



Stress Mastery Tool Kit

The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another

~William James~

Stress Mastery

Introduction:

Stress is a natural physical and emotional response that is triggered when you perceive a threat or sense danger – whether it's real or imagined – the body's defences shift into emergency mode in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight, flight or freeze” reaction, or in other words; the *stress response*.

The stress response is the body's way of keeping you safe. When working properly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life – it generates extra strength to defend yourself, and has you act impulsively or automatically, for example, slamming on the brakes to avoid an accident.

The stress response also helps you meet challenges by keeping you alert, keeping you on your toes during an interview for a job or a presentation at work. It sharpens your concentration when you're about to serve for 'match point' or drives you to study for an exam when you'd rather be watching TV.

However, there becomes a point where the stress response shifts from friend to foe, it causes damage to your health, effects your mood, reduces productivity, impacts upon your relationships and your quality of life.



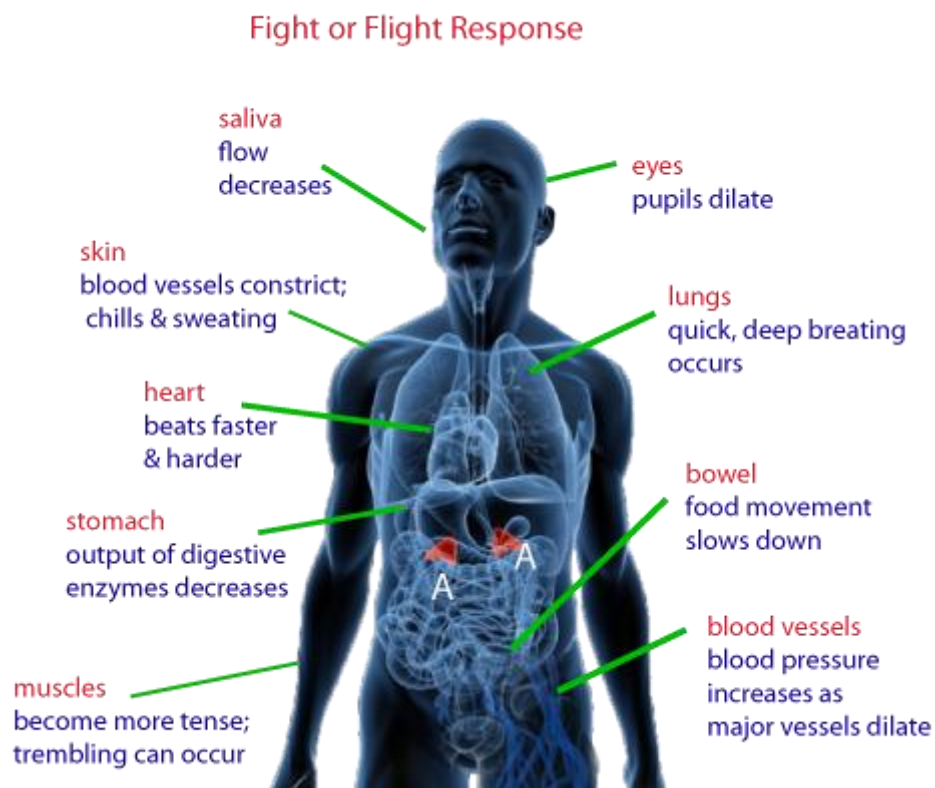
How do you recognise when you are stressed?

- **Fight** – You're impatient, you don't listen to others, become angry or agitated, heated, pumped up, volatile, overly emotional, and unable to sit still.
- **Flight** – You remove yourself from the situation, disengage, shut down, withhold, space out, and show very little energy or emotion and ultimately become depressed.
- **Freeze** – Freeze is exactly that, you stop in the face of pressure and can't do anything. You're paralyzed, unable to take action, or see any solution, but under the surface you're extremely agitated and fearful.

The Body's Stress Response

When you perceive a threat, your nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol also known as the 'stress hormone'. These hormones rouse the body for emergency action.

Your heart pounds faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and your senses become sharper. These physical changes increase your strength and stamina, speed your reaction time, and enhance your focus – preparing you to either fight or flee from the danger at hand.



[The adrenal glands (A) release cortisol and adrenaline]

REDUCE STRESS

10 STRESS BUSTING STEPS

1. **BECOME AWARE** - of the physical, emotional symptoms of stress: notice when you feel tense, panicked, anxious, low in energy, easily frustrated, knotted in your stomach, nauseous, have quick shallow breathing, headache, feel tired etc.
2. **RECOGNISE THE WARNING SIGNS** - feeling overwhelmed, inability to concentrate, constant worrying, forgetfulness, moodiness, agitation, restlessness, inability to relax, insomnia, over or under eating.
3. **PUT THE PAUSE BUTTON ON & BREATHE** - take control of your own physiology and calm our mind. Slow down your pace of breath by practicing 7-11 breathing: Breathe in to the count of 7 and out to the count of 11. Breathe deeply; right down into your belly, and as you do so, relax your shoulders, muscles and jaw. Repeat the slow in and out breathe until calm.
4. **NOTICE YOUR IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS** - the mind has a habit of exaggerating reality when we are stressed or under pressure.
5. **DO NOT** take action until you're able to make a helpful, considered choice.
6. **ASK YOURSELF** - what is the best thing I can do right now to take good care of myself AND what would be the best way to deal with the situation at hand?
7. **STAY AWAY FROM COPING MECHANISMS** - like alcohol, nicotine and caffeine. These will only add to your stress levels.
8. **UNDERSTAND YOURSELF** - recognise why specific situations, circumstances and people are triggers for you.
9. **DEAL WITH THE CAUSE** – not just the symptoms of stress.
10. **REMEMBER** - to take time for your life and take care of your personal needs such as connection, support, rest, sleep, warmth, fun, good nutrition, safety and security, to have opportunities to learn, progress and express yourself.

CALMING STRATEGIES

Are common sense-but not always common practice.



- **Breathe deeply**; remember to count to 7 on the in breath and 11 on the out breath.
- **Remove yourself** from the situation physically and emotionally if possible.
- **Go for a walk**, ideally in a park or open green space.
- **Visualise** a calm tranquil place, e.g. sea or mountains, for about 2-5 minutes.
- **Let go** of any expectations and demands you might have of yourself and others.
- **Find a quiet space**, sit and express your feelings and emotions safely.
- **Yoga, meditation, swimming** and **relaxation** are good for de-stressing.
- **Take up a relaxing and enjoyable hobby**, e.g. gardening.
- **Relax in a bath** whilst listening to chill-out music.
- **Listen or dance to music**.
- **Take action**-focus your energy into a positive activity that will move you forward in a helpful way-clear clutter, dig the garden, help a friend, vacuum the house, mop a floor and gain release.
- **Call a friend**, share your feelings and frustrations, but keep solution focused.
- **Find time for FUN, laugh at yourself. Don't take it too seriously.**



7 / 11 Breathing

Take yourself to a quiet place, if possible.

Although this can be done anywhere; on a bus, waiting in a queue, sitting in a restaurant, in bed when you can't sleep, in your car in a traffic jam....anywhere.

Take 3 conscious breaths, in through your nose. By conscious I mean notice your intake of breath, take it right down deep into your belly.

On that inward breath, as you draw it in deep, count to 7:

1....2....3....4....5....6....7....

Then let it out through your mouth to the count of 11:

1....2....3....4....5....6....7....8....9....10....11....

Repeat this 3 times.

In to the count of 7 out to the count of 11.

You will feel your stress levels drop, this will help to quieten your mind.

Give it a go now....

Here's a reminder of my general stress management tips....

Recognise the warning signs:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Inability to concentrate
- Constant worrying
- Mood swings, agitation, restlessness
- Unable to relax
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Eating too much or too little

Take care of yourself to reduce your stress levels:

- **Get early nights / get enough sleep**
- **Breathe (7/11)**
- **Exercise daily**
- **Eat nutritious foods**
- **Eat breakfast (even if it means just a apple on the way to work)**
- **Stay away from coping mechanisms like alcohol, nicotine or caffeine**
- **Communicate, communicate, communicate**
- **Organise and prioritise your tasks**
- **Make a list, what doesn't get done, do the next day**
- **Look back over your day and pick out your accomplishments**
- **Have fun, laugh, listen to music, dance (when you can)**
- **Keep perspective, what you think is fact is your interpretation only**

