

# Success Over Stress

What You Need To Know



## Permafold® Topics

1. What Is Stress?
2. Good Health Habits
3. Prevent Burnout
4. Breathing Exercises
5. Relaxation Exercises
6. Biofeedback
7. Thought Control Techniques
8. Reasons to Call Your Doctor



## 1. What Is Stress?

Stress is the way you react to any change (good, bad, real, or even imagined). These are ways the body responds to stress:

- Pupils dilate (get wider).
- Breathing speeds up.
- Heart rate speeds up.
- Blood pressure rises.
- Oxygen increases in the blood.
- Blood moves to major muscles.
- Muscles tense.
- Sweating occurs.
- Blood sugar increases.
- Abstract thinking goes down.



Stress can make you more productive. It can also help you respond to threats to your safety, such as being near a fire.

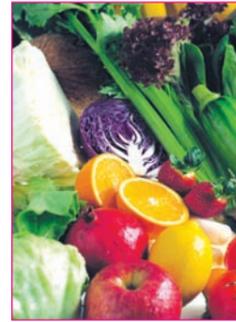
High levels of stress, though, can make you less productive. When left unchecked, stress can lead to health problems. These include:

- Heartburn
- Back or neck pain
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- A lowering of the body's immune system

In fact, the American Academy of Family Physicians states that about two-thirds of all visits to the family doctor are stress-related.

## 2. Good Health Habits

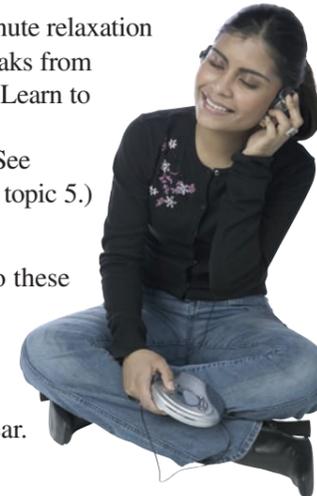
- Eat healthy.
  - Follow a balanced diet. Vary your food choices. Find out what to eat for good health from [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).
  - Eat at regular times. Don't skip meals. If you snack, choose healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, almonds, walnuts, and whole-grain cereals.
  - Avoid "junk foods" – ones high in fat and sugar.
  - Limit caffeine. It can cause anxiety.
  - If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. This is up to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women and persons age 65 and older. One drink is: 12 oz. of regular beer; 4 to 5 oz. of wine; or 1½ oz. of 80-proof whiskey, gin, etc.
  - Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water each day.
  - It is best to check with your doctor about taking vitamins, minerals, etc. This is especially true for ones labeled "stress formulas." In general, choose a multivitamin and mineral that gives about 100% Daily Values (% DVs). High doses of some nutrients, such as vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, can be harmful.
- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Do regular exercise. This is good for both physical and mental health.
- Balance work and play. Plan some time for hobbies and recreation. These relax your mind and are a good break from life's worries.



## 3. Prevent Burnout

You can get burnout from work or anything that takes more energy than you can give. Burnout is not a one-time event. It builds over time. The saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," applies to burnout. Use these tips to help prevent burnout.

- Set career and personal goals that can be achieved. Attempt to do well, but don't try to be perfect.
- Follow good health habits. (See topic 2.)
- Try not to spread yourself too thin. Delegate tasks at work and at home to lessen your load. Learn to say, "No."
- Prioritize what you need to get done in a day, a week, etc.
- Reduce long work or study hours, if you can. The more you do and the less you rest, the more likely you are to burn out.
- If you feel overwhelmed with your workload, discuss this with your boss.
- Discuss feelings and problems you are having with your family, friends, and coworkers. Talking helps to ease feelings of frustration that feed burnout. If things don't get better, get help.
- Take regular 5 to 10 minute relaxation breaks. Take mental breaks from stressful situations, too. Learn to meditate and to practice relaxation techniques. (See "Relaxation Exercises," topic 5.)
- Make time for leisure activities you enjoy. Do these daily or at least every week.
- Plan one or more vacations during the year. Don't work on your vacation.



## 4. Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises promote relaxation in 4 ways:

1. They tense and relax muscles. Taking a deep breath tenses muscles used for breathing. A deep exhale relaxes them.
2. They allow more oxygen to be absorbed. This assists the body's response to stress. It also helps the body recover from stress.
3. They increase the amount of oxygen, which allows the heart to slow down. This helps calm you.
4. They give you the chance to pause and plan your response to a stressful situation.

### Deep Natural Breathing

Follow these steps:

1. Sit in a chair, arms at your sides, legs uncrossed.
2. Note any tension in your muscles.
3. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen.
4. Take in a breath slowly and deeply through your nose. Allow your abdomen to expand and push up your hand. After your abdomen is full of air, allow your chest to expand pushing up your other hand. This is one long, steady breath.
5. Hold the air in for 3 seconds.
6. Purse your lips and exhale through your mouth. Make a relaxing, whooshing sound.



7. Keep taking long, slow, deep inhales through your nose and let out long, slow exhales through your mouth.
8. Focus on the sound and feeling of deep breathing. Continue for 3 to 5 minutes.

### Purifying Sighing

Follow these steps:

1. Keep your shoulders erect.
2. Let out a big sigh, making a sound of relief as the air leaves your mouth.
3. Continue to sigh 10 to 15 times, one after the other.

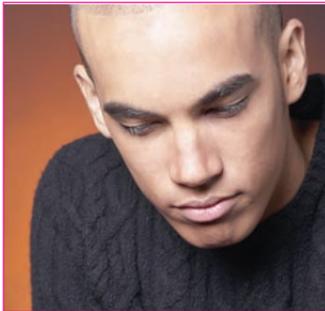
**Note:** If you are prone to hyperventilating, do not do this breathing exercise.

## 5. Relaxation Exercises

### Relaxation Response

Follow these steps:

1. Choose a quiet place that is free of distraction. Turn off the telephone. Ask for privacy.
2. Sit in a comfortable position so that there is no extra muscular tension. Your chin may drop a bit as you choose to relax. Your feet should touch the floor. Do not lie down. You may fall asleep.
3. Close your eyes gently. Don't squeeze them closed. Expect to feel very relaxed.
4. Repeat a word like "one" or any other one-syllable word. Say it silently over and over for 15 minutes. There is no right or wrong way to do this. Repeat the word quickly or slowly. Do whatever comes naturally.

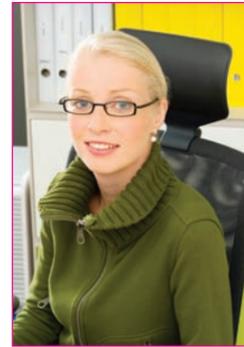


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- When thoughts distract you, ignore them. Return to the word “one.” These other thoughts are supposed to occur. Let them go. This shows the release of stress.

### Progressive Relaxation

Follow these steps:



- Sit in a chair and close your eyes. Rest your forearms on the sides of the chair. Place your palms downward.
  - Take a few slow, deep breaths.
  - Focus on any muscle tension you feel, but do nothing about it.
  - “Tense” and tighten a muscle group (as listed below) for 5 seconds. Then tell yourself to “relax” and let the tension dissolve for 30 seconds. Do this for each body part.
    - Bend both arms at the elbows and wrists. Make a fist with each hand. Relax.
    - Press your back against the chair. Relax.
    - Tighten your abdomen. Relax.
    - Lift and extend your lower legs. Relax.
    - Tighten your jaw. Relax.
    - Squinch your eyes. Relax.
    - Tuck your chin against your chest. Relax.
- Note:** Don’t hold your breath during the tensing phase or tighten any body region that is weak or injured.
- Keep breathing slowly and deeply.
  - Focus on the overall feeling of relaxation. Let your body go limp. Let your head and shoulders drop forward.
  - Imagine you feel energizing warmth flowing through your body.
  - Slowly open your eyes. Note how refreshed you feel.

## 6. Biofeedback

Biofeedback uses special machines to monitor stress responses, such as heart rate, sweating, etc. While hooked up to biofeedback devices, you learn to control your body’s automatic responses to stress. Then you learn to do the same thing without the machines.

Biofeedback is taught at centers that specialize in this technique.

There are also biofeedback machines for home use. One example is a relaxometer. It is the size of a transistor radio. You attach two small electrodes to the palm of your hand. Sounds are relayed through earphones to gauge your relaxation level.

Taking your own pulse is a biofeedback method. Feel your pulse at your wrist or on the side of your neck. Count how many times you feel your pulse beat in 10 seconds. Multiply that number by 6. This is your 1-minute pulse rate. Take your pulse before and after doing a relaxation technique. Your pulse rate should be lower after you do relaxation exercises.

## 7. Thought Control Techniques

### Thought Stopping

Use this when you are obsessed with negative thoughts. If work problems dominate your thoughts, picture an “off duty” sign for the stop sign.

- Isolate the stressful thought.
- Close your eyes. Briefly focus on the stressful thought.
- Count to three.



- Shout “Stop!” (Or, if others are in earshot, imagine a stop sign, a flashing red light, or the word “Stop” in bold letters.)
- If the thought returns, repeat steps 3 to 5.
- Go back to your normal activity. You should feel better.

### “Rehearse” for Stressful Events

Stage actors rehearse their lines before a play. You can rehearse how you want to feel during events, etc. that cause stress for you. Doing this can help you relax when the stressful event really takes place. Follow these steps:

- Close your eyes and unwind. Release all the tension in your muscles.
- For a minute or two, focus on feeling relaxed.
- For the next minute or so, think that you are really taking part in the event that causes stress for you.
- Focus again on feeling relaxed.
- Picture the event once again. Picture as many details as you can. (What is the setting? What are you wearing? Who else is there?)
- Imagine feeling calm as you handle the stress-causing event with success.
- Imagine a positive outcome. See your boss tell you that you did a good job, etc.



Practice this technique 2 times a day for 5 minutes each time. The best times are when you first wake up and when you’re ready to go to sleep.

### Other Tips to Manage Stress

- Count to ten when you’re so upset you want to scream. It buys you time so you can think about what’s bothering you. This helps to calm you down.
- Own a pet. Studies show that having a pet, such as a dog or cat, appears to cut down the effects of stress on health.
- Have a cup of warm herbal tea. Sip it slowly and savor its soothing warmth and aroma.
- Change things around you to get rid of or manage your exposure to things that cause stress.
- Budget your time. Make a “to do” list. Rank order daily tasks. Don’t commit to doing too much.
- View changes as positive challenges.
- Sometimes a problem is out of control. When this happens, accept it until changes can be made.
- Talk out troubles. Talk with a friend, relative, or member of the clergy. Someone else can help you see a problem from another point of view.
- When you feel you are getting nowhere with a problem, escape for a little while. Go to a movie, read a book, visit a museum, or take a drive. Leaving a situation for a short time helps you develop new attitudes.
- Laugh a lot. Laughter releases tension. It’s hard to feel stress in the middle of a belly laugh.



- Take a shower or bath with warm water. This will soothe and calm your nerves and muscles.
- Listen to soothing music in a quiet, calm place. Focus on the calmness of the music. When the music ends, you should feel more relaxed.
- Reward yourself with things that make you feel good. Add to your stamp collection. Buy flowers. Picnic in the park. Give yourself some “me” time.
- Help others. This takes the focus off of you and puts it on the needs of others.
- Have a good cry. Tears can help cleanse the body of substances that form under stress. Tears also release a natural pain-relieving substance from the brain.



Remember, you’re not alone. Whatever you’re going through, others have experienced and survived. You will, too.

## 8. Reasons to Call Your Doctor

For any of the problems listed below, call your doctor or health care provider. You will get advice on what to do.

- You have any of these problems often:
  - Anxiety
  - Nervousness
  - Crying spells
  - Confusion about how to handle your problems
- You abuse alcohol and/or drugs (illegal or prescription) to deal with stress.

- You have been a part of a traumatic event in the past (e.g., armed combat, airplane crash, rape, or assault) and you now have any of these problems:

- Flashbacks (you relive the stressful event)
- Painful memories
- Nightmares
- Feeling easily startled and/or cranky
- Feeling “emotionally numb” and detached from others and the outside world
- Having trouble falling asleep and/or staying asleep
- Anxiety and/or depression
- You suffer from a medical illness that you are unable to cope with or that leads you to neglect proper treatment.
- You withdraw from friends, relatives, and coworkers and/or blow up at them at the slightest annoyance.



### For More Information on Stress, Contact:

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)  
800.232.4636  
[www.cdc.gov/niosh](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh)

### For Free Health Information, go to:

HealthyLearn®  
[www.HealthyLearn.com](http://www.HealthyLearn.com)