



Beat stress

Have you noticed there seems to be ever such a thin line between 'having a cold' and 'having the flu'? And how little the difference is between a slight twinge in the back and 'doing it in'? If so, you'll also know there's often only a wafer thin mint between having a really bad day and having stress... The good news, though, is that these tips work for either. Just try a few and see how much better you feel...

Reeeeellllllllllllaxxxxxxxxxx... Let's start with a cliché: the way you breathe hugely affects how you feel. Honest! And one of the quickest, easiest ways to start to unwind is to breathe in through your nose for about 7 seconds, then breathe out through your mouth for 11...

After about 3 cycles, you should notice you start to feel considerably calmer... Carry on for another 7 cycles and see how you're doing. Oh, and if you find the 7/11 ratio a bit much, try it for 5/9 instead.

...and sttttrrrreeeettchhhh! Your poor old neck and shoulders! Boy, they don't half take a pounding when you get worked up! So try this: keep your shoulders level and tilt your head gently down toward one of them, hold it for a few seconds, then go back to normal, then tilt to the other shoulder. Next, gently tilt your head down so that you can look at the floor, then back as far as you comfortably can and look up at the ceiling.

Okay! Put your head back where it belongs before rotating each shoulder in a wide circle, whilst you open and close your jaw widely, 'cos stress tends to cause clenching in them thar parts, too. Do this whole shebang around 5 or 6 times - in private, preferably!

Music: chicken soup for the lugholes... Simply listen to music that you enjoy! There's not many people who argue with the evidence that scientists have collected: if you enjoy music, it helps you relax. Unless you play it so loud the neighbours want a row, obviously...

Controversial, this: We're going to suggest you stop work for about five minutes every hour or so, and think of something relaxing. A holiday, somewhere fabulous you've been, or a chum who makes you laugh! Don't think you have time? Well, studies show our bodies are on a cycle that compels us to slow right down for about 15 minutes every 45 minutes or so! 'Overriding' that instinct is an everyday cause of stress and proves counterproductive; you feel worse and work less effectively when you battle on. And taking just 5 of the 15 minutes or so your body really wants can make a heck of a difference.

You never know... If work is the source of most of your worry, try talking to the guvnor! Happens that employment law requires bosses to help resolve pretty much all your professional concerns and, almost always, the boss can help if you trust him or her. Course, if you are the boss, you could've skipped this one!

Dear Diary... Writing up stuff that's happened during the day often helps relieve stress. It can allow you to express unresolved emotions, setting you up for a better night's sleep. Sounds tricky, but if you can manage it, try to write diary entries 3 or 4 hours before you go to bed. After a fortnight or so, it really helps to go through that diary and look for patterns that contribute toward your personal stress - maybe certain people, deadlines or demands on your time regularly take their toll?



It's good to talk... Not just a well remembered Bob Hoskin's soundbite from the 90's; oh-no. Also a great stress busting tip! The old adage about sharing and halving a problem kind of holds true. Okay, the person you talk to mightn't have the answers you need, but sure as heck it'll help you to get it off your chest. Talking it through can also help engage both the rational and creative parts of your brain, meaning you're more likely to see new ways to handle stuff. Oh, and it's especially helpful if you can chat to your chum about the patterns you found in that diary...

Oh-oh! It almost goes without saying that smoking and drinking are big no-nos for the stressed... 'Cos whilst it may feel like they help, it's – ulp – actually making it worse! The body releases a bunch of feel good chemicals when you take stimulants of any kind to counteract the chemicals in alcohol and tobacco. But once they've been released, your brain starts holding out on you because it's worried another chemical 'attack' is on the way. In other words, one of the things that causes stress is the very thing you're doing to help deal with it. If you'd like more info on this, we know people who can tell you all sorts of stuff. Call 01784 42 12 12 for more info.

Fruity! Back to the cliché! Quite likely you've heard it plenty of times, but eating fruit and veg helps you stay physically fit enough to beat stress. As you know, almost all fruits and vegetables boost your immune system by giving you vitamins B and C, a dose of calcium and a dollop of magnesium. Check out our 'Beat that cold' sheet for more.

Exercises, exercises, see me do my exercises... Down the gym, 7 times a week, 2 hour hard sessions... Yeah, right! Actually, half an hour's brisk walk, just three times a week, helps that bod and brain of yours feel much better! And stone me if it doesn't help you snooze better in the land of nod as well, so even if it's only a couple of trips round the block at lunchtime, try and get a walk in!

The boys and girls of DMI do an awful lot of thinking, talking and researching to bring you the best advice they can on any given subject. However, we can accept no responsibility for the consequences of actions based on the advice herein. If you have any doubts about your health at all, visit your Doctor to get professional advice, or call the NHS helpline on 0845 46 47. We hope you feel better soon!