



Basic Stress Solutions:

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1. Diet & Lifestyle

You have heard the saying: “You are what you eat”. This is true! It is important to keep our bodies as healthy as possible. When we eat the wrong foods it puts our body under strain, which in turn robs us of energy and health. Try eating as naturally as possible. ***Eat lots of fresh (preferably organic) fruit and vegetables.*** Raw fruit and vegetables have the highest vitamin and minerals content of any other food. They help detoxify the body and eliminate stored waste. They also provide us with easy access to energy because they are easily absorbed into the body. Our body does not need to work hard to digest it. It is often recommended to go on a raw diet to detoxify your body. This spring cleans the body, restores the correct PH balance and leaves you feeling healthy and energized.

1.1 Avoid fatty foods.

Our body finds it very difficult to digest fatty foods unless they are natural fats, high in essential fatty acids. The processed fats that we eat today have been chemically modified to such an extent that our body can not make proper use of them. They form a fatty layer around our red blood platelets causing them to stick together and clog our arteries. This causes degenerative heart disease and high cholesterol. Because the body can not use these fats they get stored as fat, usually around the hips, buttocks or abdomen. The essential fatty acids found naturally in fruit and vegetables are essential to our health and well-being. We need them to lubricate our systems and keep our hormones in balance. These are found in avocados, nuts and cold-pressed oils.

1.2. Avoid foods with preservatives and colourants.

So often today our foods are packed with additives such as preservatives, colourants, stabilizers, anti-caking agents and emulsifiers to name but a few. These have been shown to aggravate the body and cause stress. Illnesses such as asthma and ADHD (Attention Defecit Hyperactivity Disorder) have been linked to the consumption of these additives. As a rule, natural is best. Our bodies can not cope with all these chemical additives.

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1.3. Avoid fast foods or convenience foods.

Fast foods are generally high in fat and additives. They may be convenient and taste good but they are very bad for your health and well-being. It is tempting in our stressful lives to eat on the move or buy fast foods or ready to use meals. Time savers, right? Well, while they may save time in the short term, in the long run they will create more stress and illness. It is really not worth the consequences. That is not to say, 'never eat fast food' but rather: 'everything in moderation'.

1.4. Avoid refined sugar and caffeine.

Both sugar and caffeine are regarded as what I call 'roller coaster foods'. They perk you up and then just as quickly let you down. Often they leave you even lower than before. This often gets people into a vicious cycle of consuming more sugar or caffeine to pick themselves up from the depths that the last dose of sugar or caffeine left them. We become reliant on these artificial stimulants.

Both sugar and caffeine work in similar ways in that they stimulate the adrenal glands. These are the glands that operate the fight/ flight instinct. So when we consume sugar or caffeine it puts our body on alert. That is why we perk up and get extra energy. However, too much sugar and caffeine cause the adrenal glands to overwork which eventually causes exhaustion.

In the refining process, sugar is stripped of all its nutritional value. It is what we call 'empty calories' and only serves to help us put on weight. Furthermore, sugar has been seen to decrease the immune system making us more susceptible to illness as well as to cause a number of degenerative diseases. High sugar intake affects our insulin production and can lead to diabetes. It has also been linked to a number of psychological disorders such as depression and hyperactivity.

Caffeine is a drug. It is regarded as a stimulant and has an effect on your body, your mind and your mood. One cup of coffee provides you with 90 to 150mg of caffeine. Pharmacologists would consider regular caffeine intake (2 or more cups of coffee a day) as considerable dosages of caffeine. Furthermore, produces acid in the body and increases your blood pressure.

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1.5 Reduce meat intake.

It is a fallacy that we need to eat large amounts of protein. It is our carbohydrates that provide us with energy. That is not to say that protein is not important. Your body needs protein for amino acids, muscle building and hormone production. It is essential for our metabolic processes, for growth and tissue maintenance and repair. It is the amount of protein that is under dispute. We tend to eat far too much protein. Especially in the form of red meat or animal flesh. What you must understand is that once protein is heated it is broken down. So when we cook meat we destroy most of the protein. Furthermore, animals are fed growth hormones and anti-biotics. When we eat animal flesh, we take in these chemicals. There is a school of thought that says that this is the reason why girls are starting to menstruate at a younger age. Some also feel that eating particularly red meat can make you more aggressive. This is also due to the amount of adrenalin pumping through the animal's system during the slaughtering process.

1.6. Reduce Alcohol and Smoking

People often resort to alcohol or cigarettes to help them cope in times of stress. The truth is that they numb the effects of stress and help you to avoid the real issues. Ultimately this does not help. It only serves to make things worse especially because of their addictive nature. These substances are extremely harmful on the body (alcohol on the liver and cigarettes on the lungs) as well as the mind.

2. Breathing

Breathing is essential for living. We all know that. However, most of us do not breathe properly. You may wonder how anyone can not breathe properly. We all breathe and that process happens unconsciously. We are not aware of each breath we take. We just breathe. Right? Wrong! Most of us breathe very shallowly. When we breathe shallowly we do not take in enough life force. Shallow breathing is a sign of fear and tension as a result of a constricted diaphragm.

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Our breath is our life force. It gives energy to our body .We need to *breathe in and out as deeply as possible*. This oxygenates the blood, bringing more oxygen to the brain. The more oxygen that we give our brain, the more clearly we are able to think.

2.1. Breath Awareness

Bring your attention to your breathing. Notice how you breathe. Are you breathing slowly and deeply or are you breathing quickly and shallowly?

Now take a deep breath. Breathe in fully, filling the whole of the lung area, and breathe out fully, making sure that you have emptied your lungs. What do you notice? Do you notice how difficult and uncomfortable it is to breathe in fully? We are not used to filling our lungs. You may also notice how you do not empty your lungs completely when breathing out. This causes us to hold onto toxins and negative emotional and mental patterns. That is why we find it so hard to let go of our 'issues'.

Breathing is profoundly connected to our emotional and mental state. Your breathing when you are relaxed is different to your breathing when you are scared or excited. Your breathing rhythm changes when you are angry or in love. Conversely, if we change our breathing pattern, we can change our mind set and our emotions. Just breathing deeply calms you down immediately. Speeding up your breathing puts you in a state of arousal. Try it!

2.2 Deep Breathing

Practice deep breathing- breathe in fully and breathe out fully. Breathe in through the nose and out through the nose. Feel the air filling your lungs. Focus on bringing the air down into the bottom of your lungs. You can place your hands on your sides. You know you are breathing properly when you can feel the bottom of your stomach expanding as well as your rib cage expanding outwards. Also focus on the out breath. Breathe out fully. Empty your lungs completely. Remember, when we do not breathe out fully, we hold onto toxins and negative emotions.

Try to become conscious of your breathing as often as possible and slow your breathing down. Try to make your breathing rhythmical. That is, the in breath should take more or less the same time

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as the out breath. As you become more aware of your breathing, and as you become more practiced at breathing deeply and slowly, you will notice that you are becoming more calm and relaxed.

2.3. Breathing Your Stress Away

This is a very easy, quick and effective technique to use to instantly calm yourself down in trying times.

Whenever you feel yourself getting stressed:

- *STOP – take a moment to recognize that you are feeling stressed.*
- *TAKE A DEEP BREATH IN – as you breath in imagine all the parts of yourself coming back towards yourself. When we are stressed we often feel ‘fragmented’ or ‘stretched’ or ‘pulled in a number of directions’. If you could imagine your energy at this time you would see ribbon-like fragments of energy coming out of your body.(See pic 1.) This is because we are scattered, we have lost our centre.*

So as you breathe in, imagine these ribbons or pieces of energy coming back to you. The parts of yourself that have been lost, or given or taken away, coming back to you. Feel yourself becoming whole and centred. Feel yourself being filled with yourself. Feel the strength and security you derive from feeling yourself becoming fully present in your body.

- *BLOW YOUR BREATH OUT THROUGH YOUR MOUTH – Actually blow the air out your lungs as if you were blowing up a balloon. As you do this, imagine yourself blowing all the negative, stressful and unpleasant feelings out of your body. Visualise the negative energy leaving your body in any way you see fit. (See pic 3) You may visualize it as a dark cloud that you are blowing away. When I do this I always think of that movie ‘The Green Mile’ where they portray the negative energy that the prisoner takes from other people and releases through his body as maggots flying out his mouth. It doesn’t matter what you visualize as long as you can feel the unpleasantness leaving your body.*
- *REPEAT- repeat this process until you feel strongly centered in your body and until you feel that all the anxiety and negativity has left your body.*

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3. Sleep

Getting enough, quality sleep is an essential ingredient to stress management. Sleep regenerates our body and mind and soul. When we sleep we breathe deeply and slowly, our heart rate decreases, blood pressure lowers, our digestive system quiets and our brain waves become synchronized. In this state we are wonderfully relaxed and at peace. Our body takes the time to make anti-bodies and to repair damaged tissues and cells.

Often during times of stress we tend to have sleep disturbances. Either we cannot get to sleep or we wake up during the night or early morning. If we do not get enough sleep we become irritable, forgetful, clumsy and depressed. Lack of sleep can even cause a kind of psychosis.

Try to get a minimum of 6 hours of solid sleep per night. Here are some tips to help you sleep better:

- **Exercise before you go to bed.** This helps you to release the stress and it also tires the body. When your body is tired you tend to sleep well. If you go to bed after doing paperwork or working on the computer you may find it hard to sleep because your mind is still wired. Often we cannot sleep because our mind is active and we have a lot of nervous energy that stops us from relaxing properly.
- **Avoid stimulants.** Try to avoid drinking coffee or alcohol before going to bed. While coffee will stimulate you and keep you up, alcohol might help you get to sleep but it tends to wake you in the early hours due to its effect on the liver.
- **Take a warm bath.** A warm bath will help your body relax especially if you add some relaxing aromatherapy oil such as lavender or chamomile. As your body relaxes so your mind relaxes. Light some candles and put on some soft music. Allow yourself to completely relax and unwind.
- **Read a relaxing book.** A light read will take your mind off your troubles and help you relax. Especially if you wake up during the night, do not lie in bed trying to fall asleep. This will only frustrate you. This is the time to read that book. It will help you fall asleep quicker.

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- ***Drink a glass of milk.*** This old wives tale has a lot of truth to it. Milk contains a chemical called tryptophan which helps produce the serotonin needed in order to sleep well. It is also a muscle relaxer.
- ***Write out your worries.*** It is a good idea to regularly write out your worries. Especially if you cannot sleep because your mind is racing or you are worried about something. Write down whatever is on your mind. It does not need to be eloquent or poetic. It does not even need to make sense. You can jump from topic to topic or thought to thought. You can swear and bitch and moan. It is not for anyone else to see and serves only as an emptying process. By writing out your worries you are emptying your mind and emotions of toxic thoughts and emotions. It is your rubbish bin!
- ***Practice a relaxation or meditation technique.*** We will discuss relaxation techniques and meditation in detail in the chapters to follow.

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4. Physical Exercise

Exercise is one of the most important stress management techniques. When we exercise we speed up our heart rate, which causes us to breathe more deeply, bringing more oxygen into our bloodstream. This oxygen is then used to break down and eliminate lactic acid and other stress inducing toxins from our bodies, which helps us let go of stress, anxiety and other toxic emotions we have been carrying. Moreover, it has been proven that when we exercise, endorphins get released into the bloodstream. These endorphins are nature's 'feel good' hormones which put us on a natural high. So not only does exercise reduce stress, it also makes us feel good. In fact, you often see people becoming addicted to the positive effects of exercise. Those are the people who cannot wait to get to the gym at the end of the day.

Exercise also builds stamina and discipline. In our busy lives it takes a lot of commitment to one's well-being as well as discipline to take the time to exercise regularly. There are so many demands placed on our time that we sometimes tend to put our needs last on the list. It is important not to do this. When we exercise our body, we exercise our mind. The more disciplined we become in our exercise, the more disciplined we become in our lives. When we exercise we feel so good about ourselves that we begin to take ourselves more seriously. We do not want to fill our body with junk food anymore. Rather, we want to feed our body food that nurtures and sustains us- healthy food. We start to think more positively about ourselves and the world. We feel better about our bodies and our self-esteem goes up. The stamina we develop also helps us to build stamina in our lives. It helps us to keep going even when times are tough.

Exercise is also a good, socially acceptable way of letting off steam. We all pick up frustrations during the day and need to do something to release these. If we don't we end up shouting at the kids, or kicking the dog or swearing at someone in the traffic. We will talk more about this in the 'Managing Anger' chapter of the book.

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Therefore, it is important to have a regular exercise programme in order to reduce stress. It is recommended that everybody do at least half an hour of aerobic (heart-pumping) exercise at least three times per week. It is important to take this time that you spend on keeping yourself healthy very seriously. It is as, if not more, important than putting in those extra hours at work. This is time scheduled to make sure that you can keep performing at your best. Make it a priority. Write it in to your diary and do not be tempted to shuffle it around. Treat it as a meeting with the boss or a major investor. It is a meeting you cannot afford to miss!

Calming exercises such as yoga, tai-chi and pilates are also recommended to promote a sense of calmness and well-being. Most gyms tend to offer these types of classes. It is recommended that you try them. A lot of people don't regard these types of activities as exercise. I disagree. These activities employ the mind and the body. They focus on becoming very conscious of each breath, each movement. They require a lot of strength and stamina. Moreover, they leave you feeling strong yet extremely peaceful and in touch with your body. The positions in yoga are specifically designed to keep our bodies healthy, inside and out. Many postures are designed to give our internal organs a massage. I will include some basic yoga postures in the book for you to practice at home. However, I would recommend that you try a yoga class.

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5. Think Positive

Effects of Negative Thoughts

The world is made up of energy. Therefore, we are made up of energy. Just as we have a physical body, we have an energy body. This is our blueprint. Our energy body creates a magnetic field around us, which draws people and experiences to us like a magnet. This is how we create our reality: by attracting people and situations to us in order to help us learn and grow.

Because we live in a scientific world, we are taught anything we can't see doesn't exist. Energy is not visible to our naked eye, so we don't believe how influential it is in our lives. However, if you open yourself to the possibility that you have an energy body that creates a magnetic field around you, you will begin to see how you attract certain people and situations into your life. You may have noticed that when you are in a good mood or when you are in love, everything seems to flow effortlessly. Your whole day is filled with wonderful people and amazing situations. However, when you are in a bad mood, everything seems to go wrong. Your day is filled with problematic people and situations. This is because of the energy you are putting out.

When we are in a positive state our energy field expands, our consciousness expands, our vibration increases and it is from this state we attract positivity, love and abundance into our lives.

When we think negatively, our energy field withdraws and our vibration lowers. We are no longer open to love, positivity and abundance. Instead we attract more negativity to ourselves. We attract the very things we fear.

If you break down or categorize emotions, all emotion can be broken down into either LOVE or FEAR. All positive emotion is based in love. All negative emotion is based in fear. If you are thinking negatively, you are stuck in fear.

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6. Relaxation

It is important to take time-out to be with yourself doing the things that feed your soul. Reading, dancing, singing, hiking, gardening, pottery, painting, sewing etc... We are often so busy doing things for other people (our bosses, our spouses, our children, our friends) that we forget to do things for ourselves. We put ourselves last on the priority list. Surely, this is not healthy? Surely, our health and happiness needs to be our number one priority? If we do not look after ourselves, who will? If we do not take time to make ourselves happy and feed our soul, who will? Some people may say that this is selfish, putting yourself ahead of others. I say NO this is not selfish. It is about being a responsible adult. You and only you can be responsible for your life. You can not be responsible for anyone else's life.

This is about being self-centered; about putting yourself in the centre of your life. Is this not where we are meant to be? If we cannot love ourselves and show compassion towards ourselves, we cannot love another or be compassionate to another.

So take some time to discover what feeds your soul. You may want to take up painting or dancing, or pottery. You may want to spend time reading a novel or with friends and family. Do not feel guilty about the time you take for yourself. In fact, make it a priority. Write it in to your diary. Spend at least an hour a day or seven hours a week doing something that feeds your soul.

You can download a free MP3 "Ocean Cleansing" de-stress guided visualization on our website: www.ignitesq.co.za

Meditation is an important and effective relaxation technique. You can learn more about this in the resources section of this website or by visiting: www.meditation.co.za

For more information and resources contact:

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