

17 ways to reduce stress

Produced by LifeTools (<http://www.lifetools.com>), suppliers of the astonishing MindLab Proteus, which uses pulsed light and sound to create profound relaxation, a more focused mind for learning, and includes sleep sessions too.

Tips on combating stress

- **Exercise** – yoga is a wonderful way of relieving the stress of Western society. It is non-competitive and allows you to slowly stretch and bend yourself to a calm and healthy mind and body. Tai Chi is recognised for its great powers in instilling and maintaining good health and fitness in people of all ages. You've seen people in China exercising in the parks. The gentle rhythmic movements, with its emphasis on total relaxation of both body and mind, provide a practical and therapeutic safety-valve to modern day living. Students of the art also have more efficient circulatory and respiratory systems and metabolisms. The concentration required for carrying out the movements induces a deep sense of calm and well-being. Tai Chi is often called moving meditation. Dance your way to an anxious free existence. Any type of dance and at any level – just let yourself go! Walking has been described as man's best medicine. As well as being a health-giving form of exercise, walking in the fresh air in beautiful surroundings makes it an excellent way to unwind.
- **Goal setting and assertiveness** – take time each day to set specific goals at the start of each day. Determine what you want to do; don't let the routine control you. Research shows that performance and efficiency actually improve with increased stress, until performance peaks as the stress level becomes too great. Stress management involves finding the right types and amounts of stress, given your individual personality, priorities, and life situation, so that you can maximise your performance and satisfaction. Learn to say no to people who try to set your agenda.
- **Time management** – if you recognise any of the following, you need to manage your time better – thereby lifting some of the stress from your shoulders. Problems include: constant rushing; frequent lateness; low productivity; frustration; impatience; difficulty setting and achieving goals; procrastination. We all have 24 hours in a day but why is it that some of us feel we have no time at all and others manage to get their work done and still have time to do a little of everything. Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, noted that 20 percent of what we do yields 80 percent of the results. Conversely, 80 percent of what we do yields 20 percent of the results. For example, about 20 percent of the newspaper is worth your while to read. You would be better just skimming the rest of it. Similarly, 80 percent of the housework can wait almost indefinitely, while the remaining 20 percent is a necessity if you don't want to live in a pigsty. Buy an organiser – with one that includes a daily, weekly, and monthly calendar and use it. At the start of each day list your priorities of tasks to do as follows: Top drawer – These are the most essential and most desired items. Middle drawer – You could put these activities off for a while, but they are still important. Bottom drawer – You can easily put these tasks off indefinitely with no harm done.
- **Light and sound device tip:** Use a short, relaxing session and see yourself doing the most important job first. See yourself relaxed and in control. Use positive affirmations like: "I complete the tasks I say I'll do. I plan the next day before I go home. I prioritise my work and do the most important tasks first." And so on...
- **Diet** – certain foods can be described as calm foods and can have a soothing effect on your stress levels – especially in the long term. Concentrate an 80:20 balance between the acid forming foods (wholegrain flour and cereals, fruits, vegetables, especially uncooked), and alkaline-forming foods (coffee, meat, sugar, processed foods, white flour, nuts, preservatives). Eat less (for most people). Eat more vegetables, fruits, complex carbohydrates and whole grains. Eat less fats, make sure your diet is high in vitamins A, C, E and B, drink more water. Limit or avoid altogether: coffee, soft drinks, sugar, refined foods, preserved foods and fat-laden snack foods.
- **Meditate** – go to a class, or try it yourself. Take a minimum of five minutes in a quiet place, by yourself, sitting comfortably with eyes closed and your attention focused on 'what lies within' you. Take five minutes in the morning, after a session on the MindLab Proteus, or at some other regular time during the day to focus your attention away from the outside world and on your inner world.
- **Roll your eyeballs** – if you roll your eyes slowly upwards, pause, then roll them back down again, you will automatically feel more relaxed. Repeat this exercise a couple of times.
- **Tighten and release facial muscles** – very useful for quieting your mind quickly.
- **Alternate nostril breathing** – an instant calming exercise. The brain has two sides. The right side is creative, inspirational, and relaxing. The left side is mechanical and calculating. Yogis have found that there is a

body rhythm in which every hour and twenty-eight minutes the sides of the brain alternate dominance. The nostrils reflect this because each of them has nerves that lead into the centre of the brain. One nostril will be dominant during that period. If the right side of the brain – the healing, resting side – is dominant, the left nostril will also be dominant. If the left side of the brain – the mechanical calculator – is dominant, the right nostril will be dominant. By understanding that each nostril connects to the opposite side of the brain and using this information in a breathing exercise, you can actually balance the two sides of the brain, and the result is an amazing sense of equilibrium.

Here's what to do: Select a 10-minute session and do the following...

Breathe in the left nostril to the count of six, keeping the right nostril closed using your finger. Hold the breath for three counts. Then release the right nostril and breathe out to the count of six, closing off the left nostril with your finger, and breathing back in the right nostril for six counts. Hold for three counts. Then release the left nostril and breathe out to the count of six. You can do this exercise at least once a day. It is especially helpful before a meeting or in preparation for a stressful and emotionally charged event.

- **Fight boredom** – boredom is one of life's most common stressors. When you are frustrated by the lack of anything satisfying to do, your tension levels escalate. If you concentrate wholly on whatever you have to do – however mundane or meaningless it may appear – time really does fly and you derive satisfaction from your efforts. Immerse yourself totally in the task, so that you achieve the very best result you are capable of, you will find that task becomes almost like meditation in itself. Not only is this the antidote to boredom, it is a sure way to become calm and relaxed.

- **Stay in the present** – people who worry about what has gone on in the past end up with feelings of guilt, regret and embarrassment, over which, in most cases, they can do nothing about. Similarly, worrying about what might or might not happen causes similar anxieties. The only state you can really influence is the present. The people who are most calm and relaxed about their lives are not those who have unblemished or uncomplicated pasts, nor are they those who have sorted out everything in their futures. They are those who have learned to live in the present.

- **Get a pet** – and live longer. Individuals and families who have a dog or cat are less stressed and visit their doctor less often than people who don't. Research has shown that pet owners have lower cholesterol and blood pressure. Just stroking your dog or cat will make you feel better.

- **Affirmations** – you should have a list of affirmations ready that you can start repeating when you feel stressed. Just chanting, "I can handle this", to yourself, or "I know more about this than anyone here" will work. It pulls you away from the animal flex to stress – the quick breathing, the cold hands – and toward the reasoned response, the intellect – the part of you that really *can* handle it.

- **Power-napping** – becoming more and more popular, particularly with high flyers. Relax and de-stress while staying alert. Useful during lunchtimes before you return to a busy afternoon at work. But you need the right equipment to power nap correctly.

Light and sound device idea: Use the MindLab Proteus etc to rejuvenate and refresh you using Session groups Recreation and Relaxation and Well Being.

- **Aromatherapy** – more than 6000 years old and once a Chinese form of herbal medicine, using pure, essential plant extracts. Research has shown that certain scents do produce distinct physical effects. Scents of certain essential oils stimulate the production of serotonin in the brain (serotonin is the sedative neurochemical that causes slow-wave sleep.) Scents of vanilla, orange blossom, rose, chamomile and lavender have a calming effect on the way you feel, while lavender, sandalwood and nutmeg help you shrug off the ill-effects of stress. Lavender is probably the most useful of them all – not only does it help you to relax, but it also eases aches and pains, such as headache.

- **Stress awareness diary** – at the beginning of each day write down what situations have caused you to be anxious and stressed-out. What did each situation make you feel like physically: knot in your stomach, headache etc. Take action to divert those stress-making situations before they arise.

- **Sounds of silence** – often severely stressed people claim they need a radio to relax. They do not want silence. If you want peace and relaxation, seek silence. Sit and meditate for a few minutes in an empty church or other place of worship. Lack of stimuli prevents your nervous system getting over-excited. Silence is one of the most powerful counterbalances to stress and anxiety. Almost all relaxation and meditation techniques insist on it. Wherever possible, seek calm in silence.

Light and sound device idea: Select a meditative session and use it without headphones, or keep the headphones on but turn the volume off. This way the headphones act as ear muffs and mask out some external sounds. Note how you feel after the session in a journal.

How to combat stress with a light and sound device like the MindLab Proteus

It used to be called "nerves". Later, it was referred to as anxiety. These days, almost everyone calls it stress. It

is an everyday fact of life. You can't avoid it. Stress is any change that you must adapt to, ranging from the negative extreme of actual physical danger to the exhilaration of falling in love or achieving some long-desired success. And in between, day-to-day living confronts even the most well-managed life with a continuous stream of potentially stressful experiences.

At one end of the scale is *eustress*, which is the stress that accompanies the exciting things in life – the first kiss, a lottery win; this is positive stress, things we would all like more of. *Under-stress* is the opposite: it accompanies feelings of boredom, hopelessness, physical immobility; it has a negative effect. *Over-stress* is where you push yourself beyond your limits; it can happen as easily in business as it does in marathon races and, again, has a negative effect. *Distress* is the obvious unresolved frustration, fear, anger, anxiety. All these conditions can effectively be split up into two types of stress. *Positive stress* – without it life would be very dull and less effective and *negative stress* – which we all want as little of as possible.

The MindLab Proteus is an essential tool in combating the effects, both mental and physical, of negative stress. Experiment with the Recreation and Relaxation and the Well Being sessions. Get yourself into a relaxed position, either sitting or lying down. Take some deep breaths, exhaling slowly and completely. When you do this correctly your stomach will move in and out with each breath.

Session 7 Quick Work Break

Lasts 15 minutes and an ideal session to use if you sit at a computer for long periods of time. Combined with stretching exercises this session can be done in the workplace, especially after lunch before you return back to the keyboard.

Session 8 Mind Sauna

Lasts 25 minutes and a slightly longer session which can be used with deep breathing and muscle awareness exercises – as the muscles relax tension will disappear. Because there is a two minute boost at the end of this tape you will also be able to use this session during your lunch break at work. It will leave you relaxed yet fully alert at the same time.

Session 10 Regeneration

Lasts 35 minutes and is long enough to allow you to reach a state of very deep relaxation. Best used on a regular basis to de-stress you and allow you to let go of all your tensions. This session can be used with relaxation or self-help tapes.

Session 11 Deep Meditation

Lasts 60 minutes and best used when you want to take time out at the end of a long and stressful day. Only use this session when you know you will be undisturbed. This is the longest session and some beginners may find it too long. The session is excellent as a training session if you are learning how to meditate for extended periods.

Session 18 Body/Mind Awareness

Lasts 25 minutes and useful for relaxing your tense muscles. It is difficult to have a relaxed, de-stressed mind while your body feels tense. Alternatively, it is difficult to allow your body to relax if your mind is overactive or filled with emotional anxiety. This session is ideal for using with a recorded programme designed for relaxation of your body and mind. Or do body awareness exercises – going through each muscle group and become aware of tight spots. Release and relax your entire body, letting go of all the stress and tension that has built up during the day.

Session 19 Afternoon Break

Lasts 22 minutes and can be mixed with some lovely, gentle music or sounds of nature to reduce the tensions of daily life. The session is long enough to help you become refreshed, but not too long whereby you become stressed again worrying about how long you've taken off!

Session 20 Deep Relaxation

Lasts 25 minutes and an extremely gentle session. Best to use if you are really sensitive or just starting out on the MindLab Proteus. Sit back, relax and let the tension flow out of you.

Session 21 Goodnight

Lasts 18 minutes and a short session to use at the end of your busy day. To be used when you don't need a longer session. Lie down, and set the lights at a low level.

Session 22 Release the Day

Lasts 25 minutes and to be used with the lights set to a low to moderate setting. This session is best used at the end of the day for calming and internal balance. Only use it when you plan to have a quiet evening. After using it do not watch TV – perhaps just read a book or go directly to sleep.

Case study: Robert Jefford, Gillingham

“My job as a printer is very demanding. Now I use the MindLab I feel so much calmer at work. I used to be very stressed as I often work long shifts and up to six days work without a break. There isn’t always time to get away for five or ten minutes to activate one of the techniques from the disciplines I’ve learned.

“But when I get home, I stick on the MindLab liteframes and the unit takes away all the tension and stress. At times I’ve felt like I was floating through the air. Over time the serene, peaceful state the MindLab creates has become a habit in my daily life, so I’m much more relaxed at work.”

Tapes which will help you unwind

High Coherence and Egg of Time tapes are especially useful for relieving feelings of stress and anxiety. We have many other relaxation tapes and CDs in stock – telephone our experienced staff and they will advise you on the best tapes or CDs for you.

What kind of stress?

There are three kinds of stress – Physical, Psychological (emotional) or lifestyle-related (behavioural).

Physical stressors can range from illness or violence, to environmental conditions such as extreme cold, hard beds and noisy neighbours. Lifestyle stressors (which are really a combination of physical and emotional conditions) range from high-pressure occupations or poor sleeping habits, to drug and alcohol abuse. Emotional stressors, which are those that originate in your mind, are the most insidious and complex package of them all.

Physical symptoms?

Muscular – it affects you in the back of your neck. It is tight and stiff and pulls up into the back of your head. You sometimes don’t recognise it as tight muscles, you think you have a headache. A *tension* headache at the back of your head rather than the front. A tight, dull ache rather than the throbbing of a migraine.

You also feel it as a tightening in your shoulders. Between your shoulder blades, right across your shoulders and all the way up to the base of your neck.

You feel it in your lower back and as a constriction in your chest wall. Tight muscles creating a band-like feeling right across your chest.

You feel it in your abdominal muscles. A tight ball around your solar plexus. You even feel it in your face, your jaw is clenched tight, your forehead pulled and your lips tight and pursed.

You feel it in your hands. They are tight and clenched, ready for the fight your body is preparing you for. Your whole body is preparing itself for action.

Headaches – The most common type of headache is the tension headache. Varying in discomfort and intensity, it is usually a dull, throbbing tightness stretching from the back of the neck to the crown of the head, sometimes extending as far as the forehead and temples. Occasionally, it is accompanied by nausea-like sensations and dizziness.

The pain stems from muscular contraction or cramp, which can be triggered by simple physical conditions as varied as eyestrain, spinal irregularity, or going to sleep with the neck on an awkward angle. Most often, though, it is triggered by conditions we normally associate with stress and tension.

Posture – The posture of a person under stress is easy to recognise. They have hunched shoulders, bowed head and folded arms. If you look closer they also have clenched fingers, they might have crossed ankles as well.

Expression – The facial muscles react to stress as well. The most visible area of tension is usually the forehead. The frown and tightened eyebrows are clear indications of the stress an individual is under. Other signs are clenched jaw and pursed lips. The clenched jaw also causes you to clench your teeth and this encourages two additional effects: an overall feeling of tightness in your shoulders and neck and a headache.

Breathing – The most noticeable, and yet the least visible sign of stress, is the change in your breathing. The breathing pattern of someone under stress – whether it is positive or negative – is shallow and rapid. It caused by a speeded-up heart and pulse rate.

Other signals – these include butterflies in the stomach, skin rashes, diarrhoea, constipation, indigestion, tiredness, drug or alcohol abuse, overeating, loss of appetite, poor memory, dry mouth, inability to concentrate, over-reaction to events, trembling hands, cold hands, fidgeting, grinding teeth.

Behavioural symptoms?

There are many ways negative stress shows itself in your behaviour. Sometimes other people will notice it more easily than you. These include:

- Irritability
- Irrationality
- Intolerance of people
- Low tolerance of noise
- Suspiciousness
- Easily bored
- Varying emotional states
- Inability to concentrate
- Pessimism
- Negative Attitudes
- Feeling that something is about to go wrong

Give Mondays a miss

We all know that Monday morning feeling. It's all in the mind isn't it – after all it's only another day. But that doesn't explain why we have that sinking feeling on a Sunday night.

But now scientists have proved that Monday mornings can be downright bad for you! In a study of 683 cardiac patients, Dr John Peters a New York cardiologist, has discovered that our heart rate can shoot up to more than 214 beats per minute (our normal rate is 60-100) on a Monday. But the rate dips back down to normal by the following Saturday and Sunday. Monday morning is also the peak time for heart attacks.

Levels of the stress hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline rise on Monday as we prepare for the working week. Adrenaline produces a feeling of anxiety and noradrenaline is the hormone that makes you feel good. If you overload with them, however, your blood pressure surges, which can put pressure on your heart, and if you're susceptible, cause a sudden heart attack.

The Monday morning feeling doesn't just affect the heart. According to current statistics, most suicides happen on that day too. Scientists are trying to find out if a link exists between low levels of the brain hormone melatonin, caused by seasonal or daylight changes, and suicides.

You can lessen the shock of a Monday morning by attempting to make a smoother transition between our work and leisure times. Also if you find it hard to switch off at the weekend, you're not giving your body enough time to recover and refresh itself for the week ahead.

The next time you feel yourself getting anxious at the thought of another week at work – sit down or lie down, do some breathing exercises and use a session on your MindLab Proteus.

Other stress relievers to try

Attitude –if you maintain a state of real calm, you will be positive and happy. Then again, if you are positive and happy, you will find it easy to be calm. Optimism is the most important attitude you can pursue. Not only will it help you to be calm, but it will bring increased happiness, better health, more effective relationships and vastly improved communications.

The trick is how to achieve that state.

Listen to your conversation and your thoughts. Steer well clear of all negative expressions; strive to find the positive in all you say and think about. Instead of "I've got so much work to do", try "I'm so fortunate to be fully occupied", or "It's so rewarding to have useful work and challenges".

Picture yourself with a smile and boundless enthusiasm. Refer back to that mental picture time and time again throughout the day. Look for every opportunity to laugh.

Finally, throw yourself into every activity you encounter. Even if the task is an unpleasant one, perform it as thoroughly and as conscientiously as you possibly can. As the students of Zen will tell you, this is one of the most well-established paths to peace and contentment.

Selflessness – One of the most satisfying and useful ways of relieving your stress – especially in the long term – is to make a habit of helping others to relieve theirs.

A loving or kind act, unsolicited and unconditional, will brighten another's life and come back to you as love. Once in a while, give a thought to the elderly. People who should be honoured for the wisdom and experience of their years have become the forgotten, shoved aside castoffs of our modern society. Up to quite recent times, people lived with or close to their parents throughout their lives. It is part of our nature to do so. When we don't there is a void that no amount of friends can fill. With some effort, we can change the way the elderly are treated in our society.

When you immerse yourself in helping another individual, you overcome the self-centred nature of your own stresses and anxieties. Studies show that immediately after helping others most people experience a powerful sense of elation and accomplishment which, in turn, leads to better health and feelings of peace.

As well, charitable behaviour tends to reduce the feeling of isolation which, even in people who would not classify themselves as lonely, usually accompanies feelings of stress. Direct contact with the recipient, however, is a necessary part of the process; a simple donation may not be sufficient.

For long-term sense of calm and fulfilment, seek out opportunities to help others. Your efforts will be rewarded. Imagine how many lives would be brightened if once a week millions of us showed someone forgotten that we care!

Retreats – ideal to escape to when you feel tired, rundown and stressed out. It refreshes parts other holidays cannot reach. Retreats are a deliberate attempt to step outside our ordinary life. It is an inward exploration of the inner self. Retreats cover many different perspectives: Buddhist, Christian, New Age etc. They come in many different forms: group, individual, drop-in and even open-door. They are reasonably priced and many are based on a theme: yoga, meditation, gardening, nature appreciation. You can do as much, or as little, as you wish. With time to reflect and meditate you will discover a deep, inner stillness. Put your problems in a mental box and lock with a key. You can take them out again later.

For more information on relaxation products, including the “guaranteed deep relaxer” MindLab Proteus, please visit the LifeTools site at <http://www.lifetools.com>