

11 Ideas for Tackling Stress!

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Living with stress can be exhausting. You panic that you can't get on top of things. You get angry about things that you know you cannot influence anyway. You feel like key elements of your life are frustratingly beyond your control. And, without action, things tend to get even worse.

Before long you are living in a near constant state of agitation. You feel unable to find a clear answer to personal problems. And no matter how much effort you put in, you somehow always feel behind.

Does this sound familiar?

Well, you're not alone. That's why we've teamed up with **Paycare Partners, PG Mutual**, who have provided us with **11 Ideas for Tackling Stress**, which you can share with your family and friends. Let's take a look!

"You already know that stress is common, but research suggests that stress in the UK really has become an epidemic. The Mental Health Foundation conducted the largest known study of stress levels in the UK – incorporating 4,619 respondents. It found that **74% of people have felt so stressed they have been overwhelmed or unable to cope**. That figure is shockingly high.

Stress. The slow bullet.

Some stress can be a good thing. It's a necessary part of the human condition and often the spark that ignites action – whether that's tackling the pile of laundry that has been growing or getting started on that Sales Report. Yet living in a constant state of cortisol-induced arousal is damaging to the body and can lead to emotional and physical disease. Even in the short-term, psychological impacts of stress include anxiety, depression and loneliness.

Sadly our attempts to tackle stress often lead to bad habits. You know, the type of habits that provide short-term respite but end up making things worse over time: unhealthy eating, smoking and increased alcohol consumption. Here are 11 healthy alternatives to reduce stress, give you some head space and improve your mental outlook...



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1. Mind over matter...

Have you tried clearing your mind with meditation? Five minutes of meditation each day – seriously, that's all it takes – can make a huge difference to your sense of calm, providing you with crucial respite from your cluttered schedule.

Headspace is a free mindfulness app that makes meditation almost effortless, with introductory programmes for beginners as well as specific courses for tackling issues like poor sleeping or stress. Calm the chatter occupying your mind.



2. Stop beating yourself up!

Why are you being so hard on yourself? When you tell yourself you are a failure on an almost daily basis, you can start to believe it. Negative self-talk perpetuates negative emotions.

It doesn't matter that you missed the bus or had to ask for more time on a deadline that was impossible anyway, or made the most fascinatingly unappetising cake the world has ever seen for the office baking event. A lot of the time stress is born from internal pressure – the perception that we are failing or not doing enough in some way. Show yourself some compassion and cut yourself some slack.



3. Write it down...

When you start fixating on an issue, it's sometimes hard to think about anything else. Before long this problem has hijacked other areas of your life – such as your working day. One easy way to try and free up some headspace is to write down the problem you are struggling with. You don't need to find a solution just yet. Just getting the crux of the issue out of your head and onto the page can work wonders.

4. Run, run, run!

The latest science on what running does to your brain is beyond jaw-dropping. Recent research suggests that running improves your ability to focus and take in information, while damping down activity in your default mode network – that's the source of your inner monologue and an area of the brain that has been linked to clinical depression.

Even more mind-blowing is that scientists have shown in animals that exercise can rid the body of a molecule called kynurenine, an accumulation of which has been linked to stress-induced depression. In short: exercise – in particular running – can reduce stress, improve focus and perhaps even protect your mental health – all while shedding calories. Laced up your trainers yet?



5. Make a plan...

Stress is often born from uncertainty. We don't like the feeling of being out of control. Yet no matter how complex the problem, there's often a solution. That's why it can help to draw up a plan of action for the issue that's bothering you. Whatever it is that's worrying you, draw up a list of best and worst case scenarios and plan your response to each. While it's important not to waste time worrying about things you can't control, taking control of the things you can is empowering. There's a sense of calm that comes when you know you're prepared for anything.



6. Get it off your chest!

Yes, it's a cliché. But often a problem shared really is a problem halved.

Talking through your anxieties with a friend or relative can help you to see the problem from a different angle and pick out potential solutions that you hadn't thought of before. Ruminating on the issue with someone you trust also helps to tackle the feelings of loneliness that stress can sometimes trigger.

7. There's nothing indulgent about your time...

Busy, busy, busy. These days we all seem to have less time.

Remember that not allowing time for yourself doesn't necessarily validate greatness. Failure to make time for the things you love amongst the shifting sands of your to-do list is a recipe for burnout. The mythical place where every one of your tasks is ticked off exists only in your head. There's always more work to do. Give yourself a break and read a book. Run yourself a bath. Get lost in a favourite film. Sit down and strum the guitar. Do more of the things you love.

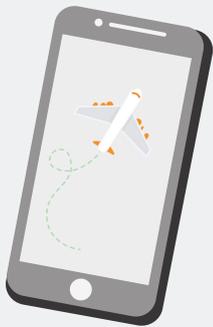


8. Engage your brain!

Your brain can't fixate on unhealthy thought patterns when it's busy working on something else. That's why the tasks that demand your full concentration tend to be the most cathartic. You may find that attempting to learn a new language, a new instrument or a new skill (such as juggling) may bring you a lot of freedom as your brain shifts gears.

9. Break your routine...

You know what they say: change is as good as a rest. And rest is exactly what your overheating brain is craving. Do something you've never done. See somewhere you've never seen. Even getting out of the office once a week and working in new surroundings can help, if your company allows you to work remotely.



10. Pull away from push notifications!

Smartphones: so useful yet so distracting...

The endless rumble of push notifications zaps focus, steals your attention from your actual responsibilities and fosters the belief that all communication needs to be responded to instantly. Stick your phone on airplane mode once in a while and bask in the sense of liberation. You rule your smartphone, not the other way around. Right?

11. Start practicing gratitude...

We can allow ourselves to dwell on the negatives in life. This can lead to a mind-set where you sniff out the negatives by default. Life gets hard sometimes. It's also capable of changing in an instant. No matter how bad your day has been, there's always something to be thankful for – no matter how small. Taking two minutes to write down five things you're thankful for at the end of each day can re-set your brain towards a more positive outlook."

Wow – thanks guys! Those ideas are incredibly helpful, and are definitely something we should all try and implement in our lives one step at a time!

Remember, if you're a **Paycare Policyholder** and feel like you're struggling with stress, things are just getting a little bit on top of you, or you simply need support on how to manage stressful situations to reduce the physical impact it is having on you, please do make use of our **confidential Counselling Helpline**, where there is always a friendly voice at the end of the phone, **24 hours a day**.



About PG Mutual...

PG Mutual income protection specialists can provide Paycare Policyholders with a plan that's designed to help bridge the gap between normal income levels and those that the state would provide if you were unable to work due to illness or injury – after all, when we fall ill our financial commitments do not go on hold.

For more information – visit www.pgmutual.co.uk.

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