



## **53 Stress Reducers**

1. Get up 15 minutes earlier in the morning. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful.
2. Prepare for the morning the evening before. Set the breakfast table, make lunches, put out the clothes you plan to wear, etc.
3. Don't rely on your memory. Write down appointment times, when to pick up the laundry, when library books are due, etc. ("The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory." Old Chinese Proverb)
4. Do nothing that, after being done, leads you to tell a lie.
5. Make duplicates of all house keys. Bury a house key in a secret spot in the garden and carry a duplicate vehicle key in your wallet or hidden in a case on the vehicle body.
6. Practice preventive maintenance. Your car, appliances, home, and relationships will be less likely to break down or fall apart "at the worst possible moment."
7. Eliminate or reduce the amount of caffeine in your diet.
8. Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.
9. Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank get below one-quarter full, keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of home staples, don't wait until you're down to your last item before you buy more of that item.
10. Don't put up with something that doesn't work right. If your alarm clock, wallet, shoe laces, windshield wipers--whatever--are a constant aggravation, get them fixed or get new ones.
11. Allow 15 minutes of extra time to get to appointments.
12. Be prepared to wait. A paperback can make a wait in a post office line almost pleasant.

13. Always set up contingency plans, “just in case.” (“If for some reason either of us is delayed, here’s what we’ll do...,” or, “If we get split up in the shopping center, here’s where we’ll meet.”)
14. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn’t get mowed this weekend, if the sheets have to be changed on Sunday instead of Saturday, etc.
15. Pollyanna-Power! For every one thing that goes wrong, there are probably 10 or 50 or 100 blessings. Count ‘em!
16. Ask questions. Taking a few moments to repeat directions, what someone expects of you, etc. can save hours. (The old “the hurrier I go, the behinder I get,” idea.)
17. Say “No!” Saying no to extra projects, social activities, and invitations you know you don’t have the time or energy for takes practice, self-respect and a belief that you will respect you right each day to a quiet time to relax and be alone.
18. Turn off your cell phone or the ringer on your home phone. Want to take a long bath, sleep, meditate, or read without interruptions? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect. (The possibility of there being a terrible emergency in the next hour or so is almost zero.)
19. Reassess your “needs” and see if they may be “preferences.” Our basic physical needs translate into food and water, and keeping warm. Everything else is a preference.
20. Simplify as many things in your daily life as you possibly can.
21. Spend time with non-worriers. Nothing can get you into the habit of worrying faster than associating with chronic worrywarts.
22. Take a hot bath or shower (or a cool one, in summertime) to relieve tension.
23. Wear earplugs. If you need to find quiet at home but junior must practice piano, pop in some earplugs (available at any drugstore) and smile. Don’t forget to remove the earplugs when your spouse is trying to say something to you, however!
24. Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.
25. Create order out of chaos. Organize your home and workspace so that you always know exactly where things are. Put things away where they belong and you won’t have to go through the stress of losing things.

26. Check your breathing throughout the day, and before, during and after high-pressure situations. When feeling stressed, most people tend to breathe in short, shallow breaths. Shallow breathing means stale air is not expelled, oxidation of the tissues is incomplete, and muscle tension frequently results. If you find your stomach muscles are knotted and your breathing is shallow, relax all your muscles and take several deep, slow breaths. Note how, when you're relaxed, both your abdomen and chest expand when you breathe.
27. Try the following yoga technique whenever you feel the need to relax. Inhale deeply through your nose to the count of four. Then exhale very slowly through your mouth and nose to the count of eight, or for as long as you can. Concentrate on the sound of your breath; feel the tension dissolve. Repeat several times, and frequently throughout the day.
28. Writing your thoughts and feelings down (in a journal, or on paper to be thrown away) can help you clarify things and can give you a renewed outlook. There are excellent journaling websites, for public ([livejournal.com](http://livejournal.com)) and private ([lifejournal.com](http://lifejournal.com)) use.
29. Inoculate yourself against a feared event. Just as a vaccine containing a virus can protect you from illness, if you expose yourself to one or more of the dreaded aspects of an experience beforehand, you often can mitigate your fears. Example: Before speaking in public, take time to go over every part of the experience in your mind. Imagine what you'll wear, what the audience will look like, how you will present your talk, what the questions will be and how you will answer them, etc. Visualize the experience the way you would have it be. You'll likely find that when the time comes to make the actual presentation, you'll be prepared for it and much of your anxiety will have subsided.
30. When the stress of meeting a deadline undermines your performance, try a temporary diversion. Leave your workspace if possible or at least change your activity to something unrelated to the deadline you face. This should help clear your mind of the block so you can resume with renewed energy and direction.
31. If your job requires that you sit for extended periods, get up and stretch periodically. Walk around for a couple of minutes. Step outside and take some deep breaths.
32. One of the most obvious ways to avoid unnecessary stress is to select an environment (work, home, leisure) that is in line with your personal needs and desires. If you dislike desk jobs, don't accept a job requiring that you sit at a desk all day. If you don't like to talk politics, don't associate with people who love to talk politics, etc. Don't set yourself up for just the thing that will be your undoing.

33. Learn to live one day at a time. In periods of high stress, break it down to one hour at a time.
34. Every day, do something you really enjoy.
35. Add an ounce of love to everything you do.
36. Talk it out. Discussing your problems with a trusted friend can help clear your mind of confusion so you can concentrate on problem solving.
37. Do something for somebody else.
38. Focus on understanding rather than on being understood, on loving rather than being loved.
39. Do something that will improve your appearance. Looking better can help you feel better. This is true for men as well as women!
40. Schedule a realistic day. Avoid the tendency to schedule back-to-back appointments, and allow time between appointments for a breathing spell.
41. Become more flexible. Some things are worth not doing perfectly, or exactly your way, and some issues are better off being settled through compromise. This is an absolute requirement for a marriage to continue successfully.
42. Eliminate destructive self-talk: I'm too old to..." "I'm too fat to..." "How can I be such an idiot!?" etc.
43. Use your weekend or days off for a change of pace. If your workweek is slow and patterned, make sure there is action and time for spontaneity built into your weekends. If your workweek is fast-paced and full of people and deadlines, seek peace and solitude during your days off. Feel as if you aren't accomplishing anything tangible at work? Tackle a job on the weekend that you can finish to your satisfaction.
44. "Worry about the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves." That's another way of saying: take care of the todays as best as you can, and the yesterdays and the tomorrows will take care of themselves.
45. Do one thing at a time. When you are with someone, be with that person and with no one or nothing else. When you are busy with a project, concentrate on doing that project and forget about everything else you have to do.

46. Try to greet or converse with a total stranger at least once a day. I'm not kidding. Do it.
47. Allow yourself time--every day--for privacy, quiet, and introspection.
48. If an especially "unpleasant" task faces you, do it early in the day and get it over with. Then the rest of the day will be freer of anxiety.
49. Learn to delegate responsibility to capable others. Then let go of that responsibility. That's what delegation is! Learn to accept that the other person will do the delegated task differently than you might have—and that's okay.
50. Don't forget to take a lunch break. Try to get away from your desk or work area in body and mind, even if it's just for 15 or 20 minutes.
51. Impulsive actions under the stress of anger usually increase your stress. So it's true—counting to 10 before responding when angry can help. You may even need to count to 100 before doing something or saying anything that could make matters worse.
52. Have a forgiving view of events and people. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world.
53. Create a basically optimistic outlook on the world. Believe that most people are doing the best they can. Don't be so judgmental and critical of others' performance.