

GUIDANCE ASSOCIATES OF PENNSYLVANIA

412 Erford Road, Camp Hill, PA 17011 (717) 732-2917; FAX: (717) 732-5375
Suite 205, 20 Briarcrest Square, Hershey, PA 17033, (717) 533-4312

Stanley E. Schneider, Ed.D.
Director

MANAGING STRESS

We've all heard the expression "A sound mind and a sound body". All of us at one time or another have described an aspect of our lives as..."good for body and soul". But with the day-to-day pressures of modern life, we frequently overlook the importance of the relationship between physical and mental health. We forget that there are two sides to the health coin and that physical and mental health are interdependent parts of our overall well being. We try to exercise each day...we watch our diet...we're constantly trying new shape-up programs...but we often overlook mental health fitness activities. And, we should not, for new research is showing more and more the effects of excessive stress and pressure on circulatory, respiratory and cardiac health. Guidance Associates is urging everyone to remember that good mental health is good for everybody and suggests that we try to spend a few minutes a day on mental health exercises - laugh, relax, share your thoughts with a friend. The following are some ideas to help offset some of the pressures and stress in our everyday lives.

RELAXATION

Take three minutes every hour to relax and breathe deeply. Sit and let your eyes become unfocused. Then take a few gentle but deep breaths. Bring all your attention to the sensations in your body as you breathe. Notice that you can relax your entire body still more. Do so. See where you are still tense (probably your neck, shoulders, upper back and face). Relax those areas. All this time continue to breath deeply, gently and slowly. See if you can make each breath slightly longer and easier than the one before.

AFFIRMATIONS

Before returning your attention to work, while you are still relaxed, use a technique called affirmations to generate energy and a positive mental attitude. These are statements you silently make to yourself about yourself that affirm your positive traits. They are most effective when your mind is relaxed and receptive. Example: I will return to work clearheaded and interested. Affirmations must be phrased positively. Don't say: When I return to work I won't be sleepy.

RECOGNITIONS

Know your body's limits. If you get tired after sitting still for several hours, don't force yourself to sit there. Move around. Stretch periodically.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

When problems do arise, ask yourself: Is there something I can do about this? If the answer is yes, ask: Is there something I can do now? If either answer is no, set it aside to deal with at a specific time later. Then go on to something else. If you don't set a later time, it will probably remain in your awareness as unfinished business.

ANXIETY CONTROL

Don't waste energy worrying about how much you have to do. Ask yourself: What is the best thing I can do with my time right now? The answer is usually quite evident. By minimizing worrying, you save both time and energy.

These techniques will help you manage some stress related symptoms. For additional help with stress management, contact Guidance Associates at 732-2917, your family doctor or local community mental health center.

21 WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS DURING THE WORKDAY

By Saki Santorelli

1. Take a few minutes in the morning to be quiet and mediate, sit or lie down and be with yourself... gaze out the window, listen to the sounds of nature or take a slow, quiet walk.
2. While your car is warming up, take a minute to quietly pay attention to your breathing.
3. While driving, become aware of body tension, e.g. hands wrapped tightly around the steering wheel, shoulders raised, stomach tight, etc. Consciously work at releasing, dissolving that tension. Does being tense help you drive better? What does it feel like to relax and drive?
4. Decide not to play the radio and be with yourself.
5. Stay in the right lane and go 55 miles per hour.
6. Pay attention to your breathing or to the sky, trees, etc. when stopped at a red light or a toll plaza.
7. After parking your car at your workplace, take a moment to orient yourself to your workday.
8. While sitting at your desk, keyboard, etc., monitor bodily sensations and tension levels, and consciously attempt to relax and let go of excess tension.
9. Use your breaks to truly relax rather than simply "pause". For example, instead of having coffee and a cigarette, take a two-to-five minute walk, or sit at your desk and recoup.
10. At lunch, changing your environment can be helpful.
11. Or, try closing the door (if you have one) and take some time to consciously relax.
12. Decide to "stop" for one to three minutes every hour during the workday. Become aware of your breathing and bodily sensations. Use it as a time to regroup and recoup.
13. Use the everyday cues in your environment as reminders to "center" yourself, e.g., the telephone ringing, turning on the computer, etc.
14. Take some time at lunch or break to share with close associates. Choose topics not necessarily work related.
15. Choose to eat one or two lunches per week in silence. Use it as a time to eat slowly and be with yourself.
16. At the end of the workday, retrace your activities of the day, acknowledging and congratulating yourself for what you've accomplished and make a list for tomorrow.
17. Pay attention to the short walk to your car, breathing the crisp air. The feeling of the cold or warmth of your body, try to accept it rather than resist it. Listen to the sounds outside the office. Can you walk without feeling rushed.
18. While your car is warming up, sit quietly, and consciously make the transition from work to home. Take a moment to simply be. Enjoy it for a moment. Like most of us, you're heading into your next full-time job: home!
19. While driving, notice if you are rushing. What does this feel like? What could you do about it? Remember, you've got more control than you imagine.
20. When you pull into the driveway or park on the street, take a minute to come back to the present. Orient yourself to being with your family or household members.
21. Change out of work clothes when you get home; it helps you to make a smoother transition into your next "role". You can spare the five minutes to do this. Say hello to each of the family members. Center yourself at home. If possible, make the time to take five to ten minutes to be quiet and still.