugar; 3) bring a blender to work and make spinach smoothies; 4) before you eat sugar or fatty foods you have a piece of fruit first; 5) eat lunch every day; 6) if it's in a package avoid eating it; 6) shop at warehouse stores for your fruits and veggies; 7) when feeling stressed breathe before you eat.





HUMOR

We think fun and humor is a natural occurrence in life. Reality check, it's not. There's a level of expectation and desire for life to be fun and exciting so it's easy to become frustrated with work and relationships when they turn into the dreads and doldrums.

*Reality
check,
it's not*

Just like romance in a relationship or success for a business, fun and humor take intention, planning, some prep work, and daily nurturing. As a coping method for stress science proves it's very much worth the time, energy, and effort. Humor interrupts your thought patterns, stimulates internal organs, increases oxygen to the brain, releases hormones that counteract the stress response, improves your immune system, and (most importantly) lightens tension.

In any moment where stress is getting to you, do the following: 1) get a 'joke of the day' app on your phone like iFunny; 2) subscribe to YouTube channels that are motivational, inspirational, and funny; 3) look for the funny in things- when you intentionally look for humorous situations they start appearing everywhere; 4) have theme days in your office to liven up the environment- visit your local party store for ideas and accessories; 5) laugh at yourself- if you laugh at things you do then you give permission for other's to laugh as well; 6) share funny stories from your life; kids and animals are typically family friendly.

ACT AS IF

Feelings follow thoughts and are reinforced by behaviors. It's easy to become a victim to how you feel and then act based on what you think is reality. For example, you feel too tired to go for a walk because in your mind you told yourself you're too tired. Similarly, when you think and tell yourself you hate your job, your feelings toward your job follow so then you disengage and do less than your optimal work which causes your boss and team members to treat you 'less than' which supports your original thought, you hate your job.

Stress at it's basic core is based on our worldview. When we have a different worldview, we think/feel/act differently so our stress is different. In any moment choose to Act as if... This can be acting as if you are happy, which then reinforces your thoughts of happiness, and create feelings of happiness. Same with your job, act as if you love your job and you will find a new passion within.

To begin the process of Act as if...ask yourself this simple question, *"If I were to act as if I'm (happy, in love, patient, smart, good enough) how would I be acting right now?"* Then proceed to act as such.





SOCIALIZE

Talking with a friend and sharing your stress, connecting, gaining validation, and getting a different perspective of your situation helps you purge some of your tension. According to a 2011 study conducted by Johns Hopkins University, researchers monitored a group of children and found that those participants who were with their best friends during unpleasant experiences logged lower cortisol levels than the rest of the participants in the study. This is one of hundreds of supporting studies that shows people have lower stress levels when they regularly socialize with people they enjoy. They also navigate stress triggers more easily in the presence of their supporting peers.

ask for help

Here's what to do now: 1) when stressed bring someone else into the situation and ask for help, they might handle it better; 2) reach out to a friend or loved one via text or social media; 3) talk about things you like and are passionate about; 4) post positive messages on social media; 5) actually pick up the phone and call

someone; 6) hug someone close to you for an immediate release of oxytocin- the anti-stress hormone; 7) write thank you notes to people that have done nice things for you and mail them; 8) vent, bitch, complain to a trusted friend or team member but only for 5 minutes- set an alarm.



JOURNALING

In order to analyze your stress type, response, and how effective a coping method is, S.M.a.R.T. experts suggest using a stress journal or diary to collect data and face facts.

One reason stress management is so difficult for people is due to a psychological law called the Theory of Self-Deception. Essentially what this means is that we cannot change our own thoughts, feelings, or behaviors because the brain doesn't recognize them as happening. We can't see outside of ourselves long enough and clearly enough to recognize when we are contributing to our own negative lifestyle. So in order for us to face facts and acknowledge what needs to be changed, we somehow have to mirror it back to ourselves or have someone else do it for us, like a SMaRT Coach or counselor.

Journaling is one way to circumvent the Theory of Self-Deception and get into our own minds. To use this technique in any moment do the following: 1) carry a small notebook in your pocket throughout your day and jot down your thoughts and feelings- review it before bed every night; 2) use a journaling app on your phone; 3) do recorded journaling via voice or video; 4) set aside 5 minute increments throughout your day to journal; 5) wake in the morning or retire early at night for 15 minutes of journaling.

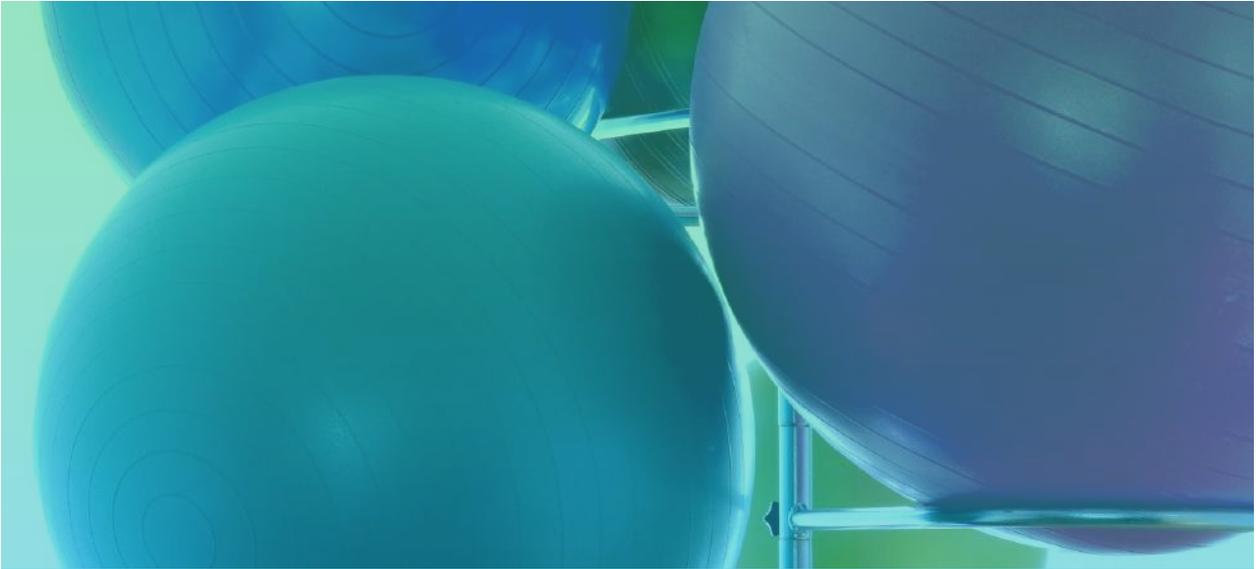


HYDRATION

The link between water and increased stress levels is well documented. All of our organs, including our brains, need water to function properly. If you're dehydrated, your body is already under physiological stress and you're pushing it's limits forcing it to manage external stressors throughout your day. Studies show that being only a half-liter dehydrated increases your cortisol levels and results in physiological stress. To the body, stress is stress and it responds the same way regardless of the stress trigger.

The old 8x8 rule, eight 8-oz glasses of water per day, isn't valid any longer. To replace the average amount of water lost each day and keep your cognitive performance normal, you need to be drinking at least half to one ounce of clear liquid for every pound you weigh. For example, if you weight 150 pounds and are fairly sedentary 75 ounces would suffice where someone highly active would need closer to 150 ounces of water.

To increase your water intake do the following now: 1) when did drinking water become unprofessional?- carry a water bottle with you everywhere and sip consistently; 2) measure your daily water intake into reusable water bottles so there is no guessing; 3) drink water at the first signs of stress; 4) make sure to have a Sparklets or Culligan water service; 5) drink room temperature water for easier intake; 6) drink a 10 oz glass of water at the top of each hour.



EXERCISE

According to the Stress in America survey findings show that Americans spend much of their time engaged in sedentary activities — often more than three hours a day watching TV or going online. Many report turning to these activities to manage their stress. Yet people who engage in these activities to manage stress are less likely to say that the technique is effective, compared with those who engage in more physically active stress management strategies.

When it comes to exercise and stress coping It's about the duration of the movement that has the effect on your stress levels not the intensity. A fierce game of table tennis or bowling can be equally advantageous as CrossFit and P90X.

*It's about the
duration of the
movement*

Do the following to stress less now: 1) march in place for 30 seconds; 2) bring light weights to the office and do arm strength ening exercises; 3) have a yoga mat easily accessible for power poses; 4) push-up, planks, and floor-bicycle exercises are wonder ful; 5) take the long way throughout the office/home; 6) stand instead of sit when possible; 7) exercise during commercials at home; 8) download a physical tracking app or where a FitBit.

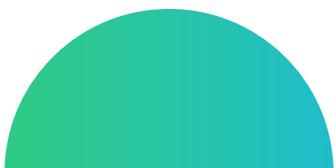


CENTERING

Centering is a method of coping that allows you to channel nervous/anxious/fearful energy and release it in a way that triggers your relaxation response. Studies show centering, because of its use of physical, mental, emotional, and existential approaches, increases concentration, focus, and critical thinking. Additionally, blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels decrease making it a powerful tool in coping with stress.

Focusing on your center grounds you in the present and reminds you of balance, control, and intention. There are three basic steps to follow to become centered: 1) become aware of your breathing, making sure it is deep, slow, and filling your abdomen; 2) find your physical center of gravity, which is typically just below your waist, and focus your mind on it while you breathe deeply at least five times; 3) release your negative energy by visualizing yourself pushing the negative energy outward away from your body.

Centering takes some practice to learn and master so it's best to become familiar with it before you need it. Schedule specific times throughout each day to spend a few moments on this exercise. You'll know you are performing it correctly when you are left feeling calm, quiet, and centered.





PMR

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) has been around since the 1920s and promoted as one of the leading techniques to reduce anxiety, stress, and tension. Over the decades multidisciplinary studies show PMR has biological, physiological, and psychological impacts on how our bodies respond to stress triggers.

The premise behind PMR is that you hold each muscle group in a state of extreme tension for several seconds and then release into a deep, relaxed phase. The process helps interrupt your body's fight-flight-freeze response when you are experiencing stress.

The simple exercise can be done in any position (standing at the office, sitting in a car, laying down on the couch) any where and at any time. Do these simple PMR exercises or go here for a full 30-minute flow: 1) raise your eyebrows as high as you can; 2) close your eyes as tightly as possible then open wide; 3) hold your arms in front of you and clench your fists tight then open wide with fingers spread; 4) bend your arms and tense your biceps; 5) curl your toes downwards as much as possible then lift them up as far as they will go. Each of these poses should be held for 5-10 seconds and repeated 3-4 times each with a relaxing breath in between.



From **Functional** To **Optimal**

NEXT STEPS

After reading the **10 BEST WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS NOW** content it may be difficult to know what your next steps are and where to begin. Here are the 4-ways I teach in my seminars to start addressing your stress:

- ① Most Difficult- starting with the most difficult gives you a major sense of accomplishment. If you can tackle the most difficult you can do anything.
- ② Easiest- when you can start checking things off your list or add to your toolkit, regardless of their difficulty level, you feel the momentum and are more willing to take the next step.
- ③ Most Resources- start with the step that you have the most resources around. Resources are online programs, classes, books, videos, or professionals.
- ④ Largest Support Network- starting something is easier when you have others join in with you.

*Start with one of these incredible coping methods and master it fully before going onto the next one. It doesn't matter where you begin, just that you do. If you discover you are more functional in life than optimal, and your stress levels are at such a level you feel you need additional information, I invite you to check out our other resources or attend one of our seminars. **You can find more information at the JB Partners website.***