



STRESS

HOW TO REDUCE THE STRESS IN LIFE

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Introduction

Stress is a normal part of everyone's life. No matter who you are or where you live everyone experiences stress. Some stress is actually good for you. But too much stress can have a cumulative effect on you. Stress adds up. As it adds up it can effect you in many ways, both physically and mentally.

This book will detail what stress is, how to determine where the stress is in your life and how to alleviate it. It's chock full of ideas and tips to help you reduce and eliminate the amount of stress you have. It will also show you techniques and exercises to reduce stress in your life on an everyday basis - for the rest of your life.

Chapter 1 - What Does Stress Do To Your Body?

Stress is a normal part of everyone's life. No matter whom you are or where you live, everyone experiences stress. You may be surprised to learn that having some stress is actually good for you. But too much stress is bad. Stress can have a cumulative effect on the human body. As it adds up, stress can affect you in many ways, both mentally and physically. Stress is a biological response. It is caused by either stimuli to the body or danger, either real or perceived. Back in the days of the cave dweller, the body used stress to help us get away from danger, such as wild animals. The body still gives us responses to danger, however, now the "dangers" are much different.

Stress is a chemical reaction in your body when you confront danger or perceived danger. Stress happens when your brain thinks something is threatening. The body releases chemicals into the nervous system that sends it racing. The heart pumps faster and you breathe more quickly to take in more oxygen. The body tenses up. Your reflexes get sharper. Your brain is preparing the body to deal with a dangerous situation. Although our modern stresses come from many places, they are no less real to us than dangers were to our caveman ancestors.

Doctors deal with stress-related problems every day. While medications can sometimes help to alleviate the symptoms, stress related issues are best dealt with by getting to the root of the problem and eliminating it. Stress causes many responses in the body. Anxiety attacks, while now quite common, are a typical response to an over buildup of stress. An anxiety attack can have very acute symptoms, many of which mirror symptoms of a heart attack. The body tenses up. Breathing becomes erratic, often hyperventilation occurs. Fear of dying is common. The

erratic breathing can cause chest pains, again simulating a heart attack. For many, a trip to the emergency room reveals through an EKG that what they have experienced was not a heart attack, but was actually an anxiety attack. An anxiety attack is actually nothing more than an extreme build up of stress in the body. Victims of an anxiety attack are told to go home and to relax.

Later in this book, you will learn several useful techniques for reducing daily stress in your life.

To better understand what stress is, it will help to know something about the human body. When you perceive a threat (either real or imagined), the communication systems within the body begin to activate. The nervous system triggers the release of hormones such as adrenaline. These hormones are secreted into the nervous system and cause a heightened arousal that increases the blood pressure and heart rate. Hormones are also released into the system that prepares it for action. They ready the body for quick response, getting the heart and muscles ready for action.

At the same time, the hypothalamus, a part of the brain, releases a substance that travels to the pituitary gland, which in turn triggers additional powerful hormones to be released into the bloodstream. These responses happen simultaneously and almost instantaneously. We feel the changes happen within our body. Our breathing becomes much more rapid.

You can get stress from a wide variety of circumstances. Some stress is rapid and lasts a relatively short time. This type of stress is usually quite intense for a short time, and then subsides. This is the type you experience when you have a close call, such as an accident or are involved in a fire or other disaster. Your body reacts to an external situation and produces the typical responses. This stress is mostly physical, that is, it is brought on by physical events.

This quick-type stress goes away quickly. You do not accumulate physical stress in the body.

Other stress can be slow, and long term. This stress can have cumulative effects on the body.

This type of stress may be more mental than physical. That is, it is more a product of the mind than of any actual physical danger. This is the type of stress that you may feel at work. When people say they are 'under pressure' at work, what that really translates to is stress. There are varying degrees of stress. Many situations in life produce stress in varying degrees. Some situations affect some people more than others. There are many stressful situations that people are unaware of as causing stress. Raising children can be stressful at times. Arguing with your spouse is stressful. And we've all heard of 'road rage'. This is stress caused by traffic situations.

As you will see later in this book, you can rid yourself of the effects of stress. This is important in dealing with cumulative stress. In the case of 'road rage', a person does not have the opportunity to cool off and relax. The stress has consumed their mind and they react in ways they may not normally react. Although 'road rage' is an extreme example, we can see where stress accumulates inside you. Some people don't release the stress and it manifests itself in the body, causing many illnesses and health problems.

Posttraumatic stress syndrome is stress that is caused by a traumatic event that happened a long time ago, often years. An example of posttraumatic stress syndrome is someone who has fought in a war and returns home only to later have nightmares, anxiety, and other stress related issues. The person can actually re-live the stress they felt during the original event. This type of stress is extreme and should be treated by a doctor.

Tension is stress that is manifested in your physical being. Some signs of tension include headaches, muscle spasms, jaw tension, and tight shoulders and neck. Treat the physical symptoms as normal, however you need to get to what caused the tension and alleviate it.

Chapter 2 - Health Problems Caused By Stress

Over 1 million people each year are diagnosed with stress-related illnesses. These illnesses range from mild to severe and acute. Because the effects of stress can be cumulative, often times people don't think that stress is the cause of their problem. Stress can cause many health troubles. Even doctors may have a hard time determining that stress has played a part in a health situation. That's why it is important in all medical conditions that you help your doctor by listing any stressful situations you may be under. Sometimes, the first real indication a person has that they are stressed is by the body showing it in physical illness.

The good news is, by reducing or eliminating our stress levels, we can combat these diseases and in some cases, we can slow or reverse the effects of stress. Once we learn to reduce our stress levels, our body will respond positively. We can prevent, reverse or slow down, many common illnesses by using stress control. Once free from stress, the body once again functions as normal. The long-term effects, however, are with us and may cause us problems down the road. By learning to control stress, we can help our body maintain proper function.

Here are some common medical ailments that can be caused directly or indirectly by stress:

⇒ **Headache** - Stress can cause headaches. The stress does not need to be occurring at the time you get the headache. Because stress can accumulate, one or several stressful situations that have already occurred can cause you to get a headache. Stress headaches usually subside after taking an over-the-counter medication. Tension headaches that are more severe or that do not subside after a reasonable amount of time may be classified as a tension-type headache.

- ⇒ **Sleep Difficulties** - Many times, stress causes people to have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep. If you are under stress, the mind is constantly working on ways to fix the situation. You may find that you have a hard time removing the situation from your mind long enough to fall asleep. Or, you may awaken after just a partial night's sleep and be unable to fall back asleep because your mind is racing.
- ⇒ **Tiredness or Fatigue** - Stress can cause us to feel tired and listless. Because your mind is working overtime, you tire easily. If you don't sleep well due to stress, you are tired and become exhausted. If you are experiencing extreme fatigue, have your doctor rule out any medical causes.
- ⇒ **Overeating or Loss of Appetite** - Stress may make you overeat. Your body is not using correct signals or is ignoring the signals that let you know when to eat and when to stop eating. Some people eat when they are nervous. Tension can also cause stomachaches, which can lead to loss of appetite.
- ⇒ **Heartburn or Sour Stomach** - This is a very common complaint that is often related to stress. The body increases acid secretions during times of stress. This may lead to a buildup of acid causing many symptoms, such as heartburn or gas. Ulcers can be the result of years of extra acid working on our stomach.
- ⇒ **Backaches** - A common source of backaches is tension caused by stress. Sitting in one position for long periods of time, such as hunched at a computer keyboard, can cause back and neck aches as well. Working under a tight deadline can force us to work for long periods with poor posture.

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- ⇒ **Stiff Neck** - Stress can cause us to tighten all of our muscles. The neck and shoulders are extremely susceptible to pain from overuse or tension. Sometimes, it may only take a small amount of stress to aggravate an already stiff neck.
- ⇒ **Colds or the Flu** - Being under stress can diminish the body's effectiveness to fight other illnesses, particularly colds and the flu. If you seem to be getting colds frequently, you may want to review your stress levels.
- ⇒ **Pain in the Jaw** - Tension can cause us to clench our teeth. We usually do this without really knowing it; however, this clenching can cause us to get acute pain in our jaws. You also may clench your teeth at night or you may grind your teeth. Grinding your teeth at night is a way the body can physically remove some built up stress. This action, however, can cause pain in the neck and jaw.
- ⇒ **Panic Attacks** - Panic attacks are very common. These episodes can occur when the body has an overload of stress. The symptoms can be very similar to a heart attack. If you ever feel shortness of breath, dizziness, rapid heartbeat or chest pains, seek medical attention immediately. Only a doctor can rule out the possibility of an actual heart attack.
- ⇒ **Depression** - When faced with chronic stress, some people may show signs of depression. These include a lack of interest in others, fatigue, and feelings of hopelessness. Talk to a medical doctor about these symptoms. When left untreated, depression can worsen.
- ⇒ **Anger** - Chronic stress can cause some people to become angry. You may notice that small things set you into a state of anger. This could be the cumulative stress making us irritable. Anger management classes deal with the underlying source of the anger, which many times is due to stress.

⇒ **Elevated Blood Pressure** - Tension and anger can temporarily raise your blood pressure.

This is especially bad for people who already have high blood pressure.

⇒ **Raised Cholesterol** - Studies have shown that prolonged stress and tension can actually stimulate cholesterol production in the body, thus raising your cholesterol level.

⇒ **Heart Disease** - Heart disease is the number one killer in the United States. Heart disease is caused by many factors but stress can be a major contributor to it. The heart, like any muscle, is exposed to stress over long periods of time. Stress can increase the risk of heart disease.

⇒ **Cancer** - Stress alone does not cause cancer. However, it has been shown that stress adversely affects cancer. If you take measures to reduce your stress, cancers often positively respond.

Chapter 3 - How Much Stress Do You Have?

You may or may not feel the stress you have. There are different types of stress. Some stress is acute, that is, it is caused by a one-time situation and is over. There is also stress caused by situations that recur. There are many situations in life that commonly cause stress. Research has shown that there are a number of stress-producing events that can happen in our life. If you have experienced one of these events within the past year, you should take stress-reducing action now. If you have experienced more than one of these, you can be certain that stress is working within you, even if you are unaware of it. Be prepared to make some changes so the stress won't take its toll on you.

Here are the top 10 stress producing life events:

1. The death of a spouse or partner
2. Divorce
3. Separation
4. Being jailed
5. Death of a family member (parent, child, close relative)
6. Major illness (diagnosis in past six months)
7. Marriage
8. Being fired from your job
9. Reconciliation with estranged spouse or partner
10. Retirement

Here are some additional stress-producing events:

- Moving
- Bankruptcy
- Changing Jobs
- Changing schools
- Trouble with your boss
- Trouble with your marriage or relationship
- Taking out a loan

As you can see, many of the items on these lists can happen to everyone at one time or another. All of life's major events, both good and bad, bring with them some stress. You can see why the first year of marriage is usually stressful for the couple. They have just been married and have moved into a home together, two of the top stress-producing life events.

How can you determine how much stress you have? While there is no such thing as a stress meter, there are certain clues you can use to see how much stress you are dealing with. You can list all the things that you feel causes you stress by taking a stress inventory. Take a sheet of paper and list all the items (from the list below) that affect you.

- Tiredness or fatigue
- Sleep Difficulties
- Overeating or Loss of appetite
- Heart palpitations (racing)
- Rashes, itching or hives
- Muscle aches and pains
- Lowered sex drive
- Increased use of alcohol
- Drug use
- Irritability
- Use of medications
- Anxiety or panic
- Moodiness
- Anger
- Memory lapses
- Loss of concentration
- Impatience
- Feeling depressed
- Racing thoughts
- Less socializing

If you listed several of these, you are showing some signs of stress. You may have some of these symptoms and have dealt with them for so long that they seem like the everyday norm. Together, these symptoms may be masking a stress problem.

Stress is cumulative. It can build up. Sometimes it builds up to the point that it only takes a small thing to put you 'over the edge'. That one small thing by itself would not have made such an impact. But piled on top of many other stresses you can get the feeling that this is the last straw. We've heard the saying "that's the straw that broke the camel's back" but stop and realize that it's true. Each stalk piled onto a camel's back by itself is very light weight. But as they all add up, there will come a time when the combined weight is just too much for the camel to handle. The same is true with our stress. As stresses add up, they become larger than the individual stress itself.

These little stresses are sometimes called annoyances. All of us get annoyed from time to time. Annoyances cause stress. Annoyances may seem minor but they can add up and cause stress.

There are many things in our daily life that can add up to stress. You need to find out what is adding to your everyday stress. One great way to see how much stress you live with is to keep a stress diary. A stress diary will help you become aware of what is causing your stress so you can learn ways to eliminate them.

Stress Diary Exercise

For this exercise, you will need a small notebook or calendar. Make sure it is small enough to be easily carried because you will need to bring it with you for a week. A small notebook works well, using one page per day.

Now, every time you feel upset or stressed write it down. Make sure you note the day and time, where you were and what you were doing at the time. Then write what the stress or annoyance was. Lastly, rate your stress on a scale of 1 - 10, with 1 being the least stressful and 10 being the most stressful. The purpose of this exercise is to find out what causes your stress so you can custom-tailor a plan to eliminate it.

Use a common 10 point scale to determine stress levels.

- 1 - No Stress
- 2 - Little Stress
- 3 - Slightly Stressed
- 4 - Noticed more rapid breathing or sweating
- 5 - Annoyed
- 6 - Moderate Stress
- 7 - Feeling Stressed, starting to feel upset
- 8 - Anxious or possibly angry
- 9 - Very stressed
- 10- Extremely stressed

Here is what a sample diary page might look like:

Tuesday, January 12

7:20 AM Daughter is not ready for school on time. Had to help find her shoes and jacket.

Now I may be late to work. [**Stress Level 7**]

8:15 AM Co-worker asked for my help. I've already got my own work to do but I need to help her. [**Stress Level 5**]

11:45 AM Grocery shopping at lunch, someone in front of me has a price-check. The line is taking forever. [**Stress Level 7**]

2:15 PM I'm working on a large presentation for my boss (which is due today) and I can't get it done because the phone keeps ringing. [**Stress level 8**]

3:30 PM Someone took the last of the coffee and didn't make more. Now I have to do it. [**Stress Level 3**]

4:30 PM I'm not done with the presentation so I will need to work about an hour late. I can't get in touch with my husband to pick my daughter up.

[**Stress Level 5**]

5:45 PM On my way home, traffic is terrible. It's going to take me an extra ½ hour to get home. [**Stress Level 7**]

6:50 PM Just got home and now find out that I need to make dinner. [**Stress Level 8**]

8:45 PM Just found out the VCR did not tape my show today. I really wanted to see that! [**Stress Level 4**]

10:00 PM I see that I need to do a load of laundry tonight so husband and daughter will have something to wear tomorrow. [**Stress Level 5**]

You see the idea. There are many things that will bother you each day. Once you have them written down for a week certain patterns will begin to emerge. You can evaluate your stresses to come up with a list of your top stressors.

Here is what the list of top stressors looks like for the sample diary above.

1. Not being ready for work on time / late for work
2. Husband did not make dinner when I was late
3. Traffic causing me to be late

Now you can take steps to eliminate the causes of stress in your life. Some may be out of your control, but if you work to eliminate the ones you can control, you should see a noticeable difference in your life. Here are ways to eliminate the stresses from the sample diary.

To eliminate stress number 1, not being ready for work on time or fearing being late for work, the answer is to wake up earlier so you have enough time to get ready for work. Leave the house a little bit earlier, also. If you have trouble getting up, adjust your bedtime.

For stress number 2, you need to communicate better with your spouse. Make sure you discuss and plan who will make dinner. Plan out the week's meals ahead of time so that whoever gets home first can start the meal. Or decide that when one of you will be late you will get take-out for dinner that night.

Stress number 3, traffic, is out of your control. You can, however, use some coping methods to help alleviate the stress that you get. For instance, while in the car, listen to soothing music or a book on CD. Try to avoid thinking about work related problems.

Chapter 4 - Useful Tips To Reduce Stress

Much of our stress is self-induced. We can reduce the amount of stress we have through some easy and useful techniques.

Breathing is a natural thing; nobody needs to learn to breathe when they are born. However, how we breathe affects our body. Deeper breathing can produce calming results. Deep breathing is also known as breathing from the diaphragm. Many Eastern practices, such as yoga and meditation, incorporate deep breathing techniques.

Here are some useful tips to help reduce your stress:

⇒ **Breathing Exercise**

Lie on your back on a hard surface such as the floor. Place your palms up towards the ceiling. Let your body lie loosely. Calm your thoughts. Pay attention to your breathing. Now, take a long, deep breath in through your nose. The breath should last about 3 seconds. Pause slightly then exhale slowly through your mouth, counting to 4 as you exhale. Pause and take another breath. Do this until you can feel the rhythm and your breathing becomes cyclical.

⇒ **Visualization Exercise**

Sit in a quiet area. Close your eyes and think of a beach. Visualize the beach, the way the sand looks and feels. The smell of the air. The sun is shining and there is a slight breeze blowing. The sky is clear blue. The water is lapping up onto shore, rhythmically. Now imagine you are the only one at the beach. You walk along, slowly. You take your shoes off and walk along the edge of the water, getting your feet wet. You stop to pick up shells. The water is beautiful. Spend about 5 minutes visualizing yourself walking along the beach.

⇒ **Self-Massage**

Give yourself a pressure massage. You can massage yourself on your arms, legs or shoulders. Sit comfortably in a chair and relax your body. Using your fingertips and thumbs, apply pressure into your tight muscles. Apply the pressure to each area for about 5 seconds, then move to another area. Try to relax yourself as you perform this massage. You can do this anywhere. You can do this massage right through your clothing.

⇒ **Meditation**

You've probably heard people talk about the great benefits of meditation, but what exactly is it? Meditation is an ancient discipline that enables you to clear your mind so you can concentrate on your whole self. It helps you bring your body and mind together. Although meditation is part of some religions, the act of meditation in itself is non-denominational. You need not be afraid of meditation, it is not hypnosis nor are you in any type of trance. What it does do is give you quiet time to contemplate yourself - who you are and who you can be. It brings together an awareness of breathing and mental control.

⇒ **Meditation Exercise**

Choose a quiet time when you won't be interrupted - mornings are best. Find a calm corner floor area. Sit cross-legged on the floor or on a straight-back chair. Be aware of good posture, and practice a breathing exercise to relax. Place your hands comfortably on your lap. Now you must clear all thoughts from your mind. Just "be". This will be hard at first but will become easier with time. Start with 5 minutes at first. As outside thoughts enter your head push them out again. Clear your mind. Focus on your breathing. Feel your blood flow through your body. After 5 minutes, slowly return to the present. As you practice this technique, you will become proficient at it. If you need some help, there are guided meditations available in various formats to help you attain a meditative state.

⇒ **Professional Massage**

Massage therapy can be very beneficial for stress relief. There are many forms of massage such as Shiatsu, Swedish, Sports, and deep-tissue. Whichever form you choose the therapist will use gliding and kneading techniques and movements to relax your muscles and improve circulation. Some massage therapists use oils, which are also beneficial for the aromatherapy they provide. Massage therapists can be found at most spas. Some companies even include massage therapy in their health plans. It is important to choose a licensed massage therapist.

⇒ **Go To The Park**

Find a local park and go there to exercise. Walk or jog through the park or do stretching exercises. Then sit on a park bench and relax. Clear your mind and take in nature and the sights around you. Try to listen for birds. Just 15 or 20 minutes in the park will transform your spirit and refresh you. Your stress will be melted away.

⇒ **Try Tai Chi**

Tai Chi is a Chinese martial art. It is a soft-style martial art that uses relaxation of the muscles. Not only does it help keep us fit, Tai Chi also teaches awareness of your balance. The benefits on stress are well known. There are Tai Chi groups or classes in almost every city or you can do Tai Chi on your own. There are some very good instructional DVDs that you can follow along with.

Chapter 5 - Stress at Work, Home, with Friends and Family

Much of your stress is a result of work as well as home life. Work stress in particular has grown over the past few years. Studies show that people are working much longer work weeks than ever. Many people easily work 50 to 60 hours a week, or more. That averages out to 10 to 12 hour workdays. That much work in itself is sure to cause some stress. There is also the fact that many companies have downsized in recent years. Your job is no longer secure as it once was. Your productivity is key to keeping your job. Executives who make even minor mistakes are being let go. With fewer workers doing the same amount of work, more work is expected from each employee. That is pressure, which translates to stress. In Japan, where work stress is well known, 10,000 men die each year from job-related stress.

With all the latest pressures at work, it's no wonder that this is where much of our stress originates. Bosses who are demanding, co-workers who can be challenging and customers who can be difficult all work to create stress.

Although much of your stress may be work related, a certain amount of stress also occurs at home or with family and friends. Because people are so active and family members all seem to be running in different directions, stress can easily happen. With even the youngest members of the family involved in several different activities, the family is moving at a rapid pace. Multi-tasking isn't just happening at the office anymore.

The onset of many different electronic devices is supposed to make our lives easier, right? Well, that hasn't really happened. With the prevalence of cell phones has come the idea that we just can't get away from anyone. We now need to be talking on the phone while we're doing all of our regular chores. Our jobs, too, seem to think that since we have a cell phone we can be reached 24/7. The internet has brought many great things to us, however, we now have an email inbox to check and respond to. Everyone seems to now use your email to communicate with you.

Try to minimize the amount of electronic devices you and your family members have. At the very least, establish a set of rules for using them. After a certain hour, only respond to emergencies. Ensure that the whole family follows the rules. Even kids can get stressed out. If your children seem stressed, try to limit the amount of activities they participate in. Allow them to choose one sport or activity at a time. This will help the kids to feel less stress and give you less stress by not having to drive them to and from all the different activities.

Schedule dinner time with the family and eat dinner together at the table. It used to be the norm, but with so many crazy schedules, most families don't eat together anymore. This is an important time for the family to communicate with each other. Lack of communication causes arguments and leads to stress. Make dinner time a time when all family members need to be present for the meal. Turn off all the phones and the television set. And nobody is excused until parents say the meal is over.

Families benefit from having a schedule. Make sure that there is a scheduled bedtime for everyone in the family and that it is adhered to. Children need more sleep than adults, usually between 10 and 12 hours a night. Get the kids and the adults to sleep early enough to ensure a full night's sleep. Children may balk at a schedule at first, if they aren't used to having one, but after just a short time everyone will start to reap the benefits of having a schedule.

Make one night family night. Choose one night of the week to be designated as family night. Nobody can make other plans that evening. The purpose is to spend time together. Rent a movie and make popcorn. Or play a game. Let each family member take turns picking an activity for their week.

Take a vacation - at home! Can't spend the time or money to take a real vacation? Designate a weekend to be your mini-vacation. Starting on Friday night, pretend you are on vacation. Plan activities similar to what you might do if you were away on vacation. Find things you can do near home. Look in the local newspaper for ideas. What do tourists do when they spend time in your town? Make a list of some of these activities and work them into your weekend. Go to the zoo. Go to a museum. Spend time in a local park or garden. Spend the afternoon at the pool or

go mini-golfing. Order take-out food or eat at a restaurant. If you want to, you can actually have family members pack for the weekend. You can have a ‘pretend’ camping trip indoors in your family room. Anything goes. Make the planning part fun for the whole family. Everyone can be involved in planning activities that they like to do. This fun activity helps everyone recharge and remove stress from their bodies.

Walk together. Try giving each family member a pedometer. Challenge each other to see who can walk more steps in a day. Walk to the park or to the store instead of driving. The exercise is good for reducing stress and keeps us fit.

Talk it out. Every family member can have stress, even the kids. Set aside an hour a week for a family meeting. Let everyone have a turn telling the best and the worst things that happened to them during that week. Open discussions foster good communication. We are more apt to openly discuss our problems, and therefore reduce the amount of stress we carry with us.

Chapter 6 - Stress Related To Money Problems

In today's busy world, money has become a major stress factor for many people. In our attempt to have it all and to keep up with our friends and neighbors, we overspend. It was estimated that most people have between 6 and 15 credit cards. This is a sure way to debt. Once you get in debt, it gets increasingly hard to get back out of debt.

Most families have two working partners and still have trouble paying off all their debt. Because the electronic age progresses so rapidly, it is almost impossible to go for any length of time without upgrading to the next level of gadget. We all want the newest car, the newest electronics, and the biggest house and credit allows us to get all these things. The problem comes later, as the bills start to pile up and the monthly minimum payments are hard to make.

Once in debt, money troubles are huge stress producers. One of the biggest money related stress makers is the threat of bankruptcy. This is followed closely by taking out a loan, getting a mortgage and fear of job loss. Many couples have divorced over money related troubles. Money stress escalates into domestic disagreements.

You can control your money-related stress by following some simple tips.

- ⇒ **Start using a budget.** Most money issues arise because it is hard to pay the monthly bills. Begin by making a list of all your monthly payments. Be sure to include all bills, even those you pay annually or semi-annually. Get a budget book and use it. Set aside an hour or two per week to maintain the budget and to write and send bills. Better yet, schedule your bills to be paid electronically. Once you have your expenses you need to compare that to your income. If you are consistently living outside of your means, you need to take immediate steps to change. You will need to lower your expenses. Be sure to allow yourself some money to be set aside for savings.
- ⇒ **Don't buy things you can't afford.** As easy as that sounds, it happens all the time. Start using cash or debit instead of credit. Work on getting your current credit card debt paid off

by paying more than the monthly payment until it is paid off. Don't charge anything new on your cards. Once you are out of debt, make sure you don't buy anything on credit that you can't pay for in full at the end of the month. Paying off the credit cards you have can be a huge undertaking. If you pay only the monthly minimum payments, it's likely that you are making payments only slightly more than the interest charges. At that rate, you will spend years getting the credit cards paid off.

- ⇒ **Cut out any discretionary spending.** You'd be surprised at how much a latte each day can add up to! Bring your lunch to work. Use coupons at the grocery store. In other words, tighten your belt. Give yourself a budget and stick to it. Make sure you write down everything you spend throughout the day. Then cut out your spending on unnecessary things.
- ⇒ **Discuss your money issues with your partner.** As simple as this sounds, if two people have different views on spending and saving money, disputes are likely to occur which will cause stress. If you need to, get a financial advisor to help sort out your money issues and help you get or stay on the right track.
- ⇒ **Keep 3 to 6 months worth of living expense money tucked away in a savings account.** If you unexpectedly lose your job, you will be able to live while you look for a new job, without the stress that comes from wondering how you will pay the bills. Experts recommend keeping the money in an interest bearing account which is easily accessible.
- ⇒ **If you do have money problems, don't compound the issue by wasting money playing the lotto or gambling.** Gambling can become an addiction and you could end up in a much worse financial situation.
- ⇒ **Get a personal financial advisor to assist you with your finances.** Make sure you find someone who is trained, certified and is reputable. Many times, banks or other financial institutions offer financial advisors or planners as a service. Financial advisors know all about personal finance and can help get you on the right track with your money. They know the best ways to invest and will advise you on the best savings plans to invest in. They are also up on the latest in the world of 401K plans or other retirement plans and can help you find the one best suited to your needs.

Chapter 7 - Relaxation Techniques

Being able to relax is important in reducing the pressures of stress. By using relaxation techniques you can diffuse some of your built up stress before it accumulates. Tension is stress that is manifested in your body. Some signs are tension headaches, neck and back pain, stomach pains, and muscle spasms, to name just a few.

The fact is, many of us are so used to living with tension that we don't think we have any. If you completed the stress diary earlier in this book you have already seen many areas that give you stress, many you probably didn't even realize. Some physical signs of tension include a clenched jaw, pursed lips, furrowed brow, hunched shoulders, muscle tightness, curled toes and clenched fists.

Relaxation is important as both a quick way to relieve tension and as a permanent solution to keep stress at bay. There are many relaxation techniques, so find one or two that fit into your lifestyle and work them into your daily routine. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- Bubble Bath
- Massage
- Foot Rub
- Stretching
- Yoga
- Sex
- Meditation
- Listening to Music
- Spas
- Chiropractor
- Acupuncture
- Take a Walk
- Exercise
- Aromatherapy
- Visualization
- Hobby

Now let's expand on some of these ways to find relaxation.

YOGA

There are several types of Yoga. The basics of Yoga, however, are the same. Exercise through guided methodical movements and steady breathing. Basic Yoga positions can be very helpful for both proper breathing and posture. And Yoga is very relaxing. If you can incorporate some Yoga into your daily routine, you are sure to reduce your stress level greatly. Pick a specific time of day to do your Yoga exercises. Some people find it best to do Yoga in the early morning, upon waking, because they get energy from the workout. Others prefer to do Yoga in the evening as a relaxation technique before bed. Either way, the exercises are great and once learned can be improvised so some can be done even at your desk at work! Get yourself a good Yoga DVD or CD with relaxing music. Follow along several times. Don't worry if you can't do all the exercises well at first. Your flexibility and stamina will increase as time goes on but your relaxation will improve immediately. Yoga works on training your breathing which is important to your total well-being.

RELAXATION EXERCISE

This exercise will prepare you for meditation. Sit on the floor in a cross-legged position or in a straight-back chair. Breathe slowly and deeply. Now starting at your head, tell yourself aloud that you are relaxing. Repeat this to yourself: "My neck is relaxed." Then, "The muscles in my shoulders are relaxing" and so on down your body. Talk slowly, take your time. Finally, tell yourself your mind is calm and relaxed. Your whole body is calm. Your mind is alert and awake.

EXERCISE

Exercise of all types will help to relax the mind. When you exercise, your body releases endorphins, a natural feel-good chemical. This automatically counteracts stress hormones. The more aerobic an exercise is the more endorphins will be produced. However, you should choose an exercise program that is geared towards your age and abilities. Walking is a great way to start exercising. Start by walking smaller distances and work up to longer ones. Park further away at stores, choose the stairs rather than the escalator, or walk to the local store instead of drive. Take

a stroll around your neighborhood. Then, come up with an exercise plan you can stick to. Start small and work up to longer and more strenuous activities. You may even want to join a gym or get a personal trainer. Before starting any new exercise plan, you should consult with your doctor.

AROMATHERAPY

Aromatherapy is the use of scents to calm the body and mind. The scents are essential oils that come from plants. Different plants produce essential oils that have different effects. Lavender is the most common of the relaxing scents. You can find many products that have a lavender scent. Essential oils that calm nervous tension and anxiety are ylang ylang, jasmine, bergamot, rose, sandalwood and geranium. Put a drop or two of the essential oil on a cloth or massage into the forehead. Essential oils can also be used in the bath or as massage oils. These oils can be found at health food stores or at natural food markets.

PAMPER YOURSELF

After a stressful week, take some time for yourself. Plan about an hour without the kids or the phone and have your own at-home spa. Run a hot bath. Make the water as hot as possible. Use bubble bath and pour some drops of a relaxing essential oil into the water. Light some candles. Get some cucumber slices and place them over your closed eyelids while you soak in the tub. Try not to let your mind race, but instead, try to clear your mind of all thoughts. After you've soaked for awhile, drain the tub and run a cool shower. The cool water after the hot bath will help refresh you. Your stress has now been soaked away.

Chapter 8 - Can Medication Relieve Stress?

Medication cannot relieve stress. What it can do, is help conceal the effects of stress. In the past, little was known of the connection between the mind, the body, and stress. Medications were frequently given for even nominal amounts of stress. Now, however, we know that stress can cause many physical symptoms and illnesses. Today, doctors typically frown upon prescribing drugs for normal stress. Instead, getting to the root cause of the stress and eliminating that is the preferred treatment.

Still, there are some cases when medication can provide immediate relief. For instance, if you have muscle spasms, muscle relaxers will help calm your muscles enough to loosen them up and help them to stop hurting. If you have gone through a traumatic emotional event, tranquilizers will help calm you enough to get the rest your body desperately needs.

Tranquilizers, such as Valium, can be prescribed for use in controlling stress symptoms such as sleep disorders, restlessness and other problems that are usually attributed to the nervous system. Although once used in abundance, tranquilizers are no longer prescribed very often for routine stress problems.

Anti-depressant and anti-anxiety drugs are usually only prescribed for short time periods. These drugs help to alleviate some of the anxiety associated with acute stress. These drugs, along with others, have side effects such as drowsiness and must be used sparingly. These prescription drugs are addictive and can easily be abused. For these reasons, doctors don't prescribe these for long-term situations. Most often, they are given in cases of acute stress, such as the death of a loved one. The medication is used to help you sleep or relax for several days or weeks, after which time you should be over the extreme stress of the situation. These prescription drugs, such as Xanax, are called benzodiazepines.

Some people learn to live with their stress and the stress-related illnesses. In order to calm their minds, some people self-medicate, using alcohol or illegal drugs. While these may offer temporary relief of the symptoms of stress, these are hardly an answer to your stress problems.

Alcohol addiction is possible, as well as drug addiction. These will only add to your negative situation.

Always consult with a doctor when you have any physical symptoms. Only a medical doctor can ensure that your symptoms do not have a physical cause. A doctor will prescribe medication as necessary.

The best way to treat stress is by working to eliminate the cause of the stress. Masking the effects of stress is just making a temporary band-aid that will not prevent further stress from happening. You can use medications as an aid in extremely stressful situations but know that you will need to make changes in your life to reduce the amount of stress you continue to have.

It may seem easy to take medication and feel as though your stress has been reduced, but you are not apt to actually get to the cause of the stress. At some point, you will need to deal with the situations that cause you such extreme stress. A therapist or counselor may be helpful in getting to the root of the problem. Often the causes of stress are deep rooted. To remove them requires us to look deep within ourselves and make an effort to change our thinking.

Holistic medicine has progressed quite a bit in the last ten years. Many more people are learning about the connection between the body and the mind. Treating the whole person and not just the specific symptoms is becoming more standard, even with regular physicians. While the mind-body connection is just beginning to be studied, most experts agree that there is some strong connection. There have been many cases in modern medical history where the power of positive thinking has helped people overcome tremendous odds.

With so many techniques and ways to alleviate stress in your life, you would be advised not to take medications except in extreme cases. Try to understand the causes for your stress and remove them from your life. Stress is cumulative, that is, unless it is released, the effects of

chronic stress can affect all parts of the body. Even though you may not have any physical symptoms, be aware that there is a weakening in many areas of the body due to chronic stress. The heart attack you suffer in 10 years will be due, in part, to the stress you are feeling today. You need to work on reducing stress in all areas of your life. You can never totally eliminate all stress from your life, but you can certainly work to reduce the amount you have.

Chapter 9 - Mental Stress

Much of the stress we feel is mental stress. That is, stress that we have brought about ourselves. Even though there are outside influences at work, your mind takes these and turns them inward, often creating stress. It is our perceptions that help create stressful situations. Some experts say that a certain amount of stress is actually helpful to the body. But when the stress starts to become too much, we start to feel it.

Type A personalities are most susceptible to mental stress. A type A person is someone who is constantly on the go. They are involved in everything and are moving at record speed. Eventually, most Type A people come to a point where they need a mental and physical break.

What can you do to help eliminate mental stress before it starts? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Make a To-Do list once a day and use it to check off items that are complete.** Not only will you feel more organized, but you will also get a sense of accomplishment once you complete items from the list.
- **Partition your day into work sections.** Spend some time where you let your telephone go directly to the answering machine. The uninterrupted time will help get your task at hand completed. Set aside a specific time to go through messages and make return phone calls. You will have gained some time in your day and will have completed something.
- **Use a planner or planner software to plan your days.** You can set up alerts to let you know when you have an appointment or conference call coming up. There are many excellent software programs available as well as paper-based planners to help you get organized.
- **Take a time management course.** Many are now offered over the internet. Sometimes they are sponsored through your company. Usually only a few days in length, the time is well spent learning new strategies and techniques to stay focused and organized. Even if you have

previously taken a time management class, you will find you are re-charged by taking this type of class once a year.

- **Be prepared.** Whatever the task, make sure you spend some time preparing for it ahead of time. You'll feel a lot less stress when you have readied yourself for a specific task. If you constantly wait until the last minute, you will put yourself under immense stress every time.
- **Don't procrastinate.** Remember when you were in school and crammed for exams the night before the final? That was ultimate stress. People who say they work better under pressure are just poor at planning and are masters at procrastination. You will always do better when you take your time and don't wait until the last minute to complete your work.
- **Balance your life.** Make sure you have a balance between work, home, family, fun, finances, romance, health and fitness, and personal growth. You will feel less stress when you achieve balance with all these areas of your life. Make a list of which areas you feel are out of balance and work on the areas that need more attention.
- **Streamline your life.** When you take a closer look at all the things you do each day or each week, there may be some you can streamline. There are also bound to be some things you can eliminate all together.
- **Stop being a perfectionist.** Not everything needs to be done to perfection. Allow yourself to be imperfect. We are usually our own worst judge. Try to free yourself from judging others and yourself.
- **Give your children chores to do around the house.** Children as young as 5 or 6 can help with some easy chores. Don't worry if they don't do things perfectly. As the children get older, change their chores to harder ones.
- **Get a maid service.** Even those of us on middle class incomes can afford a maid every other week. Save up the chores that take the most time or cause you the most irritation and let the maid do them! It's well worth the cost.

- **Get rid of clutter.** Clutter can actually drain us mentally and cause us stress. Just looking at the clutter every day fills us with guilt about having it and thus, stress. Vow to spend a week (or more) sorting through the built up clutter and getting rid of anything unnecessary. You'll be a lot less burdened once you do.
- **Take up a hobby.** Find something you like to do, make or collect. Then spend some time each week working with your hobby. Hobbies, by their nature, are instant stress reducers. You may even get involved in clubs or meets with others who enjoy the same activity.
- **Make a family schedule.** Studies have shown that children benefit from structure. Adults can benefit as well. A schedule takes the stress out of chaotic days. Once you get used to it, a schedule is a welcome addition to the family. Everyone knows what to expect and things run much more smoothly. Be sure to leave some free time in the schedule for family members to do what they want.
- **Plan the family meals ahead for the whole week.** Do the grocery shopping once a week to have all the ingredients that are needed on hand. This eliminates making numerous trips to the grocery store. Make some of the meals ahead, on the weekend. Freeze or refrigerate them for easy use during the week.
- **Eat balanced meals.** Eating right helps the body work more efficiently and helps the body eliminate stress. Eat breakfast in the morning. This meal fuels you for half the day at work. When you skip a meal, you are more prone to stress.
- **Live in the present.** The past is over and can't be changed. The future is not here and we can't predict what will happen. Therefore, time well spent is in the present. You will only bring up stress if you worry about what has already happened or fret about what may happen in the future.

Chapter 10 - Physical Stress

Physical stress is sometimes called tension. When stress is taken into the body and not released, it can transform into many different ailments. Stress settles into our muscles and causes muscle aches or cramps. When we are tense, we tend to tighten our muscles. When we do that over time, we get stiff muscles, such as a stiff neck.

The body needs to release some of the built up tension. Exercise is a great stress reducer. Here are some physical activities that you can do to help eliminate stress buildup. Be sure to check with a doctor before starting a new exercise routine.

- **Try running or jogging.** These activities don't require any special training and no expensive equipment. All you need are a good pair of running shoes. There are many short runs sponsored by different charities. Try training for one of those. Start by walking and work your way up to running.
- **Take a walk.** Either early in the morning or in the evening, walking provides a great way to relax and get some physical activity at the same time. If you can, try to walk in a quiet area where you can observe nature. Even your neighborhood provides this setting early in the morning.
- **Try yoga.** Yoga is based on the idea that the body, breath and mind are all connected. Special yoga breathing techniques are instant stress reducers. These breathing exercises can even be used to help alleviate a panic attack. The methods of yoga teach proper relaxation techniques. The exercises can be done easily at home or you may opt to try a yoga class. Either way, the experience will give you the tools you need to help you relax yourself in times of stress.

- **Join a gym.** Exercising with a group gives many people added incentive to continue. The exercises are taught by an instructor who can personally help you. The class forum gives you some socialization while you exercise. Signing up for a specific class gets you into the routine of exercising at the same time every day.
- **Exercise with your family.** When the family exercises together, they are more likely to stick to it. They also provide encouragement for each other and help give positive reinforcement. It also gives you some additional family time!
- **Laugh every day.** Laughing provides an outlet that can help eliminate stress. The ability to laugh at oneself is important in keeping a positive attitude. Listen to something funny; watch a funny TV show or just joke around with friends.
- **Let your anger out.** If you are feeling angry, let the emotions out. Holding anger in will create stress. One way to let out anger is to go into a room alone and scream loudly into a pillow. Another outlet for anger is to hit a pillow very hard several times. Each time you hit the pillow, yell aloud what you are mad about. Allowing yourself to disperse your anger outward in a positive setting will get rid of built up stress.
- **Relax with nature.** Take a walk outside or sit in a park. Take in all the sights, sounds and smells of nature. Listen for birds. Marvel in the trees and examine them to see how old they must be. Become one with nature, if only for a little while. Nature has a way of helping us reduce our stress levels.
- **Take a walk on the beach.** If you live near a beach, take a slow walk along the water. Take off your shoes and let your toes sink into the sand. Look out into the ocean and listen to the waves as they repeatedly hit the shore.

Chapter 11 - Natural Ways To Relieve Stress

Much of the regular stress that we get can be dealt with quite well by the body. When people interfere with the body's ability to take care of itself, stress can become a problem. Not enough sleep, poor eating habits, too much work and getting too much caffeine all contribute negatively to the body's functions. Putting the body back into balance is key to getting the body to deal with stress efficiently. There are some natural ways to help relieve the immediate effects of stress.

Getting the proper amount of sleep can help minimize stress. By letting our bodies get the rest they need, normal stresses go away. Sleep is the body's natural way of getting a daily cleansing. If you aren't getting enough sleep, the body doesn't perform at its best, including its ability to handle stress. The amount of sleep you should get nightly varies, however 8 hours is the standard. The rule of thumb when it comes to sleep is to feel refreshed and rested when you get up. You may require less sleep than 8 hours, and some people may require more. The key is that you need to get quality sleep. If you continuously wake up in the night, you aren't going to feel rested in the morning.

Another natural way to relieve stress is through exercise. Even a minimal amount of exercise each day can help discharge amounts of stress that are accumulating in the body. Exercise is like nature's cure for stress. It is beneficial in so many ways, but as a stress reducer it can't be beat! If you are new to an exercise program start out slowly. Talk to your doctor and be sure he gives you the go-ahead to start an exercise program. Exercise is so good because it is free to everyone. There are so many ways to exercise that you will most likely never get bored from one routine. There are activities to suit everyone's needs and abilities. Even if you have not exercised in a while, you can benefit from even a small amount of exercise. Start slowly and gradually increase your activity level and time as you progress. You'll find you sleep much better if you've exercised during the day. The benefits of exercise are huge. If you don't want to exercise alone, or need an extra push, join a gym or local exercise class. You can even get a personal trainer to come to your home to help you with an exercise program.

Try to cut out or minimize your caffeine intake. Caffeine works against the body, filling it with unnatural energy. By removing the caffeine, you allow the body to work naturally. Caffeine in the form of soft drinks and coffee are the most common ways we take caffeine in. If you just can't part with your morning java, try the decaffeinated version instead. If you find that it doesn't wake you up, congratulations. Your body is telling you to get more or better sleep.

There are many herbal cures that can be used to help relieve the symptoms of stress. The advantage of herbal medicines over traditional prescription drugs is that they are usually not habit-forming. They are generally safe to use, with few side effects. They usually take at least a week or two in the system to see any effects. Consult your doctor before taking any herbal remedies. Some may react adversely to certain prescription drugs, so if you are taking any medication, check first to be sure there will be no interactions.

Kava is an herb that is used for nervous tension, anxiety and insomnia. It would be compared to the prescription drugs Xanax and Valium. Valerian is a strong herbal tranquilizer used to treat sleep problems. Some other, less intense herbs that are known for their calming effects are chamomile, lemon balm and passion flower. These are sometimes available in herbal teas.

Aromatherapy is the use of scents, typically in essential oils, to help you relax. The oils can be massaged into the forehead, and can be used for tension and anxiety as well as day-to-day stress. Some of the essential oils used for relaxation are lavender, jasmine, geranium, bergamot, ylang-ylang, sandalwood and rose. These can sometimes be found in sprays that can be sprayed onto the pillow before bed or into the room. The scents may also be found in soothing body lotions.

Massage therapy is another natural way to help the body relieve tension and stress. The muscles are worked to relaxation, and tension is eased away using various forms of massage. Massage can help relieve stress that is built up in the muscles. Once released, you should be able to get a better night's sleep. Ask your friends for the name of their massage therapist or do some research online. Check with a hotel in your area. Many have massage therapists on staff and offer services at hourly rates. There are many types of massage. Experiment with them until you find the one you like best.

Meditation is a great way to help your body regain balance. Once learned, meditation can take just a few minutes. Start first by sitting still in a quiet room. Remove any noises or distractions. Focus on the quiet. Then, focus on your breathing. Soon, you can feel yourself breathing in and out. Lie flat on the floor with your eyes closed. Listen to each heartbeat and feel the blood flow to each part of your body. Remove all thoughts from your mind. Let your mind be completely still. Each time you try this you will be able to go a longer amount of time. Once you get good at meditation, you can bring yourself to the quiet place almost anywhere or anytime. This will be extremely helpful in very stressful situations.

Chapter 12 - Quick Ways To Relieve Stress

Here are some quick tips to reduce your stress. Use these at home, at the office, or anywhere you need to.

Do You Have 15 Minutes? Try these stress reducing ideas.

- **Take a quick nap.** Short, power-naps are a fast way to recharge the system. Don't let yourself sleep for longer than 15 to 20 minutes. A quick nap will give the mind and the body the burst of renewed energy needed for the rest of the day.
- **Take a short walk.** Keep gym shoes at your desk so you can take a quick break. Walk outside, near trees or a park if possible. Many office buildings have walking paths for this activity. Take in all the sights and sounds. Clear your head while you treat your body to some physical activity. You will come back with renewed energy.
- **Make a quick spa at your desk.** Take off your shoes and using a golf ball, roll it around under each foot as a mini foot massage. Heat a cup of water to boiling. Close your eyes and relax. Sit with your head over the steam. Let the mist seep into your skin. Now sit back in your chair with your eyes closed. Use two folded paper towels, soaked in cold water, to place over each eye. Tilt back and sit for a few minutes. Relax your mind as you sit. Be sure to forward your phone while you do this activity. You don't want any distractions. Let your mind relax.
- **If you are under a lot of stress at work, or your mind is stuck on a big project, take a short break.** Do something completely different from what you were working on. Find another project you need to do or return emails or voice mails. Get up and walk around the office. Now approach the first project with new eyes and a renewed spirit.

- **Work a puzzle.** Taking 15 minutes out to do a puzzle, such as a crossword puzzle can refresh the brain. Spending too much time thinking about one thing can stunt your creative juices. Work a puzzle totally unrelated to your project at hand. The distraction will be just what your mind and body needed to rejuvenate.
- **Organize your office.** If your office is messy, spend 15 minutes going through stacks of old paperwork and discarding them. If you need to keep them, use file folders to put the information in. If your office is clean, try re-organizing it. Move things around your office, or desk. Make the room flow by changing the placement of your desk or file cabinet. Designate one area for personal objects or pictures that make you happy.

Do You Have 10 Minutes? Try these.

- **Write yourself a note.** If you are particularly stressed or upset about something, write it down. This is not going to be seen by anyone but you. Write (or type on your computer if you prefer) all about the situation that occurred and why you are upset or angry. Now list several things you could have done differently. Finally, list several alternatives for what you can do now. Many times just the act of writing things down helps you to diffuse the situation in your mind and reduces the stress caused by it. When you are done, throw out the note or erase it.
- **Listen to soft music or nature sounds.** Take a short break and turn on some soothing music. There are many relaxation CDs available with soft music mixed with sounds from nature, such as the ocean waves or the mountain stream. Relax your mind as you listen to the soft sounds of nature. Feel your muscles loosen up.
- **List all the states.** Time yourself for 10 minutes. Now, without looking them up, or asking anyone else, try to write down all 50 states. It's harder than you think! This activity takes focus away from your immediate stresses. Can't get them all? Try again tomorrow.

- **Write down a list of all the things you are thankful for.** Counting our blessings is one way to put all our troubles into perspective. Just thinking about all that we have and love in our lives can make us feel a renewed joy at being here.
- **Take a 10 minute vacation.** Visualize a mountain with a forest and a babbling brook. There is a path and you are walking on it. You can smell the pinecones. The fresh air is amazing. You stop along the way to look at nature. There are beautiful trees and you see birds. You pick up a stick and use it as a walking stick. Walk until your 10 minutes are up. You will feel as though you were actually there. You will feel reenergized.
- **Count stars.** Take a walk outside at dark and see how many stars you can count. Look up and try to find various constellations in the sky. Many can be seen with the naked eye. Stargazing has long been a relaxing night activity.

Do You Have 5 Minutes? Use these super-quick and easy stress reducers.

- **Stand up and stretch.** Sitting in one position for long periods of time can make muscles achy. Stand up; turn off the phone, and stretch. Just a quick stretch or walk around your cubicle will make you feel renewed.
- **Use aromatherapy.** Get a spray bottle and fill it with water. Mix in several drops of essential oil in a calming scent. When you feel stressed, take out the spray and spritz it into the air. You can also spray some onto a towel and hold it on your forehead or over your eyes for a few minutes. You will be instantly calmed and relaxed. Some calming scents to choose are lavender, bergamot, jasmine or sandalwood.
- **Have a hot cup of herbal tea.** Take a quick break and make yourself a cup of herbal tea. Chamomile is a good choice because of its relaxing properties. Use two teabags. Let the warm steam go into your nose. Put the warm teabags onto your closed eyelids. Hold them there for a minute or two to get a nice calming effect.

- **Tell yourself an affirmation.** Affirmations actually do work. Find one positive statement that makes you feel good today and repeat it to yourself for several minutes. Then, write it down and post it near your desk. Whenever you are feeling stressed, read your affirmation.
- **Take a quick break.** Sitting at your desk for too long at a time isn't healthy. Every hour or so you should get up and walk around for 5 minutes or so. Walk around the office or go down to the lobby. Step outside for a breath of fresh air.
- **Spritz water on your face.** Keep a small spray bottle of water at your desk. When you're tired or stressed, spray your face with a fine mist. The sensation is relaxing and the water is good for your skin.
- **Give your hands a massage.** Working on a computer all day can make your hand muscles sore and weak. Give your hands a 5-minute break. Slowly massage each hand. If you want, you can use hand cream and give yourself a double treatment.
- **Use a stone to push your worries away.** Find a smooth stone, like a river stone. It should be small enough to easily fit into your hand. When you have stress, take out your stone and rub it while thinking happy thoughts. The repeated action of rubbing the stone will help sooth and reduce stress.

Chapter 13 - How To Reduce Stress While Driving

With the amount of cars on the road today, you're almost assured of getting into some traffic during the day. Many of us drive longer distances to work, making the commute time in our car up to, or more than, 2 hours per day. When you're running late for work or you've just left a hectic day at the office, the last thing you need is stress while driving home. Here are some tips to get you through the commute.

- **Change your mindset.** Instead of hoping each day that the commute will get shorter, accept the fact that you have an hour to drive. Now, stop trying to shorten the time. Usually that just frustrates you more. Instead, just know that the time will always be the same and spend the time relaxing instead of being tense.
- **Relax.** Don't let lousy drivers get to you. Know that not all drivers can be as good as you are. Then, cut them some slack when they do crazy things. When you see a driver that's driving erratically, stay away.
- **Play soothing music.** Spend at least part of your time in the car calming down by playing a nature music CD. This will relax you and take your mind off work. Your goal is to leave work at the office and come home with a refreshed outlook.
- **Listen to a book on CD.** You can get just about any book on CD. Choose one that is lighthearted enough to relieve your stress. Not only will it help relax you, but also you'll have something new to talk about, besides work, when you get home.
- **Use aromatherapy in the car.** Bring a spray bottle with water infused with a few drops of your favorite essential oil. Then, before you start your drive, spray a few times into the car. The scent will help keep you relaxed.

- **Play car games.** Pick a color and count how many cars of that color you can spot in 10 minutes. See how many license plates you can spot from different states. Make a list of 10 random items that you may see while driving, such as a police car, a flag, a billboard, etc. Then try to spot all ten things before you get home.
- **Keep your mind active while in the car.** Read every billboard and sign you see, as quickly as possible. This helps keep the mind nimble and takes your mind off other thoughts.
- **Stop and stretch.** If you are driving for more than an hour, stop at a rest stop or gas station and get out of the car. Stretch or take a short walk. Keeping your body tensed in one position for too long isn't good. You'll end up with a stiff neck or back.
- **Listen to your music.** Make a CD of your favorite songs to play while on the road. Then crank it up and sing along! Singing helps us take good, deep breaths which helps us relax.
- **Learn a foreign language.** There are special CD sets made specifically to learn a new language while in the car. Just minutes a day will help get you started. It can also be a fun activity for the family when you drive together. Children learn foreign languages faster than adults do, so watch out!
- **Remember that if you are tired and get too relaxed, you may get sleepy.** If you are feeling extremely tired, pull over and rest. If possible, find a rest area or gas station that you can safely stop in. Don't leave the car running. Carbon monoxide fumes may get in the car. If you are very tired, call a friend or a cab to come and pick you up.