

Breathe Easy Therapies

Lifestyle Tips for Today – 8 important tips for reducing stress

1. Eat good food more often and junk food less often.

My friend Marree taught me this when I was working a stressful job. I'd call her in a dither, all teary and feeling like it was all too hard. "When did you last eat a decent meal?" she'd ask. Got me every time!

Though this may seem a little obvious, it's worth pointing out. Every extra vegetable or salad you choose is going to provide your body with extra fibre and nutrients. The body is very good at doing the best with what it has. A meal or two lacking in necessary nutrients probably won't challenge your body too much. However, if you've been replacing fruit and vegies with donuts and white bread for a while the effects will start to accumulate. Eating foods low in fibre and high in sugar or white flours will cause your blood sugar levels to swing. If you experience these highs and lows you'll know what I mean. You also probably have a hard time losing weight.

Not only that, nasties like Candida (an unhelpful bacteria) love a sugar fix. These little guys live in your gut and other uncomfortable places. Each time you eat a meal high in sugar, you are delivering them a feast. Once they've had their fill, they'll leave you the scraps and excrete toxins that get absorbed into your blood stream. The result – mood swings and headaches.

No matter how you cope with stress in your life, I'll bet you cope better when you eat decent meals regularly.

2. Reduce your smoking and drinking

Every cigarette you don't smoke gives your lungs a break. Every drink you exchange for water reduces the work your liver has to do in detoxifying.

Again this sounds kind of self explanatory, yet it really is worth considering. Each cigarette causes damage to your lungs. Once the air sacks of your lungs (alveoli) are "popped" they cannot be repaired. The result is a reduced capacity to absorb the oxygen that you breathe. And this is just one effect. While you may not feel ready to give up, maybe you can start with reducing by one or two.

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As for the drinking, we're not just talking alcohol here – reduce your tea, coffee and coke and even your brain will thank you (they have a dehydrating effect on the brain). If you currently have five drinks a day, reduce it to four. Go easy, setting yourself achievable goals. Reducing these drinks can start a detox.

If you have a wine or a beer every night, choose one night each week where you'll take a break. Remember the ripple effect on the pool. Small pebbles can make every increasing ripples. Start with small changes that you can stick to and enjoy the benefits.

3. Breathe Fresh Air through your nose.

Stale, stuffy air can be exhausting, affecting both how you think and how you feel.

Keep fresh air circulating in your home or place of work. If you're in an air-conditioned environment for more than an hour or so, make sure you take a break. Just the act of getting up and moving can get more oxygen to your brain and make concentrating easier.

When you breathe, use your nose. It is the perfect instrument for getting the air to your lungs at just the right temperature with just the right amount of moisture (and it can filter harmful bits and pieces on the way.)

4. Drink filtered or fresh spring water often.

While tap water is safe to drink in that it is free of microorganisms that cause illness, it has several chemicals in it that are of concern.

How much is enough? While the standard response is 8 glasses, I find it varies from person to person. Drinking smaller amounts more often is better than drowning 2 or 3 glasses at once to get your quota in.

Water is an acquired taste or more accurately, we can very quickly condition our bodies to prefer sweet drinks to pure water. The upside is, we can be re-conditioned back to water if we make the effort.

Water is used by the body in a variety of ways. Just as it cleanses on the outside, it also cleanses on the inside. It keeps the mucous membranes moist, the brain, heart, lungs, stomach, kidneys and bladder all need water to function optimally.

Pure water can be absorbed directly into the blood stream through the mucous membranes in the cheeks. Once you start adding other tastes to it (like juices or teas), the drink becomes a food and must go through the whole digestive process to get absorbed. The moral of the story is, keep pure water in your mouth for longer before swallowing.

And remember – alcohol and coffee dehydrate the body. If you're thirsty and you drink these, you're only going to stress your body further.

5. Get out for a walk every day

We live in a great climate – get out and enjoy it.

Any amount of walking is good. Start small and build up. You may think a five-minute walk is a waste of time. Habits only form when we keep repeatedly doing the same thing. You will never convince me that you can't find five minutes a day. Get yourself used to walking to the end of the street, to the convenience store, to the beach, to the park. Walking can be a time to let the cobwebs blow away, to release some built up emotions, to clear your head.

6. Give yourself time to think and reflect everyday.

Sit and do nothing? Absolutely !

Some people are more inclined than others to analyse things and see the patterns life brings. Reflective time encourages your intuition and gives you an opportunity to acknowledge the thoughts and feelings that influence your day-to-day activities. There are countless books out on how positive language and self-talk can affect our stress levels and our perception of life. Are you making your problems worse with negative talk and reminders of failure? Or are you tapping into your internal resources and allowing your mind to dream of a better life?

7. Rest if your body is tired.

While no-one wants to be accused of being lazy, there are few people who have learned how to really rest their body and stop working.

A significant part of rest is getting a good night's sleep. The best time for sleep is from about 10pm to 6 am. You may survive on less sleep, go to bed later or get up earlier; the important thing is that this time is relaxing for you. If you're not sleeping well or not sleeping at all, find out what is causing the insomnia.

Sometimes a busy mind is a symptom of an important issue that seems too hard to face right now. Give yourself permission to rest, knowing you'll deal with life's problems after a good night sleep.

A change is as good as a holiday. A break from work will achieve dramatically more than if you keep slogging on. This could mean taking a breather during the day, or making sure you have a break from work during the year. (Don't forget to take a break from your unpaid job too - parenting or caring can be extremely rewarding and extremely draining. Taking time for yourself and your grown-up relationships will help your children learn how to be a balanced parent.

Every person's version of rest is different. For me, it's softball. Maybe for you it's dancing, reading, snoozing, listening to music, playing with the kids, or walking the dogs. What ever you do make it *fun !*

8. Ask for help when you need it.

Picture a beautiful swan sailing gracefully and swiftly across the lake, but look underneath the surface and we see those legs are paddling furiously to achieve an image of effortlessness.

Whether it's help with the housework or childcare, or help with issues of pain or hurt, I urge you to ask for help! Just knowing that you've started on the path of healing can be a great relief. If you do look for professional help, make sure you feel comfortable and supported by your therapist - it's their job to be there for you.

Want to find out more?.....

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