

Tips to Keep Stress in Balance

By Craig Miller

Modern life is full of frustrations, demands, hassles, and deadlines. In small doses, stress can motivate you to do your best. However, when life is full of demands, frustrations and emergencies, your mind and body pay the price.

Whether you're stressed over a busy schedule, an argument with a spouse, or a mountain of bills, your body reacts just as strongly as if you were facing a life-or-death situation. If you have a lot of worries, your emergency stress response may be "on" most of the time. The more your body's stress system is activated, the easier it is to be overwhelmed and the harder it is to shut off.

Long-term exposure to stress can lead to serious health problems, affecting nearly every system in your body. It can raise blood pressure, suppress the immune system, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, contribute to infertility, and speed up the aging process. Long-term stress can even rewire the brain, leaving you more vulnerable to anxiety and depression. To help you decrease the stress level in your life here are some tips to keep stress in balance:

- Identify key stressors and decide if they can be reduced or eliminated.
- Talk to someone you trust to let out your feelings.
- Find pleasurable and playful activities in your life- read a book, watch a movie, listen to music, exercise for fun, volunteer, pursue a hobby.
- Set limits and say "No" to excessive demands- avoid over commitment and unnecessary obligations.
- Make to do list- tackle one at a time, pace yourself, give permission to do the next day what is not done.
- Be open to change and value flexibility.
- Stop negative thinking. Ask someone to remind you to think positive.
- Avoid too many big changes at the same time.
- Slow down. Practice eating slower, driving slower, and talking slower.
- Sit and listen to someone talking with you.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine. Including walking, dancing, sports, and sex.
- Eat mostly health-promoting foods without creating a list of off-limit foods.
- Avoid situations that are noisy and crowded – eat in quiet restaurants, or shop in smaller stores.
- Ask for help when you need it. Assign tasks that other people can do.
- Practice complimenting yourself and others several times each day.
- Write about your problems and feelings in a journal.
- Pamper yourself with a massage, facial, manicure, or a hot bath.
- Keep a "big picture" view. Don't sweat the small stuff.
- Let go of grudges, forgive others and laugh a lot.
- Hug members of your family.
- Relax while listening to soothing, gentle music.
- Believe in your unique talents and limitations. Compliment yourself for every small win.
- See challenge and change as opportunity rather than obstructions.

If you struggle keeping your stress in balance, I suggest you seek professional counseling to help you find ways to create that balance in your life.

Craig Miller is a counselor with Masterpeace Counseling, in Tecumseh, MI. visit, www.mpccd.com and a speaker, author, visit, www.insightsfromtheheart.com