

16 WAYS TO COPE WITH STRESS DURING 2010

A. INTRODUCTION:

Stress is a fact of life. The world is a busy place in which we work hard to meet deadlines and make promotions, to be assertive with the spouse who does not listen or the store that overcharges and underserves. Therefore, instead of kidding ourselves that we can avoid stress, we must understand ways to cope with it. Here is a quick look at 16 ways.

B. WAYS OF COPING:

1. **Recognize the Signs of Stress**: The sooner you spot the signs, the sooner you can stop the stress. Common signs are: a pounding heart, sweaty palms and brow, tension at the back of your neck or in the pit of your stomach, a headache (often the feeling of a tight band across your forehead), a backache, irritability, pacing the floor, wringing your hands, and fatigue.
2. **Determine Priorities**: You can not do everything well. So, learn to do a few things well, instead of many poorly.
3. **Drop Unrealistic Expectations**: Drop excessive use of words like “must” and “should” from your vocabulary. Pick up words like “no” and recognize your limits. Not being 150% involved does not mean being lazy.

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4. **Talk to Yourself**: Analyze whether your thinking is dominated by ideas which filter out your positives and accentuate your negatives, blowing out of proportion mistakes which you may have made.
5. **Talk to Others**: Express vs. Suppress your feelings. Be assertive and sensitive vs. being an explosive volcano or someone who silently seethes, until the inevitable sarcastic snipe oozes out on the victim.
6. **Give in Once in a While**: Make allowances for the fact that you could be wrong; avoid being obstinate and defiant.
7. **Tackle One Task at a Time**: Deal with the most urgent tasks first; partialize the big loads, remembering the old joke, “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.”
8. **Take a Breather**: 5 minutes “off” can lead to most of your day being “on”. Take a walk or just step away from your desk, instead of making yourself “stand there and suffer”.
9. **Deep Breathing**: A simple relaxation exercise is to sit still for a few minutes and breathe deeply, not so dramatic that anyone can notice, just so that you feel relaxed and more under control.
10. **Meditation**: Deep breathing can be combined with focusing upon one idea or object so as to slow your mind down, and focus on one thing vs. many.
11. **Join a Support Group**: If your extended family is geographically distant, try to make friends with whom you can be yourself, or join a support group, whether at your church, synagogue, or civic group. Even a Men’s League at a Golf Club or Bowling League can help relieve some stress by giving you relaxation + friends.
12. **Exercise to Relax**: A routine of walking, jogging, or any regular exercise program can work off pent-up frustration. If you are able to, try to alternate between weight-bearing and aerobic exercises, always after preliminary stretching exercises.
13. **Massage**: A regular massage may be too expensive, but consider treating yourself to a massage when under a great deal of stress.
14. **Try Helping Others**: Focusing on the troubles of others may put yours in perspective.
15. **Develop a Hobby**: A new interest can get your mind off an old problem; woodwork, kite flying, gardening – whatever you like.

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16. **Pray:** I saved the best for last. Try daily prayer, meditation, or reading scripture to show you the meaning of your life.

The Rev. Peter K. Stimpson