

STRESS BUSTING

SYMPTOMS THAT COULD INDICATE STRESS

Dry mouth	Anger/Irritability/Resentment
Headache	Tic in eye, or elsewhere
Sighing	Desire to “run away”
Overeating/Under-eating	Muscle spasms/tightness
Chain-smoking	Fatigue/Weariness
Stomach cramps	Continual boredom
Diarrhea/Constipation	Hypochondria
Nausea	Clammy hands
Feeling “faint”	Lip biting
Stroking beard/mustache	Ready tears
Hair twirling/pulling/tossing	Hyperactivity/Listlessness
Clenched fists	Inability to be alone
Nervous cough	Sleeping too much/not enough
Mouth noise (e.g., tongue clicking)	Heart palpitations
Talking too much/too fast	Distractibility
Inability to talk	Proneness to errors
“Lump” in throat	Decreased productivity
Lack of sexual interest	Confusion
Sweating	Alcoholism/Drug dependence
Menstrual irregularities	Nightmares
Blushing	Butterflies in stomach
Fingernail biting	Stomach knots
Leg wagging	Excessive giggling
Rocking back-and-forth	Ulcers
Depression	Indigestion
	Skin problems

Abdominal Breathing Exercise

1. Note the level of tension you're feeling. Then place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your rib cage.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into the "bottom" of your lungs—in other words, send the air as low down as you can. If you're breathing from your abdomen, your hand should actually *rise*. Your chest should move only slightly while your abdomen expands. (In abdominal breathing, the *diaphragm*—the muscle that separates the lung cavity from the abdominal cavity—moves downward. In so doing, it causes the muscles surrounding the abdominal cavity to push outward.)
3. When you've taken in a full breath, pause for a moment and then exhale slowly through your nose or mouth, depending on your preference. Be sure to exhale fully. *As you exhale, allow your whole body to just let go* (you might visualize your arms and legs going loose and limp like a rag doll).
4. Do ten slow, full abdominal breaths. Try to keep your breathing *smooth* and *regular*, without gulping in a big breath or letting your breath out all at once. It will help to slow down your breathing if you slowly count to four on the inhale (1-2-3-4) and then slowly count to four on the exhale. Remember to pause briefly at the end of each inhalation. Count from ten down to one counting backwards one number with each *exhalation*. The process should go like this:
 - Slow inhale...Pause...Slow exhale (count "ten")
 - Slow inhale...Pause...Slow exhale (count "nine")
 - Slow inhale...Pause...Slow exhale (count "eight")
 - and so on down to one. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing abdominal breathing, stop for 15-20 seconds, and then start again.
5. Extend the exercise if you wish by doing two or three "sets" of abdominal breaths, remembering to count backwards from ten to one for each set (each exhalation counts as one number). *Five full minutes* of abdominal breathing will have a pronounced effect in reducing anxiety or early symptoms of panic.

Some people prefer to count from one to ten instead. Feel free to do this if it suits you.

*Calming Breath Exercise**

The *Calming Breath Exercise* was adapted from the ancient discipline of yoga. It is a very efficient technique for achieving a deep state of relaxation quickly.

1. Breathing from your abdomen, inhale through your nose slowly to a count of five (count slowly "one...two...three...four...five" as you inhale).
2. Pause and hold your breath to a count of five.

*The name *Calming Breath* was taken from an exercise by that name developed by Reid Wilson in *Don't Panic: Taking Control of Anxiety Attacks*. The steps presented here differ significantly from Wilson's exercise.

3. Exhale slowly, through your nose or mouth, to a count of five (or more if it takes you longer). Be sure to exhale fully.
4. When you've exhaled completely, take two breaths in your normal rhythm, then repeat steps 1 through 3 in the cycle above.
5. Keep up the exercise for at least three to five minutes. This should involve going through *at least* ten cycles of in-five, hold-five, out-five. As you continue the exercise, you may notice that you can count higher, or count higher when you exhale than when you inhale. Allow these variations in your counting to occur if they do, and just continue with the exercise for up to five minutes. Remember to take two normal breaths between each cycle. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing this exercise, stop for thirty seconds and then start again.
6. Throughout the exercise, keep your breathing *smooth* and *regular*, without gulping in breaths or breathing out suddenly.
7. Optional: Each time you exhale, you may wish to say "relax," "calm," "let go," or any other relaxing word or phrase silently to yourself. Allow your whole body to let go as you do this. If you keep this up each time you practice, eventually just saying your relaxing word by itself will bring on a mild state of relaxation.

The calming breath exercise can be a potent technique for halting the momentum of a panic reaction when the first signs of anxiety come on. It is also useful in reducing symptoms of hyperventilation.

Practice Exercise

Practice the *Abdominal Breathing* or *Calming Breath Exercise* for *five minutes every day for at least two weeks*. If possible, find a regular time each day to do this so that your breathing exercise becomes a habit. With practice you can learn in a short period of time to "damp down" the physiological reactions underlying anxiety and panic.

Once you feel you've gained some mastery in the use of either technique, apply it when you feel stressed, anxious, or when you experience the onset of panic symptoms. By extending your practice of either breathing exercise to a month or longer, you will begin to retrain yourself to breathe from your abdomen. The more you can shift the center of your breathing from your chest to your abdomen, the more consistently you will feel relaxed on an ongoing basis.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is a systematic technique for achieving a deep state of relaxation. It was developed by Dr. Edmund Jacobson more than fifty years ago. Dr. Jacobson discovered that a muscle could be relaxed by first tensing it for a few seconds and then releasing it. Tensing and releasing various muscle groups throughout the body produces a deep state of relaxation, which Dr. Jacobson found capable of relieving a variety of conditions, from high blood pressure to ulcerative colitis.

In his original book, *Progressive Relaxation*, Dr. Jacobson developed a series of 200 different muscle relaxation exercises and a training program that took months to complete. More recently the system has been abbreviated to 15-20 basic exercises, which have been found to be just as effective, if practiced regularly, as the original more elaborate system.

Progressive muscle relaxation is especially helpful for people whose anxiety is strongly associated with muscle tension. This is what often leads you to say that you are “uptight” or “tense.” You may experience chronic tightness in your shoulders and neck, which can be effectively relieved by practicing progressive muscle relaxation. Other symptoms that respond well to progressive muscle relaxation include tension headaches, backaches, tightness in the jaw, tightness around the eyes, muscle spasms, high blood pressure, and insomnia. If you are troubled by racing thoughts, you may find that systematically relaxing your muscles tends to help slow down your mind. Dr. Jacobson himself once said, “An anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body.”

The immediate effects of progressive muscle relaxation include all the benefits of the relaxation response described at the beginning of this chapter. Long-term effects of *regular* practice of progressive muscle relaxation include:

- A decrease in generalized anxiety
- A decrease in anticipatory anxiety related to phobias
- Reduction in the frequency and duration of panic attacks
- Improved ability to face phobic situations through graded exposure
- Improved concentration
- An increased sense of control over moods
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased spontaneity and creativity

The long-term benefits are sometimes called *generalization effects*: the relaxation experienced during daily sessions tends, after a month or two, to *generalize* to the rest of the day. The *regular* practice of progressive muscle relaxation can go a long way toward helping you to better manage your anxiety, face your fears, overcome panic, and feel better all around.

There are no contraindications for progressive muscle relaxation unless the muscle groups to be tensed and relaxed have been injured. If you take tranquilizers, you may find that regular practice of progressive muscle relaxation will enable you to lower your dosage.

Guidelines for Practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation (or any form of Deep Relaxation)

The following guidelines will help you to make the most use of progressive muscle relaxation. They are also applicable to *any* form of deep relaxation you undertake to practice regularly, including self-hypnosis, guided visualization, and meditation.

1. Practice at least *20 minutes per day*. Two 20-minute periods are preferable. Once a day is mandatory for obtaining generalization effects. (You may want to begin your practice with 30-minute periods. As you gain skill in relaxation technique, you will find that the amount of time you need to experience the relaxation response will decrease.)
2. Find a *quiet location* to practice where you won't be distracted. Don't permit the phone to ring while you're practicing. Use a fan or air conditioner to blot out background noise if necessary.
3. Practice at *regular times*. On awakening, before retiring, or before meals are generally the best times. A consistent daily relaxation routine will increase the likelihood of generalization effects.
4. Practice on an *empty stomach*. Food digestion after meals will tend to disrupt deep relaxation.
5. Assume a *comfortable position*. Your entire body, including your head, should be supported. Lying down on a sofa or bed or sitting in a reclining chair are two ways of supporting your body most completely. (When lying down, you may want to place a pillow beneath your knees for further support.) Sitting up is preferable to lying down if you are feeling tired and sleepy. It's advantageous to experience the full depth of the relaxation response consciously without going to sleep.
6. *Loosen any tight garments* and take off shoes, watch, glasses, contact lenses, jewelry, and so on.
7. Make a decision not to worry about anything. Give yourself permission to put aside the concerns of the day. Allow taking care of yourself and having peace of mind to take precedence over any of your worries. (Success with relaxation depends on giving peace of mind high priority in your overall scheme of values.)
8. Assume a *passive, detached attitude*. This is probably the most important element. You want to adopt a "let it happen" attitude and be free of any worry about how well you are performing the technique. Do not *try* to relax. Do not *try* to control your body. Do not judge your performance. The point is to let go.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique

Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing and relaxing, in succession, sixteen different muscle groups of the body. The idea is to tense each muscle group hard (not so hard that you strain, however) for about 10 seconds, and then to let go of it suddenly. You then give yourself 15-20 seconds to relax, noticing how the muscle group feels when relaxed in contrast to how it felt when tensed, before going on to the next group of muscles. You might also say to yourself "I am relaxing," "Letting go," "Let the tension flow away," or any other relaxing phrase during each relaxation period between successive muscle groups. Throughout the exercise, maintain your focus on your muscles. When your attention wanders, bring it back to the particular muscle group you're working on. The guidelines below describe progressive muscle relaxation in detail:

- Make sure you are in a setting that is quiet and comfortable. Observe the guidelines for practicing relaxation that were previously described.
- When you tense a particular muscle group, do so vigorously, without straining, for 7-10 seconds. You may want to count “one-thousand-one,” “one-thousand-two,” and so on, as a way of marking off seconds.
- Concentrate on what is happening. Feel the buildup of tension in each particular muscle group. It is often helpful to visualize the particular muscle group being tensed.
- When you release the muscles, do so abruptly, and then relax, enjoying the sudden feeling of limpness. Allow the relaxation to develop for at least 15-20 seconds before going on to the next group of muscles.
- Allow all the *other* muscles in your body to remain relaxed, as far as possible, while working on a particular muscle group.
- Tense and relax each muscle group once. But if a particular area feels especially tight, you can tense and relax it two or three times, waiting about 20 seconds between each cycle.

Once you're comfortably supported in a quiet place, follow the detailed instructions below:

1. To begin, taken three deep abdominal breaths, exhaling slowly each time. As you exhale, imagine that tension throughout your body begins to flow away.
2. Clench your fists. Hold for 7-10 seconds and then release for 15-20 seconds. *Use these same time intervals for all other muscle groups.*
3. Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up toward your shoulders and “making a muscle” with both arms. Hold...and then relax.
4. Tighten your *triceps*—the muscles on the undersides of your upper arms—by extending your arms out straight and locking your elbows. Hold...and then relax.
5. Tense the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as far as you can. Hold...and then relax. Imagine your forehead muscles becoming smooth and limp as they relax.
6. Tense the muscles around your eyes by clenching your eyelids tightly shut. Hold..and then relax. Imagine sensations of deep relaxation spreading all around the area of your eyes.
7. Tighten your jaws by opening your mouth so widely that you stretch the muscles around the hinges of your jaw. Hold...and then relax. Let your lips part and allow your jaw to hang loose.
8. Tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by pulling your head way back, as if you were going to touch your head to your back (be gentle with this muscle group to avoid injury.) Focus only on tensing the muscles in your neck. Hold...and then relax. Since this area is often especially tight, it's good to do the tense-relax cycle twice.

9. Take a few deep breaths and tune in to the weight of your head sinking into whatever surface it is resting on.
10. Tighten your shoulders by raising them up as if you were going to touch your ears. Hold...and then relax.
11. Tighten the muscles around your shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back as if you were going to touch them together. Hold the tension in your shoulder blades...and then relax. Since this area is often especially tense, you might repeat the tense-relax sequence twice.
12. Tighten the muscles of your chest by taking in a deep breath. Hold for up to 10 seconds...and then release slowly. Imagine any excess tension in your chest flowing away with the exhalation.
13. Tighten your stomach muscles by sucking your stomach in. Hold...and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen.
14. Tighten your lower back by arching it up. (You can omit this exercise if you have lower back pain.) Hold...and then relax.
15. Tighten your buttocks by pulling them together. Hold...and then relax. Imagine the muscles in your hips going loose and limp.
16. Squeeze the muscles in your thighs all the way down to your knees. You will probably have to tighten your hips along with your thighs, since the thigh muscles attach at the pelvis. Hold...and then relax. Feel your thigh muscles smoothing out and relaxing completely.
17. Tighten your calf muscles by pulling your toes toward you (flex carefully to avoid cramps). Hold...and then relax.
18. Tighten your feet by curling your toes downward. Hold...and then relax.
19. Mentally scan your body for any residual tension. If a particular area remains tense, repeat one or two tense-relax cycles for that group of muscles.
20. Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading throughout your body, starting at your head and gradually penetrating every muscle group all the way down to your toes.

The entire muscle relation sequence should take you 20-30 minutes the first time. With practice you may decrease the time needed to 15-20 minutes. You might want to record the above exercise on an audio cassette to expedite your early practice sessions. Or you may wish to obtain a professionally made tape of the progressive muscle relaxation exercise. Some people always prefer to use a tape, while others have the exercises so well learned after a few weeks of practice that they prefer doing them from memory.

Remember—regular practice of progressive muscle relaxation once a day will produce a significant reduction in your overall level of anxiety. It will also reduce the frequency and intensity of panic attacks. Finally, regular practice will reduce anticipatory anxiety that may arise in the course of systematically exposing yourself to phobic situations.

The Peaceful Scene

After completing progressive muscle relaxation, it's helpful to visualize yourself in the midst of a peaceful scene. Progressive muscle relaxation addresses particular groups of muscles; imagining yourself in a very peaceful setting can give you a global sense of relaxation that frees you from anxious thoughts. The peaceful scene can be a quiet beach, a stream in the mountains, or a calm lake. Or it can be your bedroom or a cozy fireside on a cold winter night. Don't restrict yourself to reality—you can imagine, if you want to, floating on a cloud or flying on a magic carpet. The important thing is to visualize the scene in sufficient detail so that it completely absorbs your attention. Allowing yourself to be absorbed in a peaceful scene will deepen your state of relaxation, giving you actual physiological results. Your muscular tension lessens, your heart rate slows down, your breathing deepens, your capillaries open up and warm your hands and feet, and so on. A relaxing visualization constitutes a light form of self-hypnosis.

Here are two examples of peaceful scenes. (See also the “Beach” and “Forest” Visualizations).

You're walking along a beautiful, deserted beach. You are barefoot and can feel the firm white sand beneath your feet as you walk along the margin of the sea. You can hear the sound of the surf as the waves ebb and flow. The sound is hypnotic, relaxing you more and more. The water is a beautiful turquoise blue flecked with whitecaps far out where the waves are cresting. Near the horizon you can see a small sailboat gliding smoothly along. The sound of the waves breaking on the shore lulls you deeper and deeper into relaxation. You draw in the fresh, salty smell of the air with each breath. Your skin glows with the warmth of the sun. You can feel a gentle breeze against your cheek and ruffling your hair. Taking in the whole scene, you feel very calm and at ease.

You're snuggled in your sleeping bag. Daylight is breaking in the forest. You can feel the rays of the sun beginning to warm your face. The dawn sky stretches above you in pastel shades of pink and orange. You can smell the fresh, piney fragrance of the surrounding woods. Nearby you can hear the rushing waters of a mountain stream. The crisp, cool morning air is refreshing and invigorating. You're feeling very cozy, comfortable, and secure.

Note that these scenes are described in language that appeals to the senses of sight, hearing, touch, and smell. Using multi-sensory words increases the power of the scene to compel you, enabling you to experience it as if you were actually there. The whole point of imagining a peaceful scene is to transport yourself from your normal state of restless thinking into an altered state of deep relaxation.

Use a separate sheet of paper to design your own peaceful scene. Be sure to describe it in vivid detail, appealing to as many senses as possible. It may help to answer the following questions: What does the scene look like? What colors are prominent? What sounds are present? What time of the day is it? What is the temperature? What are you touching or in physical contact with in the scene? What does the air smell like? Are you alone or with somebody else?

Just as with progressive muscle relaxation, you may wish to record your peaceful scene on tape so that you can conjure it up without effort. You might want to record your scene on the same tape following the instructions for progressive muscle relaxation.

Use the script below to introduce your peaceful scene when you make your own recording.

...Just think of relaxing every muscle in your body, from the top of your head to the tips of your toes.

...As you exhale, imagine releasing any remaining tension from your body, mind, or thoughts ...just let that stress go.

...And with every breath you inhale, feel your body drifting down deeper...down deeper into total relaxation.

...And now imagine going to your peaceful scene... Imagine your special place as vividly as possible, as if you were really there. (Insert your peaceful scene.)

...You are very comfortable in your beautiful place, and there is no one to disturb you... This is the most peaceful place in the world for you... Just imagine yourself there, feeling a sense of peace flow through you and a sense of well-being. Enjoy these positive feelings... Allow them to grow stronger and stronger.

...And remember, anytime you wish, you can return to this special place by just taking time to relax.

Once you have imagined your own ideal peaceful scene, practice returning to it every time you do progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, or any other relaxation technique. This will help to reinforce the scene in your mind. After a while, it will be so solidly established that you will be able to return to it on the spur of the moment—whenever you wish to calm yourself and turn off anxious thinking. This technique is one of the quickest and most effective tools you can use to counter ongoing anxiety or stress during the day. Fantasizing a peaceful scene is also an important part of imagery desensitization, a process for overcoming phobias.

The Beach

You're walking down a long wooden stairway to a very beautiful, expansive beach. It looks almost deserted and stretches off into the distance as far as you can see. The sand is very fine and light...almost white in appearance. You step onto the sand in your bare feet and rub it between your toes. It feels so good to walk slowly along this beautiful beach. The roaring sound of the surf is so soothing that you can just let go of anything on your mind. You're watching the waves ebb and flow...they are slowly coming in... breaking over each other... and then slowly flowing back out again. The ocean itself is a very beautiful shade of blue...a shade of blue that is so relaxing just to look at. You look out over the surface of the ocean all the way to the horizon, and then follow the horizon as far as you can see, noticing how it bends slightly downward as it follows the curvature of the earth. As you scan the ocean, you can see many miles offshore, a tiny sailboat skimming along the surface of the water. And all these sights help you to just let go and relax even more. As you continue walking down the beach, you become aware of the fresh, salty smell of the sea air. You take in a deep breath...breathe out...and feel very refreshed and even more relaxed. Overhead you notice two seagulls flying out to sea...looking very graceful as they soar into the wind...and you imagine how you might feel yourself if you had the freedom to fly. You find yourself settling into a deep state of relaxation as you continue walking down the beach. You feel the sea breeze blowing gently against your cheek and the warmth of the sun overhead penetrating your neck and shoulders. The warm, liquid sensation of the sun just relaxes you even more...and you're beginning to feel perfectly content on this beautiful beach. It's such a lovely day. In a moment, up ahead, you see a comfortable-looking beach chair. Slowly, you begin to approach the beach chair...and when you finally reach it, you sit back and settle in. Laying back in the comfortable beach chair, you let go and relax even more, drifting even deeper into relaxation. In a little while you might close your eyes and just listen to the sound of the surf, the unending cycle of waves ebbing and flowing. And the rhythmic sound of the surf carries you even deeper...deeper still...into a wonderful state of quietness and peace.

The Forest

You're walking along a path in the forest. All around you there are tall trees...pine, fir, redwood, oak...try to see them. The rushing sound of the wind blowing through the treetops is so soothing, allowing you to let go. You can smell the rich dampness of the forest floor, the smell of the earth and new seedlings and rotting leaves. Now you look up through the treetops until you can see a light blue sky. You notice how high the sun is in the sky. As the sun enters the canopy of the treetops, it breaks into rays which waft their way down through the trees to the forest floor. You're watching the intricate patterns of light and shadow created as the light filters down through the trees. The forest feels like a great primeval cathedral...filling you with a sense of peace and reverence for all living things.

Off in the distance, you can hear the sound of rushing water echoing through the forest. It gets louder as you approach, and before long you are at the edge of a mountain stream. You're looking at the stream, noticing how clear and sparkling the water is. Imagine sitting down and making yourself very comfortable. You might sit down on a flat rock up against a tree or you might even decide to lay down on a grassy slope. You can see the mountain stream creating rapids as it moves, rushing around a variety of large and small rocks. These rocks are many shades of brown, gray, and white and some are covered with moss. You can see the sparkling water rushing over some and around others, making whirlpools and eddies. The rushing sound of the water is so peaceful that you just let yourself drift...relaxing more and more.

You take a deep breath of fresh air and breathe out, finding the subtle smells of the forest very refreshing. As you let yourself sink into the soft bed of grass or dead leaves or fragrant pine needles beneath you, you can let go of any strains or concerns...allowing the sights, sounds, and smells of this beautiful wooded area to fill you with a deep sense of peace.

52 PROVEN STRESS REDUCERS

1. Get up fifteen minutes earlier in the morning. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful.
2. Prepare for the morning the evening before. Set the breakfast table, make lunches, put out the clothes you plan to wear, etc.
3. Don't rely on your memory. Write down appointment times, when to pick up the laundry, when library books are due, etc. "The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory." – OLD CHINESE PROVERB
4. Do nothing which, after being done, leads you to tell a lie.
5. Make duplicates of all keys. Bury a house key in a secret spot in the garden and carry a duplicate car key in your wallet, apart from your key ring.
6. Practice preventive maintenance. Your car, appliances, home, and relationships will be less likely to breakdown/fall apart "at the worst possible moment."
7. Eliminate (or restrict) the amount of caffeine in your diet.
8. Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do *today*; whatever you want to do today, do it *now*.
9. Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank get below one-quarter full, keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of home staples, don't wait until you're down to your last bus token or postage stamp to buy more, etc.
10. Don't put up with something that doesn't work right. If your alarm clock, wallet, shoe laces, windshield wipers – whatever – are a constant aggravation, get them fixed or get new ones.
11. Allow 15 minutes of extra time to get to appointments. Plan to arrive at an airport two hours before domestic departures.
12. Be prepared to wait. A paperback can make a wait in a post office line almost pleasant.
13. Always set up contingency plans, "just in case." ("If for some reason either of us is delayed, here's what we'll do..." kind of thing. Or, "If we get split up in the shopping center, here's where we'll meet.")
14. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this weekend, if the sheets have to be changed on Sunday instead of Saturday, etc.
15. Pollyanna-Power! For every one thing that goes wrong, there are probably 10 or 50 or 100 blessings. Count 'em!
16. Ask questions. Taking a few moments to repeat back directions, what someone expects of you, etc. can save *hours*. (The old "the hurrieder I go, the behinder I get," idea.)
17. Say "No!" Saying no to extra projects, social activities and invitations you know you don't have the time or energy for takes practice, self-respect, and a belief that everyone, everyday needs quiet time to relax and to be alone.
18. Unplug your phone. Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep, or read without interruption? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect. (The possibility of there being a terrible emergency in the next hour or so is almost nil.)
19. Turn "needs" into *preferences*. Our basic physical needs translate into food and water, and keeping warm. Everything else is a preference. Don't get attached to preferences.
20. Simplify, simplify, simplify.
21. Make friends with non-worriers. Nothing can get you into the habit of worrying faster than associating with chronic worrywarts.
22. Take a hot bath or shower (or a cool one, in summertime) to relieve tension.
23. Wear earplugs. If you need to find quiet at home but junior must practice piano, pop in some earplugs (available in any drugstore) and smile.
24. Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to *go* to bed.
25. Create order out of chaos. Organize your home and workspace so that you always know exactly where things are. Put things away where they belong and you won't have to go through the stress of losing things.
26. When feeling stressed, most people tend to breathe in short, shallow breaths. When you breathe like this, stale air is not expelled, oxidation of the tissues is incomplete, and muscle tension frequently results.
Check your breathing throughout the day, and *before*, *during*, and *after* high-pressure situations. If you find your stomach muscles are knotted and your breathing is shallow, relax all your muscles and take several deep, slow breaths. Note how,

when you're relaxed, *both* your abdomen and chest expand when you breathe.

27. Writing your thoughts and feelings down in a journal, or on paper to be thrown away) can help you clarify things and can give you a renewed perspective.

28. Try the following yoga technique whenever you feel the need to relax: inhale deeply through your nose to the count of eight. Then, with lips puckered, exhale very slowly through your mouth to the count of 16, or for as long as you can. Concentrate on the long sighing sound and feel the tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.

29. Inoculate yourself again a feared event. Just as a vaccine containing a virus can protect you from illness, if you expose yourself to one or more of the dreaded aspects of an experience beforehand, you often can mitigate your fears.

Example: before speaking in public, take time to go over *every* part of the experience in your mind. Imagine what you'll wear, what the audience will look like, how you will present your talk, what the questions will be and how you will answer them, etc. Visualize the experience the day you would have it be.

You'll be likely to find that when the time comes to make the actual presentation, it will be "old hat" and much of your anxiety will have fled.

30. When the stress of having to get a job done gets in the way of getting the job done, diversion—a voluntary change in activity and/or environment—may be just what you need.

31. Get up and stretch periodically if your job requires that you sit for extended periods.

32. One of the most obvious ways to avoid unnecessary stress is to select an environment (work, home, leisure) which is in line with your personal needs and desires. If you hate desk jobs, don't accept a job which requires that you sit at a desk all day. If you hate to talk politics, don't associate with people who love to talk politics, etc.

33. Learn to live one day at a time.

34. Everyday, do something you really enjoy.

35. Add an ounce of love to everything you do.

36. Talk it out. Discussing your problems with a trusted friend can help clear your mind of confusion so you can concentrate on problem solving.

37. Do something for somebody else.

38. Focus on understanding rather than on being understood, on loving rather than on being loved.

39. Do something that will improve your appearance. Looking better can help you feel better.

40. Schedule a realistic day. Avoid the tendency to schedule back-to-back appointments; allow time between appointments for a breathing spell.

41. Become more flexible. Some things are worth *not* doing perfectly and some issues are well to compromise upon.

42. Eliminate destructive self-talk: "I'm too old to..." "I'm too fat to..." etc.

43. Use your weekend time for a change of pace. If your work week is slow and patterned, make sure there is action and time for spontaneity built into

your weekends. If your work week is fast-paced and full of people and deadlines, seek peace and solitude during your days off. Feel as if you aren't accomplishing anything tangible at work? Tackle a job on the weekend which you can finish to your satisfaction.

44. "Worry about the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves." That's another way of saying: take care of the todays as best you can and the yesterdays and tomorrows will take care of themselves.

45. Do one thing at a time. When you are with someone, be with that person and with no one or nothing else. When you are busy with a project, concentrate on doing *that* project and forget about everything else you have to do.

46. Allow yourself time—everyday—for privacy, quiet and introspection.

47. If an especially "unpleasant" task faces you, do it early in the day and get it over with. Then the rest of your day will be free of anxiety.

48. Learn to delegate responsibility to capable others.

49. Don't forget to take a lunch break. Try to get away from your desk or work area in body *and* mind, even if it's just for 15 or 20 minutes.

50. Forget about counting to 10. Count to 1,000 before doing something or saying anything that could make matters worse.

51. Have a forgiving view of events and people. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world.

52. Have an optimistic view of the world. Believe that most people are doing the best they can.

How to Change Stress-Invoking Self-Talk

Erroneous, exaggerated self-talk can increase our anxiety levels and thus create more stress. These stress-provoking thoughts perpetuate our fears and reinforce worrying. The more you worry about a particular outcome or experience that you fear, the more likely you are to be involved in erroneous self-talk connected with that fear. You may also have had negative images about what could happen if you had to face that fear, or about your worst fears coming true. Both of these negative images and negative self-talk serve to perpetuate this cycle. They undermine your confidence that you can cope, manage or overcome the stressful or fearful situation. By getting past these mistaken beliefs and negative images, you will be more likely to overcome any avoidance, confront your fears, and manage stressful situations more effectively.

There are two basic errors in fearful thinking:

Overestimating a Negative Outcome – overestimating the odds of something bad happening or “awfulizing”. Most of the time your worries consist of “what if” statements that overestimate the likelihood of a particular negative outcome. *For Example*, “What if I freeze, forget everything that I’ve studied, and flunk out?” “What if the plane crashes?” “What if he/she breaks up with me and I never find a partner?” “What if I can’t get a job after I graduate?”

Underestimating Your Ability to Cope – not recognizing or acknowledging your ability to cope with the situation, even if a negative outcome did in fact, occur. This underestimation of your ability to cope is usually implicit in your overestimating thoughts as well.

If you take any fear and examine the negative, stress-provoking thoughts that contribute to maintaining this fear, you’ll probably find these two distortions. The goal in reducing this cycle of influence, then, is to reclaim control of your thoughts by replacing these distortions with more reality-based thinking, which will diminish the strength of the stressful situation. In essence, you are working with your body to manage stress by allowing your mind to serve as a stress-alleviator instead of a stress-enhancer. Our definition of fear in this context is *the unreasonable overestimation of some threat, coupled with an underestimation of your ability to cope.*

Restructuring Unhelpful Self-Talk

As you begin to monitor the times when you feel anxious or over-stressed, try to use the following five steps to work with negative self-talk.

1. If you’re feeling anxious or upset, do something to relax, such as abdominal breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation. It’s easier to notice your internal dialogue when you take time to slow down and relax.
2. After you get somewhat relaxed, ask yourself, “What was I telling myself that made me anxious?” or “What was going on inside as I was getting all worked up?” or “What’s on my mind that I’m worrying about?” Make an effort to separate thoughts from feelings. For example, “I felt terrified” describes a feeling, while “I will lose control of myself” is an overestimating thought which might lead you to feel terrified. Sometimes feelings and thoughts occur together in one statement: “I’m afraid that I’ll blank out and forget everything I’ve studied.” The negative thought here is “I will blank out and forget everything that I’ve studied.”
3. Identify two basic types of distortions or errors within your anxious self-talk. Sort out the *overestimating thoughts*, and then the *thoughts that underestimate your ability to cope*. Note that overestimating thoughts begin with or respond to a “what if” scenario. For example, “I will blank out” is really an overestimating thought that one’s brain will become paralyzed and shut down entirely. Underestimating thoughts address one’s perceptions of the ability to cope with a situation that usually refer to statements with “I can’t...” or “I won’t be able to...” The statement, “I will forget everything that I’ve studied” is a thought that underestimates your ability to cope.

4. When you've identified your anxious, distorted thoughts, challenge them with appropriate questions.

For overestimating thoughts: "What are the realistic odds that this feared outcome will actually happen? "Has this outcome ever happened to me before? If so, with what frequency?"

For thoughts underestimating your ability to cope: "What coping skills can I bring to bear to handle anxiety?" "If the worst outcome I fear does occur, what could I actually do to cope?"
5. Write counter-statements to each of your overestimating thoughts. These counterstatements should contain language and logic that reflect more balanced, realistic thinking. Then make a list of the ways you might cope with the particular stressful situation, including what you would do if your most feared outcome actually occurred.

Helpful Counter-Statements

Negative Self-Talk

Positive Counter-Statements

This is unbearable.

I can learn how to cope better with this.

What if this goes on without letting up?

I'll deal with this one day at a time. I don't have to project into the future.

I feel inferior or inadequate compared to others.

Some of us have steeper paths to walk than others. That doesn't make me less valuable as a human being.

Why do I have to deal with this? Other people seem freer to enjoy their lives.

Life is a school. For whatever reason, at least for now, I've been given a tougher curriculum. That doesn't make me wrong. In fact, adversity develops qualities of strength and compassion.

I don't know how to cope with this.

I can learn to cope better—with this and any difficulty life brings.

I don't know why I'm this way—why this happened to me.

The causes are many, including heredity, early environment and cumulative stress. Understanding causes satisfies the intellect, but it's not what heals.

I have to really fight this.

Struggling with a problem won't help so much as making more time in my life to better care for myself.

I shouldn't have let this happen to me.

The long-term causes of this problem lie in heredity and childhood environment, so I didn't cause this condition. I can take responsibility for learning how to better deal with it.

I feel like I'm going crazy.

When anxiety is high, I feel like I'm losing control. But that feeling has nothing to do with going crazy.

Each day seems like a major challenge.

I'm learning to take things more slowly. I make time to take care of myself. I make time to do small things to nurture myself.

HOW TO KEEP CALM DURING TESTS

1. **PREPARE WELL IN ADVANCE.** Keep up day-to-day if you can, but don't judge yourself harshly if you don't. Avoid last minute cramming. Don't go without sleep the night before. Stop studying an hour or so before the test and relax and compose yourself.
2. **KNOW THE TIME AND PLACE** of the test and what you need to bring. Be on time, neither too early nor too late. Don't rush.
3. **DON'T TALK ABOUT THE TEST** with classmates immediately beforehand if you know it raises your anxiety level—to do so may nourish group paranoia.
4. Read over the test and **PLAN YOUR APPROACH.** Ascertain point values per part, time limits for each section, which question you'll start with, etc.
5. Don't hesitate to **ASK FOR CLARIFICATION** if you have questions about directions, procedures, etc., rather than letting anxiety build up because you aren't sure about what you are expected to do.
6. **DEVELOP AN AGGRESSIVE, YET REALISTIC ATTITUDE.** Approach the test determined that you'll do your best—but also accept the limits of what you know at the moment. Use everything you know to do well—but don't blame yourself for what you don't know.
7. **ACTIVITY REDUCES ANXIETY.** If you go blank and can't think of anything to write, go on to another question or another part of the test. On an essay jot down anything you can recall somewhere where you may write to stimulate your memory and get your mind working.
8. **RELAX YOURSELF PHYSICALLY** during the test if you notice that you are not thinking well or are tight. Pause, lay your test aside, and take several slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on your breathing. Do this if you notice that you are worrying excessively about one problem, not reading carefully, forgetting information you know.
9. **PAY ATTENTION TO THE TEST**, not to yourself or others. Don't waste time worrying, doubting yourself, wondering how other people are doing, blaming yourself, etc. Don't worry about what you should have done. Pay attention to what you can do now.