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**Look after yourself
first.....**

***you can then take care of
others.***

Ten tips for stress management for
Executives and Professionals

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Prevention is better than cure

Stress isn't pleasant. It's at the wrong end of the pressure-strain-stress spectrum. You begin to lose concentration, become forgetful, may experience muscle contractions that frighten you, become anxious, depressed, suffer panic, and your imagination can go riot. You focus on what is wrong rather than on your work, supporting the people around you, and your future. You look inwards instead of outwards. You often need help and support to bring you back to your 'old self'.

The following tips will help to prevent you from the debilitating experience of stress and help you gain the benefits that periodic pressure can bring.

1. Your resilient self

Resilience comes from your inner strength, which helps you bounce back after experiencing adverse events.

Tips:

Find the person or people who you trust completely and talk to them about anything you like – even you fears, founded or unfounded. Try to ensure your trusted friends have a positive outlook, and a sense of humour. You cannot be stressed when genuinely laughing.

Work out what you really, really want to do in the future, and write down the things you wouldn't touch with a barge pole. Make plans with small steps to achieve what you really, really want to do and avoid, at all costs, the things you wouldn't touch with a barge pole.

Don't be rigid in your views – try to develop a flexible approach and understanding. This will help you respond well to adverse events, and see events in several different ways.

2. Your tolerant self

Tolerance allows you to remain fairly calm in the face of events happening around you.

Tips:

Become really attentive to other people, their ideas, their needs, and their concerns. Respond attentively to them by offering empathy, ideas and support. They will respond positively back to you.

Count up to 25 at heart rate pace when faced with something that drives you mad, causes you irritation, or makes you want to run. After counting, adopt the first tip.

Adopt courteous behaviour – this means placing other people before you in all forms of interaction. This will make you focus on someone other than yourself, and make you tolerate their behaviours and actions if you make yourself courteous in response to others.

3. Your physical self

There is a very close relationship between physical health and the prevention of stress.

Tips:

Take some physical exercise every day. Try to make sure that whatever you do raises the heart rate without causing physical distress of any kind. Brisk walks between meetings; walking up stairs in place of lifts – these kinds of activities help.

Eat in moderation. Try to avoid comfort eating, tempting though this may be. Eating in moderation will help you to remain alert; overdoing it will make you feel sluggish, and add to your other concerns. At stressful times you need to be alert.

Drink alcohol in moderation. One or two units a day is about right to act as a stimulant, rather than a depressant. Alcohol impairs everything, and whilst it may be felt to be a useful hiding place (softening all sensations), - it isn't. Try something else instead. Sparkling mineral water with lemon and ice can lift the spirits, cleanse the system, and keep you alert.

4. Your opportunistic self

At times of uncertainty keeping an open eye out for opportunities will help you turn the uncertainty into a period of potential excitement – the excitement of the unknown.

Tips:

Be active in seeking out opportunities; don't simply remain inactive, waiting for things to happen – they will and you won't be in a strong position to react. Get ahead of the game, and help shape events rather than reacting to them.

Be responsive to suggestions, even if the initial idea sounds uninteresting. Remember to be your tolerant self.

5. Your organisational self

In stressful times you will want to abandon reading letters, answering telephones and seeing people. It takes considerable will power to overcome this desire to hide. However, there are simple ways of regaining control over your routine daily life.

Tips:

Buy some small toy ducklings; line them up; under each place a small piece of paper with a task you have to do. Place the easiest task at the beginning (either the left duckling or the right depending on your preference) and gradually do the tasks in turn. Once completed, take the relevant duckling away and hide it, and throw the piece of paper away.

Write down on a blank piece of paper – on the left what you really, really want to do; on the right the things you wouldn't touch with a barge pole; at the bottom your 'don't knows' that you would do if nothing else cropped up. Then start planning how you would do your 'really, really want to do' list. Then start implementing the plan.

Every morning write in your diary the list of things you must do on that day. Don't put anything down that could be done on another day. As you go through the day, cross off the items you have finished. Don't add to the list anything that crops up after 11.00 am (unless it's a genuine emergency) as you won't do it.

6. Your planning self

Looking to the future has two major benefits – it provides you with hope, and gives you a target to aim at. These are both antidotes to stress.

Tips:

Write down on a piece of paper what you would like to be doing now if you weren't doing what you are doing. Plan how you would do the thing you would like to be doing if it's not what you're doing now.

Think about the most attractive person you could talk to today. Make a plan to engineer a way of having a brief exchange; avoid using email, text or other impersonal form of communication; use only your own ingenuity.

Think about the skills, knowledge and experience that you would like to acquire. Write these down on a piece of paper; work out how to acquire them. Talk to your trusted friend about your plans.

7. Your successful self

Reminding yourself of your past successes is an excellent way of raising your spirits. It, also, helps with providing you with confidence – you have been successful before, you may be successful now, but you can certainly be successful in the future.

Tips:

Think about the good times at work. What were they like and what made them different compared with today. If the good times are today, think about what makes them really good.

What was your proudest success? Did it happen by chance or did you have to work really hard to achieve it? Think about the steps that you took then, and see if they can be useful to you now.

Be proud of your successes. Stand up straight and go to a mirror and say to yourself 'well done'.

8. Your role model self

Executives and Professionals are role models for other people aspiring to be like you.

Tips:

Take a hard look at yourself and see if you match up to the role model you have based your executive or professional life on. If not, do something about it.

Remember you are a role model for others. Act like one, and show a positive face even when you feel unsettled inside. Don't be aloof, however. Remember to be your tolerant self.

Role models nurture others. Remember that, even when you feel rotten, you still need to nurture other people and encourage them with wise words and effective deeds.

9. Your ethical self

Personal integrity in the face of difficult challenges is a must. There is a life after everything, so don't ruin it.

Tips:

Never take advantage of someone else. Instead, nurture, encourage, stimulate and support them.

Never allow harm to come to anyone. This includes harm due to stress, no matter how rotten you may be feeling.

Take decisions you can genuinely justify, even if they turn out to be the wrong ones.

10. Your determined self

Being determined requires considerable self belief. This is a strong antidote against stress, even chronically stressful situations, such as the start of a new venture that takes time to get off the ground.

Tips:

When times get really tough you may resort to talking to yourself. Find a mirror and sort out some key phrases such as 'enjoy the journey' or 'make it happen' or 'I can do it' and repeat these mantra constantly. They banish the negative thoughts – if only for the time you shout at yourself – so keep shouting.

Keep your eye on the ball – and make sure the ball is some distance away.

Try to make sure your trusted friends have positive outlooks; talk to them and gain encouragement from being with them. Try to find something to laugh about – laughter and stress don't mix – stress loses.

Dr Derek Mowbray is a specialist in mental health and wellbeing at work.

For further information please go to www.derekmowbray.co.uk and www.orghealth.co.uk

To arrange a meeting with Derek Mowbray to discover more about how he helps organisations and people at work email Barbara.leigh@derekmowbray.co.uk or call 01242 233999.