

# Learning to take control of stress

By Mandy Kendall

With the snowfall we have had these past few days I wondered if it would, at last, relieve a little of the stress that local businesses must have been feeling over the last few dry months?

A small amount of stress is vital for our well-being, but too much stress and we risk our mental and physical well-being. Thousands of years ago, for our ancestors, stressful situations tended to involve things like running from or fighting with Saber tooth tigers. (Pretty stressful I should imagine.) Hormones would flood the body to speed up certain responses such as heart rate and blood flow to muscles, but also slow down less immediately vital ones, like digestion, so that they could flee to safety. Once they'd decided which one of the fight or flight responses were best, generally it was all over fairly quickly.



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Once they had survived, the body's hormone responses would quickly go back to normal. However, these days, stressful situations tend to be much less life threatening, but often much longer in duration.

Unfortunately, our bodies have not evolved since those primal

times and this often means our bodies are pretty much racing, like a car in a high gear, for much longer than they are designed to. If these stressful situations last over a prolonged period, this can do a lot of harm to our body's engine.

But what can we do about it? Can we limit how much stress we experience when so much of it seems totally out of our control?

Here are a few *Qwik-e* tips (quick and easy, because let's face it who has time for anything else!) to help ease up on our body's gas pedal a little.

**Focus on what you can control** – “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.” Try to take an objective look at the top five stressors in your life (there are likely to be more, but let's not overwhelm ourselves before we start). Typically the top stressors involve family, work and money. Try to look objectively at each stressor and ask yourself “is there anything I can do to change this?” If the answer is yes, then you have something to work on. If the answer is no, then try to see if you can look at/react to the situation differently. For example, you might hate your job, however the job is not likely to change but you can change how you view it. List all the things you do like about it; being paid, getting health insurance, the people you work with, or maybe how you help other people because of the work you do. Sometimes a change of attitude can put a helpful new perspective on a situation.

**Calm things down** – What ever works for you; exercise, talking with a loved one, playing with your kids or your pets, yoga, meditation. There will be something that is the best way, for you, to unwind the day. Try to avoid using substances (alcohol, etc.) to relax, as these just tend to become replacement stressors on the body.

**Just breathe** – Oxygen is nature’s great relaxing agent. A few deep breathes help to flush out the stress hormones from the body and help our systems return to normal. Breathing deeply can also give us that “count to 10” type space to help us not make that heat of the moment snap decision that is often fueled by the physical effects of those over active stress hormones. A wonderful meditation teacher once told me that the simplest meditations were often the best. He recommended purely thinking the word “accepting” as you breathed in and “releasing: as you breathed out. He insisted you needn’t worry about what exactly you were accepting and releasing, if it weren’t obvious, as your subconscious would do that for you. So maybe just try it and see what happens.

**A problem shared is a problem halved** – Maybe we think we are the only ones that can deal with the stresses in our lives? Maybe our family and friends would love an opportunity to help us, if only we would share with them what is going on. Quite often sharing problems can bring up solutions, clear up misunderstandings, or just plain share a heavy burden that might become easier to bear.

Until next time.

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