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Slowing Down Stress

From the leader of a country to a stay-at-home mom, everyone feels stress. Likewise, at times, the bank teller feels more stress than the bank president does. Stress motivates us, yet it can also cripple us. As the world around us continues to get busier and more complicated, this one little noun, "stress," is the source of much attention in the media, at work, and in our lives.

Stress can be caused by what's going on within us, or around us. Positive stress produces a feeling of good health and well-being. Massage Therapists use positive stress to prevent the damages caused by negative stress. Regular massage can relieve muscle tension, alleviate headaches, improve digestion, reduce depression and anxiety, and prevent stress-related diseases.

How does stress work? Commonly known as the "fight or flight" response, our bodies react with a protective mechanism. For example, if a dangerous animal (or a surly co-worker) attacks you, the stress response will 'kick-in' to optimize your ability to "fight" the animal, or run away ("flight"). The body reacts by increasing your heart rate, blood pressure and respiration, arousing your senses, releasing energy reserves, maximizing oxygen intake, and eliminating carbon dioxide. Moreover, the body stops such healing processes like energy conservation, muscle tissue repair and digestion when it is under stress.

Unfortunately, prolonged negative stress leads to serious consequences: bleeding ulcers, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, connective tissue disease, headaches, depression and anxiety, muscle tension, and social problems. And if you're not paying attention to your body, these conditions may creep up on you, similar to how a tiger stalks its prey. Be kind to your body. Slow down negative stress by increasing positive stress in your life. The results will be worthwhile, guaranteed.

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Self-care techniques used to combat stress

1. Breathing exercises. Breathing that is calm, even, and smooth will promote a state of rest and restoration, relaxation, decreased heart rate, blood pressure and respiration, improved digestion, and reduced muscle tension.

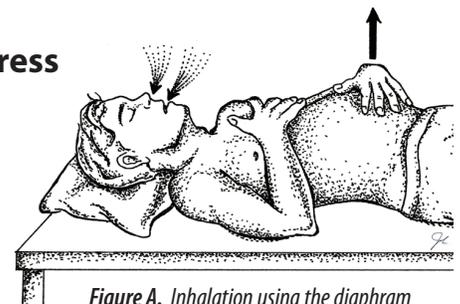


Figure A. Inhalation using the diaphragm

To start, sit or lie down quietly and mindfully. Pay attention to the rising and falling of your breathing. When you inhale, allow your lower abdomen to protrude slightly, as if you were inflating it like a balloon. (See Figure A above) During exhalation, allow the lower abdomen to return to its natural position, visualizing the balloon deflating. Only inhale to about 3/4 of your lungs capacity. Find pockets of time in your day to regulate your breathing until it is calm and smooth. Pay attention to how your mood affects your breathing; then, focus on moving your mind and body to a peaceful place.

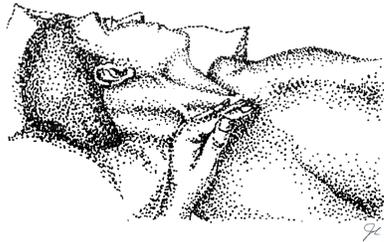
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Self-care techniques used to combat stress (Cont'd)

Many muscle related disorders have more severe and prolonged symptoms when stress is a factor ... Stress may not only prolong a condition, but may be the primary cause.

2. Quieting the mind. When the mind is quiet and calm, stress melts away and breathing regulates. Adapting and responding to life's challenges becomes an easy task with mental and emotional clarity. Practice mind-body exercises that work to develop this skill, such as meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi or Qi Gong.

3. Therapeutic massage. Regular massage is vital to reduce the harmful effects of stress and promote long-term health. Massage combats stress by activating your "relax and restore" nervous system. Energy conservation initiates, muscle tissue repair enhances, and digestion improves. Your tense and stiff muscles will relax under the skilled hands of your therapist. Your posture will improve. Your joints will move more freely, and your general health will improve.



How often should you go for massage?	
General health maintenance	1-hour every 2-4 weeks
Specific Treatment	Ask your Massage Therapist

4. Gentle stretching

The purpose of stretching is to normalize the length of your muscles

- ⇒ Stretching should be done after a muscle has been warmed up
- ⇒ Hold each stretch for at least 30 seconds
- ⇒ Breathe slowly placing your attention on the muscles being stretched
- ⇒ Stretching can be learned in Yoga, Pilates, and Tai Chi classes
- ⇒ Your Massage Therapist may prescribe a personalized stretching program

5. Regular exercise. When life gets busy, exercise is usually one of the first things to be moved to the bottom of the priority list. Ironically, exercise and a healthy lifestyle tops the list as your best tool for combating stress. Eating well and moving more often improves your mood, your esteem, and your energy levels.

Through regular exercise you can reduce stress, strengthen your heart and lungs, and maintain a healthy body weight. You've been searching for a secret weapon that promises feeling better? Search no longer, exercise is the key. Walk, run, swim, jump - move yourself to a healthy, happy body that is better equipped to manage stress.

For appointment bookings or more information, please call: (905) 897-8889