



Balanced Living

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Stress & Mental Health

You may have heard many times that stress relief activities benefit mental health. But, what exactly does that mean? Before fully understanding why you should practice stress relief for mental health, it would be helpful to discuss what mental health is.

Oftentimes we think of mental health as simply the absence of mental illness. But, this is far too simple a definition. Instead, let's think of mental health in terms of the presence of a few things. For example, mental health includes the ability to make sound decisions, form healthy and successful relationships, the ability to be resilient against adversity, the ability to create balance within our lives, and other qualities



that enable us to function at an emotionally and behaviorally stable level.

Stress can affect our mental and emotional stability by creating an imbalance that causes us to react with tension and anxiety. This tension is not only taxing on the mind, but the body as well -- it can make you feel mentally and physically depleted. Other mental effects of stress include the inability to concentrate,

confusion, irritability, anxiety, mood swings and difficulty making decisions. Unresolved mental stress can result in more severe problems such as depression. This is why it's so important to practice stress relief for mental health.

The following stress relief techniques are great for relieving mental stress:

Yoga. This is a wonderful exercise that combines meditation, breathing and poses that relax the mind and body. There are many styles of yoga, and if you are new to this form of exercise, you should look for a beginner class. Yoga is a great stress relief technique that is suitable for people of all ages and fitness levels.

Meditation. If you are not used to meditating, try starting with 5 minutes a day of sitting quietly focusing on your breathing. The object is to quiet your mind and let it rest. If you have trouble focusing on your breath, pick a mantra or saying that puts you at ease and repeat it to yourself. Taking a few moments for yourself will leave you feeling more peaceful.

Reading. Curling up on the couch with a good fiction or non-fiction book is a great way to distract your mind from the daily vexations of life. Reading also provides an escape from your routine and gives your mind and body a chance to rest.

The next time you find yourself under pressure and feeling tense and anxious, remember the benefits of stress relief for mental health and practice one of the stress relief techniques above for a more peaceful way of life.

-Kaitlyn Bronson-

Newsletter Content

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Mental Health Is Just As Important As Physical Health

By Scotie Keithlow

Many people spend their days rushing from one stress to another. They worry about everything and focus on their problems. Even the smallest irritation can cause them to react with strong feelings of frustration, thus increasing their stress to uncomfortable levels. The nature of modern life does not lend itself easily to a search for inner peace - too much noise and speed - but it is possible to take a few steps and face the day with a more relaxed attitude that comes from finding peace within yourself.

Many times, the problems we face are of our own making. If we examine our own roles in creating our daily problems, we can perhaps get better control over these actions and become more peaceful and less stressed. Are there things we can do to mitigate a problem if we cannot resolve it completely? Do we spend more time worrying about a problem than looking for a solution in the first place? Do we always blame our problems on someone or something else?

There is considerable value in taking things one day at a time. If we address what we can in a measured fashion, we can significantly lower our levels of stress. We can't change the many stresses in our lives that we have no control over, but we can change the way we react to these stresses and our attitudes about them. Much of our

stress can be alleviated if we stand up for ourselves and respect our need to take time for ourselves as well. Once we learn to take control over as many factors of our lives as we can, our stress levels drop. These actions can also result in higher confidence levels, which can, interestingly, lead us to inner peace.

Stress is the top contributor to conditions and diseases that lead to poor health, mental problems, and even death. By taking charge of your life, you will find the path to inner peace. Being honest with yourself is the first step. Taking responsibility for your actions means you clear space in your life that would ordinarily be crowded with worries. When something goes wrong, own up to your responsibility for causing the problem and then take control by looking for a solution. As you do this, you will weed out stresses, and eventually find your mind and soul are more free and quiet.

Inner peace means having hope and faith that things will work out for the best, regardless of how bad they may appear at the moment. You must determine the things that give your life value. If your time is one of them, you must find time to nurture yourself and take the time to find inner peace



Going Green Just Got Better.

An up and coming field of educational psychology addresses the benefits of natural science and nature exposure to health. The latest research explains how children – and adults – receive mental and physical restoration from experiences linked with nature.

In other words, “restorative environments”, or environments that incorporate nature, have a beneficial impact on people’s mental functioning, social relationships and physical well-being. It is important to also realize that to achieve the benefits of nature, one doesn’t necessarily have to head to the hills or wander off to the woods. A simple glimpse of nature from a window helps can lead to a positive impact on emotional health and wellbeing.

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Controlling Stress and Anxiety



There's no question that stress, and frequently anxiety, affects everyone regardless of age, sex, background, career, etc. And, oftentimes it's easy to blame stress on external factors such as the annoying coworker, work overload, the slow driver in front of you or anything else that will absolve you of responsibility. But, let's face it -- you play a significant role in the amount of stress and anxiety you experience on a regular basis.

The answer to what is causing the stress in your life can be found in examining your personality, likes, dislikes and interactions with others. This is the key to controlling stress and anxiety. For example, if you are a perfectionist, you probably experience stress when you or other people don't complete a task to your standards. Or, if you are a control-freak, you may get stressed when you have to delegate work to others. Perhaps you are the type of person who just can't say no. As a result you take on more projects than you can really handle and this stresses you out.

As you can see from the examples above, you actually have control over some of the activities that are stressing you out. If you take time to evaluate how you react in certain situations you will begin to notice patterns in your behavior that contribute to feelings of anxiety. Once you are able to identify what causes you to stress, it will be much easier to resolve the problem. Whether you are a people-pleaser or a perfectionist, one of the best things you can do when you feel yourself tensing up is take a few minutes and breathe deeply. This invokes a sense of relaxation

Here are some general guidelines that you can follow for controlling stress and anxiety:

1. Don't be afraid to ask for help. People may be afraid to ask for help for several reasons. They may not feel comfortable asking for help for fear of rejection, feeling stupid and incapable, or because their pride gets in the way. Instead of worrying about these things, remember that we are human and need help sometimes.
2. Focus on your accomplishments, not your shortcomings. Instead of focusing on how many things you didn't accomplish today, think about all of the positive things that you did achieve. Appreciate even the simplest act like making someone smile.
3. Have more fun! It's easy for stress to overwhelm and aggravate you. If you set aside time to spend with family and friends, to relax and to enjoy other fun activities, you won't focus so much on stress and you'll be happier overall.

Remember, taking time to evaluate your current situation will help you identify what is causing the stress in your life. Once you are aware of the stress triggers, you will be able to regain control and eliminate the stress to which you are contributing.

Mike is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Northwest Metro Atlanta, Georgia. He has been in the mental health profession for 20 years and provides psychotherapy for children, adult individuals and couples.

Please feel free to contact him with comments on topics in this newsletter or suggestions for future articles.