How to be good at stress

What does it mean to be “good” at stress? Does it mean you don’t get stressed out? That you stay calm under pressure and bounce back from adversity? Actually, no. First, trying to avoid it is fundamentally counterproductive. Second, thinking that we can emerge from stressful circumstances unscathed and unchanged is precisely the wrong way of thinking about things.

A small amount of stress can be good, motivating you to perform well. But multiple challenges daily, such as sitting in traffic, meeting deadlines and paying bills, can push you beyond your ability to cope.

When your brain perceives a threat, it signals your body to release a burst of hormones, cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine, which increase your heart rate and raise your blood pressure. Cortisol helps regulate your blood pressure and the immune system during that sudden crisis. This "fight-or-flight" response, thanks to the hormone adrenaline, fuels you to deal with the threat. Norepinephrine helps you become more aware, awake and focused. It also helps to shift blood flow away from areas where it might not be so crucial, like the skin, and toward more essential areas at the time, like the muscles, so you can flee the stressful scene. Once the threat is gone, your body is meant to return to a normal, relaxed state. Unfortunately, the nonstop complications of modern life mean that some people's alarm systems rarely shut off. When you stew on a problem, the body continuously releases cortisol, and chronic elevated levels can lead to serious issues. Too much cortisol can suppress the immune system, increase blood pressure and sugar, produce acne, contribute to obesity and cause sleep problems.

So what happens when you don't pay attention to and process your emotions? Your emotions are stored in your subconscious mind and in your body. Let me give you an example...many years ago, a friend of mine went for their first massage. She said the massage itself was wonderful. Now you would think that she would walk out of that experience feeling great and relaxed, right? Surprisingly, she said she found herself feeling very angry. Why? Because years of angry feelings were stored in her muscles and the massage released those emotions. If you ignore and store your "negative" emotions, they will manifest themselves in disease, health issues or other destructive outlets. So your first step is to stop ignoring your emotions. Use them to tell you what's next. What do you need to do differently?

There are many things you can do to manage and release your emotions.
So how do we DEAL??

Deep breathing relieves stress and anxiety due to its physiological effect on the nervous system. Breathing slowly and mindfully activates the hypothalamus, connected to the pituitary gland in the brain, to send out neurohormones that inhibit stress-producing hormones and trigger a relaxation response in the body.

**Chest breathing** — which uses secondary muscles in your upper chest. Chest breathing is designed to be used in situations of great exertion, such as a race or regular exercise.

**Diaphragmatic breathing** — which comes from the body’s dominant breathing muscle — the diaphragm. This type of breathing is more effective and efficient. Cuts cortisol level 20%. Here’s how to do this...

- Place one hand on your abdomen, right below your navel, and the other hand on your upper chest. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your nose. Feel the coolness of the air as it enters in and the warmth as it flows out.

- As you breathe in and out through your nose, focus on shifting your breath so that you can feel the rise and fall of your breathing in your abdomen more than in your chest. In other words, make the hand that rests on your abdomen move more than the hand on your chest. Take a deep breath in through your nose, sending it through the back of your throat and down to your belly. Let your abdomen slowly deflate as you exhale through your nose.

- Take three more, slow, deep breaths with conscious focus on the rise and fall of your abdomen. Continue to breathe fully and deeply, allowing and trusting the body as the breath slows and becomes more relaxed.

**Take time to refuel** — More often than not our emotions tell us when we are tired and emotionally drained. Pay attention to your short fuse and irritability. Schedule some fun and relaxation time for yourself. This will do wonders for putting your emotions in check.

**Laugh** — Laughter releases endorphins in your brain - the "feel good" hormone. Watch a hilarious movie or comedy skit. Read a light hearted joke book. Do something that makes you laugh yourself silly.

**Exercise** — My doctor has always said exercise is the best antidepressant on the market. Blow off some steam by taking a brisk 30 minute walk. Relax with a yoga class. Do a little Taebo and punch and kick until your heart’s content.

**Journal** — Take 30 minutes every morning to write in a journal anything and everything that you are feeling. Process everything that is going on in your life. You will be amazed at what can come up during the journaling process.

**Other ways to slow the stress hormone (seriously!)**

- To Cut Cortisol Elevation 66%...Make a great iPod mix
- To Cut Cortisol 50%...Hit the sack early—or take a nap
- To Cut Cortisol 47%...Sip some black tea
- To Cut Cortisol 39%...Hang out with a funny friend
- To Cut Cortisol 12-16%...Chew a Piece of Gum

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**Classes in MAY!**

(hopefully!)

**Stress Triggers & Resilience Builders**

3rd Tues of every month!
Tue, 19 May 20 — 0900-1100
ASAP bldg. 10250, Room F
(contact EAPC to register—772-2597)
Join the EAPC for an interactive workshop on identifying your triggers and walk away with tools to help manage those while building resilience.

**NEW! Mindful Time Out**

7 May 20
ASAP bldg. 10250, Room F
Join Christine, in a relaxed environment, for a cup of coffee or tea at the start your day and emerge revitalized inspired, equipped with new tools to continue to be productive.

**Stone Art Therapy**

7, 12, 20, 26 May 20 — 1130-1300
ASAP bldg. 10250, Room F
Take a break from current stressors and Come do a little art therapy with the EAPC.

**safeTALK**

Fri, 15 May 20—
0900-1200/1300-1600
Fri, 10 Jul 20—
0900-1200/1300-1600
ASAP bldg. 10250, Room H
(contact EAPC to register—772-2597)
Empowering Suicide Prevention training that prepares anyone (15+) to connect people to resources

**Chillin’ Out—Anger**

Thu, 28 May 20—0900-1000
ASAP bldg. 10250, Room F
(contact EAPC —772-2597 or FAP—772-5914 to register)
Small group setting designed for support in understanding what stressors trigger certain reactions and how to minimize the effects of those stressors.