

# Coping With Stress



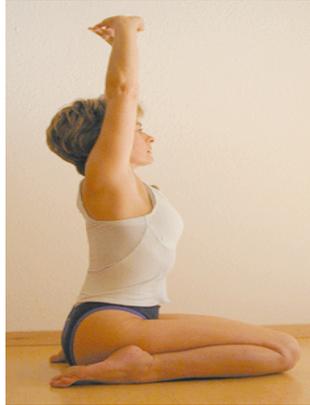
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*Stress can be really disruptive. It affects our feelings, thoughts and behaviour. Learning to relax is about managing all these aspects of stress - reduce stress feelings, think differently, and change your behaviour.*

## **REDUCE STRESS FEELINGS**



- **Learn how to relax & ‘chill out’** - Make sure you are in a comfortable and relaxing setting, with no distractions such as sounds from a radio or TV. Wear loose clothing, and sit in a comfortable chair. Carry out a few simple relaxation exercises – listen to a relaxation tape if necessary, or simply tense and relax certain muscles in your body. Chose the ones that you are most comfortable with. Tensing and relaxing muscles will help you have more control over feelings of tension and relaxation in your body. Focus on the feeling of relaxation when the tension is released from your muscles. You could end up concentrating on one muscle group, such as your hands, and at the same time take a deep breath in. Then, as you relax your hands, at the same time breathe out.
- **‘Quick Chill’ – how to reduce feelings of tension quickly.** When you relax your muscles and breathe out, say whatever ‘cue words’ are most relaxing for you – RELAX, CALM DOWN, TAKE IT EASY, etc. If you find it soothing to also focus on a relaxing scene, such as lying on a tropical beach, then do so.

## THINK DIFFERENTLY



- Next, picture stressful situations – these could be frustrations at not being able to find something, getting lost, being criticised by someone, etc. Try to think of real-life examples that occur frequently or have recently occurred. Try also to imagine some background stress – e.g. you are tired, hungry, wet, have a headache, etc. Vividly imagine such a situation, and then picture other SENSIBLE SOLUTIONS to the situation – this could involve asking someone else for advice, leaving the situation and doing something different for a short time, saying IT'S NOT SO IMPORTANT, IT'S NOT SO AWFUL, thinking of another solution to the problem, use a strategy, etc.
- It is easy to exaggerate how difficult a situation might be – ask yourself what is the worse thing that could possibly happen, think of ways of dealing with it, and say to yourself: 'I can cope with that'.
- If the stress is caused by another person's behaviour, one way to play this down is to say – 'Well, I *would* be surprised if he/she hadn't behaved like that, so I'm not really shocked'.
- Finally, try and do both the relaxation and thinking exercises at the same time. Pick a stressful situation > tense a muscle group > breathe in > picture the stressful setting. Then relax the muscles > breathe out > say your relaxing cue word > and also picture a sensible solution or say aloud a sensible solution to the stress in question.

## **CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOUR**



- When you find yourself in an everyday stressful setting, stop and think of **R** and **S** (**R**elax and think of **S**ensible **S**olutions). **R > S** should come naturally, as they follow each other in the alphabet.
- If you cannot find something, and are getting frustrated and tense because of this, one 'sensible solution' may be simply to use a substitute item for the time being.
- In many situations, just having a break and a cup of tea/coffee, leaving the situation and doing something completely different, etc. may help to reduce the tension you feel at the time.
- Remember to ask anyone around who can help you out....if it is something you cannot find, they may be able to help you find it. If you are upset because of what someone else has said or done, they might suggest how best to deal with the situation, what is the best thing to say or do, etc.