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HOW TO ALLEVIATE STRESS IN 10 DAYS

Take advantage of these ideas to relieve body and mind.

By Amanda Kinard-Cruz

In the emergency communications center (ECC), stress can appear from a variety of sources and it affects people in a variety of ways. There is no getting away from stress, but there are ways to cope with it and reduce or alleviate it. Here are intentional steps you can take to achieve equilibrium in 10 days.



DAY 1: REFLECT

When you recognize that stressed sensation in your body, it's time to take a step back, identify the source of your stress and find ways to alleviate it. The first step is to take a deep breath. Reflect on what is causing the stress in your life. Once you identify the source of the stress, you'll be better prepared to deal with it. Ask yourself if it's your reaction to a stressor or situation that is making your stress worse. Are you taking on more than you can handle, or are you failing to deal with problems head-on? Are you procrastinating?

DAY 2: THE FIRST STEPS

Once you have identified your stressors, identify ways to reduce your contact with that situation in the short term. Can you take a breather or mental health day from

that stressful job? Can you take a day away from the stressor and do something you love to distract yourself from problems at home? If a full day isn't possible, spend an hour watching something funny or listen to a skit by your favorite comedian. Laughter causes the release of endorphins and decreases cortisol and adrenaline. Endorphins are chemicals produced by the body's nervous system to cope with pain or stress and are called "feel-good" chemicals because they

can act as a pain reliever and happiness booster.

DAY 3: SPEND TIME WITH FAMILY OR FRIENDS

Spend time with someone you trust. Talk to a friend or family member about what's going on in your life. People outside of a situation often can offer advice or insight that you didn't have the perspective to see because your stress was blocking the view.

What Is Stress?

Merriam-Webster defines stress as:

- A state of mental tension and worry caused by problems in your life, work, etc.
- Something that causes strong feelings of fear or anxiety.
- Physical force or pressure.

According to American Psychological Association (APA), there are three different types of stress — acute stress, episodic acute stress and chronic stress.

Acute stress is the body's immediate reaction to a challenging situation. Stress isn't necessarily bad. For example, it can be a response to a thrilling roller coaster ride or your first skydiving adventure. Or it could be narrowly avoiding involvement in a motor vehicle accident. When you encounter sudden stress, your brain floods your body with chemicals and hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. Stress can initiate a flight or fight response, and that gets your heart beating faster and sends blood to muscles and essential organs. You feel energized and have heightened awareness so you can focus on your immediate needs. Once the perceived danger passes, your body returns to normal.

Episodic acute stress is when you have frequent episodes of acute stress. It is what first responders often deal with in their daily jobs.

Chronic stress is when you have high-stress levels for an extended period of time. Long-term stress like this can have a negative impact on your health. It may contribute to anxiety, cardiovascular disease, depression, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system.

Stress can vary among the different people experiencing it. Some typical causes of stress are living through a disaster, having a chronic illness, being the victim of a crime, taking care of a chronically ill loved one, poverty, homelessness or working in a dangerous profession. Stress can also cause you to have a negative work-life balance, work long hours or stay in a job you hate. It can cause problems in your family or living situation, which might include an abusive relationship, an unhappy marriage, divorce and even child custody issues.

For public safety telecommunicators, the work-life balance and long hours can cause a stressful work environment. Stress at work can come in the form of:

- Feeling that you lack power or control over what happens
- Feeling stuck in a job you dislike and seeing no alternatives
- Being made to do things you don't think you should do
- Experiencing a conflict with a co-worker
- Having too much asked of you or being overworked

Stress can contribute to both physical and mental ailments. Headaches, digestive problems, insomnia, trouble concentrating and fatigue are some symptoms caused by stress. Stress and anxiety often go hand in hand, leaving you with high levels of worry about the future or unease. Having both stress and anxiety together may lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, panic disorder and depression.

Spending time with those you love can also distract you from your stress and make you feel safe.

DAY 4: TAKE ON THE PHYSICAL

Take care of your body:

- Avoid caffeine, which can temporarily raise your blood pressure.
- Exercise to release feel-good endorphins.
- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Try to get seven to eight hours of sleep a night.

DAY 5: DISCONNECT

Get out of the house and do something you enjoy. Whether that's getting into nature, taking a hike somewhere with fresh air and beautiful scenery, shopping or treating yourself to a fancy restaurant. Anything that gets you out of your head is a positive way to disconnect.

DAY 6: SELF CARE

Practice self care and make it a priority. Get to the basics — practice good hygiene and take care of your basic human needs. Take a relaxing shower or soak in a long, luxurious bath. Use aromatherapy shower steamers or bath bombs and candles to create

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a comfortable environment. Lavender scents can promote that feeling of relaxation. Treat yourself to a massage or a manicure and pedicure. Try something new you've always wanted to do. Bake a cake, build something, take up a craft or learn another language. Take yourself back to the joy of childhood. Do something you loved as a kid, such as finger paint or run through sprinklers.

DAY 7: EXPLORE OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Get out of your head by doing something outside your comfort zone; this will direct your stress toward a healthier, more positive task. An activity outside your comfort zone can also serve as a distraction. Try skydiving, scuba diving, parasailing, white water rafting, zip-lining, climbing, paragliding, caving,

kayaking, bungee jumping or wakeboarding. Planning an excursion for the future can give you something to look forward to, just like planning a trip or vacation.

DAY 8: SLOW DOWN

Keep a journal of your experiences. Use meditation, practice mindfulness and explore techniques that help you focus on controlling your breathing. Start using affirmations. An affirmation is a written or oral statement that confirms something is true. An example would be writing out comments to read to yourself each day, such as, "I can handle anything" or "I am smart." They can be as simple or elaborate as need be, but the simpler it is, the easier it is to commit to memory.

DAY 9: REDUCE EXPOSURE

Proactively reduce your stress. Start any task that you're procrastinating on. Don't cause yourself more stress by prolonging the inevitable. Learn to say no. Don't take on more than you can handle. Enjoy imperfection. Challenge yourself so you can continue to grow but realize that perfection is unnecessary.

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DAY 10: KEEP AT IT

Realize that stress is an ongoing process. There will always be some stress but remember that rather than let it accumulate, you can use coping methods to alleviate it. ●

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CDE EXAM #61707

QUIZ

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|---|---|--|
| <p>1) Stress is a state of mental tension and worry.
a) True
b) False</p> <p>2) Which is a type of stress?
a) Acute stress
b) Episodic acute stress
c) Chronic stress
d) All of the above
e) None of the above</p> <p>3) When you encounter sudden stress, your body produces a fight or flight response.
a) True
b) False</p> <p>4) Negative stress can be caused by:
a) Living through a disaster, chronic illness or being the victim of a crime
b) Receiving a promotion
c) Buying a new car
d) Having your vacation approved</p> | <p>5) Stress will go away with time.
a) True
b) False</p> <p>6) What hormones flood your body during a fight or flight response?
a) Cortisol
b) Endorphins
c) Adrenaline
d) Both a and c
e) Both a and b</p> <p>7) Long-term stress can contribute to:
a) Anxiety, cardiovascular disease and depression
b) Healthy blood pressure levels
c) Low cholesterol
d) Great attitude</p> <p>8) Planning for the future can give you something to look forward to and distract you from your worry.
a) True
b) False</p> | <p>9) How much sleep is recommended per night?
a) 1-2 hours
b) 3-4 hours
c) 7-8 hours
d) 10-12 hours</p> <p>10) Relaxation is detrimental to stress relief.
a) True
b) False</p> |
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