techniques & tips for stress reduction

Stress is an unavoidable part of our daily lives. As we face changing times, as well as competing demands to balance work, family, finances, friends and pastimes, stress and tension can abound. While life can never be stress-free, you can learn how to manage stress in a productive way. Here are some simple techniques to help alleviate stress and make it work in your favor.

Deep Breathing
Deep breathing is exactly what it sounds like—allowing yourself to breathe slowly and deeply in order to reduce tension and create relaxation. You can do the following exercise whenever you have a few spare moments (a lunch hour; when stuck in traffic; before bed; when feeling anxious).

- Sit in a comfortable position.
- Place your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your abdomen.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose and into your abdomen, letting your left hand rise up as much as feels comfortable. Slowly count to four as you inhale—one, one thousand, two, two thousand, etc.
- Breathe out through your mouth, making a quiet whooshing sound. Count slowly to four while you exhale.
- Continue to breathe slowly and deeply, focusing on your relaxation, until you have taken at least ten deep breaths.

Visualization
Visualization is simply using your imagination in creating peaceful images that relax you. All you need is five spare minutes. This can be done anytime and anyplace. Close your eyes, take several deep breaths and picture . . .

. . . a fluffy white cloud floating along in the gentle breeze
. . . a quiet, spotless beach with the sound of waves softly lapping at the shore
. . . relaxing on a plush carpet in front of a warm fireplace
. . . a large field filled with hundreds of colorful, fragrant flowers, or any scene you find personally relaxing

Progressive Relaxation
Progressive relaxation involves isolating and tensing muscles so that you can begin to focus on relaxing them. This increases awareness of the different muscles and the feeling of muscle tension in contrast to lack of tension. This exercise can be done anyplace and anytime (while walking; sitting at your desk; lying in bed). You can work through each muscle in your body, from top to bottom, or in reverse, or focus only on those muscles which are experiencing tension. (continued on other side)
- Begin by isolating a muscle.
- Tense it for five seconds.
- Slowly release the tension and simultaneously visualize it floating up into the air away from your body.
- Slowly take a deep breath.
- While slowly exhaling, repeat to yourself “relax and let go.”

**Respecting Your Limits**
Practice saying “no” when you need to say “no” and “yes” when you need to say “yes,” and know the difference between the two. Control what you can, and let go of that which you can not. Recognize and respect your limits by acknowledging what’s in your control and what’s not, and reacting accordingly. For example, you can’t control how much traffic there will be, so when you get stuck in a jam, instead of getting upset, try to use the time to listen to some relaxing music or to organize the events of your week.

**The Serenity Prayer**
This simple exercise is based on the Serenity Prayer by Rhinehold Niebuhr. It can be helpful in articulating the limits of what you can and cannot control and in taking responsibility for making positive changes in your life. Take a few minutes to fill in what is personally relevant for you.

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**GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT . . .**

The things I cannot change

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The courage to change the things I can

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. . . and the wisdom to know the difference.

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This information is not intended to replace professional care. Please call your EAP if professional care is needed. The EAP offers assessment, counseling and referral to appropriate resources.