

TIPS FOR REDUCING STRESS

1. **Get enough sleep:** The body requires sleep in order to function at optimal levels. Lack of sleep contributes to irritability, poor decision-making, lessens your ability to cope with stress and makes you more susceptible to illness.
2. **Learn to accept what you cannot change:** If problems beyond your control are causing you stress, let them go. Do not waste time and energy worrying about something you cannot do anything about.
3. **Exercise:** You hear it all the time, but it is true. Physical activity is vital for you physically and mentally. Even in short spurts, it can improve your mood and replenish energy. It also provides a free opportunity for quality time with your kids. Take a bike ride together, walk the dog around the block, spend time outdoors gardening.
4. **Eat nutritious foods:** Eating well is vital for your health. Start the day with breakfast.
5. **Turn off the news:** Remember the news is a TV program that depends on ratings, so it tends to be sensationalized and filled with tragedy and anxiety-provoking stories. Without realizing it, these images and stories stay with you and contribute to stress and worry. The information can also be frightening for children because they lack the cognitive skills to understand what they are hearing and put it in perspective.
6. **Make a To-Do list:** Take 10 minutes Sunday nights to organize your thoughts and jot down what you need to get done for the week. Keep the list where you will see it a few times a day and cross off each item when it is completed. You will feel more productive, which will ease the feeling of being overwhelmed. Be sure the list has attainable goals. Do not set yourself up for failure.
7. **Break down large tasks into smaller pieces:** This will help with procrastination if the task is not so overwhelming. It is also good when helping kids with school projects.
8. **Ask for help:** I know this may be hard and you do not want to be a burden. But, your health and sanity depend on it. Arranging carpools or asking friends/relatives to baby-sit for a few hours can make a huge difference. There may also be more help your spouse can provide – you don't know until you ask. Kids can help with household chores and it provides them with a sense of responsibility, pride and accomplishment.
9. **Breathe:** Take a few minutes several times a day for deep breathing. Slowly inhale and then breathe out slowly. Do this three or four times. Try to breathe using your diaphragm, not your chest, and focus on the air as it leaves your body, taking your stress with it.
10. **Balance work and play:** Remember Jack Nicholson in "The Shining?" Too much work. Be sure to include things you enjoy into your week. Even thumbing through a magazine, painting your nails, or talking on the phone to a friend can make a difference. Enjoying life's simple pleasures ease stress and make you a happier, more satisfied person.

Think of this list as a menu. Pick and choose what works for you and add to it.