
SELF-CARE PLAN

For dealing with daily, low-level, chronic stress

MEDITATION

Stress reduction is one of the most common reasons people try meditation.

Normally, mental and physical stress cause increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol. This hormone produces many of the harmful effects of stress, such as the release of inflammation-promoting chemicals called cytokines. These chemicals can disrupt sleep, promote depression and anxiety, increase blood pressure, and contribute to fatigue and cloudy thinking. In an eight-week [study](#), researchers found that a meditation style called "mindfulness meditation" reduced the stress-induced inflammation response.

In a nutshell, the results of the test showed that after eight weeks of mindfulness meditation, subjects experienced “reduced emotional reactivity that may be of therapeutic benefit in chronic inflammatory conditions.”

The stress was still present (let’s face it—we’re never going to eradicate stress), but interestingly, the people in the study reacted differently to the stress after eight weeks of mindfulness meditation. They didn’t **FEEL** the same effects of stressful situations.

What would that be like for you?

Would it be meaningful to have a different reaction to stressful circumstances—one with which you could say that some things “are not really worth stressing over”? Maybe you could stop stressing out about that guy who cut you off on the highway and almost caused a 30-car pileup, or the growing mess at home, or the crazy schedule you’ve lived since having children, or the lack of control that seems to be more prevalent these days, thanks to our extremely busy lifestyles.

My personal go-to resource for getting into a state of relaxation is 10% Happier. Check out the link below and see if it has a meditation that you think might be able to support you.

<https://www.tenpercent.com/>

CHOOSE UPLIFTING READING MATERIAL

It's absolutely wonderful to get lost in a novel, and it can be a huge stress relief, but if you're dealing with a lot of stress, reading dramatic stories might not do the trick. Choosing something uplifting or choosing books that help you develop the right mindset can be a great influence and help you create the habits you need for dealing with everyday stresses.

A great read might be [The Little Book of Stress Relief](#). It offers a chapter for every week of the year and covers great tips for mindset when dealing with chronic stress.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS ON THE TOPIC OF DEALING WITH STRESS AND HELPING WITH MINDSET ARE:

[*The Happiness Advantage*](#)

[*The Happiness Project*](#)

[*Loving What Is*](#)

[*Emotional Intelligence*](#)

MANAGE YOUR TIME

Another way to take control of your stress is to stay on top of your priorities and stop procrastinating. Procrastination can lead you to act reactively and leave you scrambling to catch up. This behaviour can be very stressful!

Get in the habit of making a to-do list, organized by priority. Give yourself realistic deadlines and work your way down the list. Work on the things that you need to do today, and give yourself chunks of uninterrupted time, as switching between tasks or multitasking can be stressful.

Prioritize what you need to do and make time for it. Staying on top of your to-do list can help ward off procrastination-related stress.

EXERCISE

We'll cover this topic in much more detail in another section of this course, but it's important to note that not all exercise is created equal. Find an exercise routine that won't add to your mental stress or physically stress your body.

I advocate for moving your body **regularly** in a way that feels joyous, rather than like a chore.

YOGA

The benefits of yoga for stress and anxiety are related to its effect on your nervous system and stress response and are achieved by increasing body and breath awareness.

Some studies have even found that yoga can enhance mood and may even be as effective as antidepressant drugs at treating depression and anxiety. That said, more studies are required for a better understanding of exactly how yoga achieves this effect.

Yoga may help lower cortisol levels, blood pressure, and heart rate and increase gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) levels. GABA is the neurotransmitter that is usually low in people with mood disorders.

WRITE IT DOWN

Another great way to handle stress is to write down your feelings. Writing them down gives you an opportunity to vent if no one is around for you to talk to in that moment.

However, although recording what you're stressed about is a great approach, once you've completed that exercise, always follow it by writing down the things for which you are grateful. Gratitude can help relieve stress and anxiety by focusing your thoughts on what's positive in your life.

HAVE A LIFELINE FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Having strong social ties may help you get through stressful times and lower your risk of mood disorders.

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell talks about an entire town with astonishing health statistics compared to their neighbouring towns. In this town, the death rate was 30-35% lower than expected, and virtually no one under 50 died of a heart attack or showed any signs of heart disease. For men over 65, the death rate from heart disease was roughly half that of the United States as a whole.

How did this happen?

In Gladwell's words, "...they had created a powerful, protective, social culture capable of insulating them from the pressures of the modern world."

Being part of a friend network gives you a sense of belonging and self-worth, which can help you in tough times and improve your health overall!

TAKE BACK CONTROL

Not all stressors are within your control, but some are.

Take control over the stressful parts of your life that you *can* change. One way to exert control may be to **say "no" more often**, especially if you find yourself taking on more than you can handle. Juggling too many responsibilities can leave you feeling overwhelmed.

Because our North American culture values hard work so much, we are under pressure to always DO more and we don't place enough value on just "being," or doing nothing for the sake of relaxation.

This is where being comfortable in your own skin will save you. Just because your neighbour is frantic and busy all the time doesn't mean she's better off than you. YOU DO YOU! In the end, when you have a nervous breakdown, only you can get yourself back to health, so take care of yourself now, before it's too late!

To reduce your stress levels, be selective about what you take on, and say NO to the things that will unnecessarily add to your load. Try not to take on more than you can handle, and be honest with yourself about what you *can* handle. There is no shame in admitting the truth about what you are willing/able to undertake!

LISTEN TO MUSIC

If you're feeling overwhelmed by a stressful situation, try taking a break and listening to relaxing music. Calm music has a positive effect on the brain and body; it can lower blood pressure and reduce cortisol, a hormone linked to stress.

If classical music isn't your thing, then try listening to sounds of nature—they have similar relaxing effects.

LAUGH IT OFF

My favourite thing after a stressful day is to watch a stand-up comic on my TV!

Laughter releases endorphins that improve mood and decrease levels of the stress-causing hormones cortisol and adrenaline.

Laughing tricks your nervous system into making you happy. If you are not into comedians, try watching sitcoms rather than a drama after a stressful day.

LIGHT A CANDLE OR USE ESSENTIAL OILS

Using essential oils or burning a scented candle may help reduce your feelings of stress and anxiety. Some scents are especially soothing. Here are some of the most calming scents:

Lavender

Rose

Vetiver
Bergamot
Roman chamomile
Neroli
Frankincense
Sandalwood
Ylang ylang
Orange or orange blossom
Geranium

Using scents to treat your mood is called aromatherapy. Several studies show that aromatherapy can decrease anxiety and improve sleep.