

Saying “YES” to Less Stress – Part 3 of a series of 3

And finally we move on to this final part of three, in learning how to **Say “YES” to Less Stress**. Remembering that in part one we learnt about **Stress Awareness** and found out about **Coping Skills**, in part two we looked at **Assertiveness** and focussed on **Time Management**. And in this final part we’ll see if we can recognise which **Exercise** we may like and visit a place called ‘**Relaxation**’.

EXERCISE

Exercise as a stress-reliever

Exercise is a good stress-reliever that’s why some NHS GP practices are prescribing sessions for patients suffering from some ill-health problems - where stress and anxiety can exacerbate the problem - to gyms and leisure centres – they’re paying for the first few sessions to help the patient get fitter and at the same time help them to release some of their dis-stress.

Cost-free or almost cost-free exercising

Let’s look at some cost-free or almost cost-free ways of exercising:

- ✓ Walking is good for us (*and it doesn’t cost anything*) however it’s no good ‘pounding the pavements’ with jogging if you really dislike running or jogging, so how about going for regular ‘walks in the parks’ nearby;
- ✓ If you have a dog then a 20minute walk per day is great;
- ✓ Using a step machine can get your blood pumping around a bit more. Can’t afford a machine? – are there any stairs where you live or work? Go up and down the stairs about a dozen times (over a period of time);
- ✓ Catching the bus? Get off a stop earlier than normal, and walk to the next stop to get on – might even save you some money;
- ✓ Enjoy swimming? Just 30 minutes per week can help you begin to feel better and begin to tone you up; and
- ✓ When you’re exercising you’ll be breathing better too, taking deeper breaths rather than shallow breathing.

Endorphins

And whilst you ‘doing’ whatever it is you’re doing, guess what? This is allowing your mind to unwind from some of the stresses you may have, releasing endorphins into your system to make you feel better. So, the more regular the exercise the better you’ll begin to feel. The secret is making sure you enjoy the exercise – then you’ll keep it up.

How much exercise?

So how much exercise should you take? It should be regular, exercising for 30 minutes up to 3 times a week is normally recommended. If you can walk the dog every day then brilliant. If you go to the gym regularly then 3 times a week is great.

RELAXATION

When we begin to relax we manage to switch off a little from our stresses, we allow (that means we're taking control) our minds to wander onto other things, onto things that may even be pleasant and enjoyable to us.

Breathing

It's surprising how often someone will say "**I can't relax! I can't breathe properly!**" Now there is a connection here for when we relax our breathing slows down. When our breathing slows down we can start to feel more comfortable in ourselves. Although we may not notice it just yet others may notice it in our skin colouring (it can be less pasty or less ruddy); in our body posture (our shoulders may move away from our ears); in our voice (getting slightly deeper and more relaxed); in our speech (words are not as rushed). However this does not begin to happen straight away – it's a gradual process. To help ourselves to breath deeper and calmer we can use a simple breathing technique I call *Belly-Button-Breathing*.

1. Just imagine a piece of string (about 10inches/25cms long) coming out of your belly-button;
2. take hold of this piece of string and pull it s-l-o-w-l-y away from your body;
3. and as you pull it s-l-o-w-l-y away your feel your stomach being pulled out too.
4. And as your stomach is being pulled out you automatically fill your lungs more than previously.
5. Then slowly let your piece of string relax and you breath out.
6. Do this 3 or 4 times as you begin to feel out of control and as your breathing calms down you begin to feel better too. But don't pull that string too quickly!

What happens is that you are controlling the flow of air into your body by using a visualisation technique, and therefore your body processes the air slower then previously (ie faster breathing when dis-stressed or anxious) and you begin to come back into a state of equilibrium with your breathing. When our breathing is at an optimum level we can actually induce a state of relaxation (as in meditation or trance states) and as we do this we can release endorphins – which help us feel better and more relaxed. Endorphins can also help with some aspects of pain too.

Types of relaxation

We really need to find out for ourselves what kind of relaxing techniques suit us as individuals.

- ✓ One person may like to have a body massage;
- ✓ another may just like de-stressing in a warm bath with pleasant smelling relaxing scents (aromatherapy);
- ✓ another may like their feet being massaged (reflexology);
- ✓ or their head, neck and shoulders being massaged;
- ✓ or maybe just meditating;
- ✓ or listening to relaxing music;
- ✓ or a relaxation recording;
- ✓ or relaxing using crystals;
- ✓ or even just sitting in front of a nice warm fire with a relaxing cuppa and a chocolate or too;
- ✓ or reading a good book;
- ✓ or swimming;
- ✓ or going to the gym;
- ✓ or imbibe in a relaxing glass of wine (as long as it doesn't becoming too regular and is in itself then a problem);
- ✓ or relaxing each set of muscles one at a time;
- ✓ or watching a beautiful sunset;
- ✓ or any number of scores of other ways to relax – experiment and find out which one suits you the best.

Better still find out at least 3 that you like to do varying in time taken from a 5minute relaxation, a 15minute relaxation and a 30minute relaxation. And make sure you use them at least 3 times per week.

So when we journey down that road of '**Saying "YES" to Less Stress**';

- ✓ You can use your awareness of **what** stresses you to learn more about yourself and then **use** this knowledge for change;
- ✓ Be **willing** to change **what** you are doing- if what you have been doing has not been working – be willing to do something different;
- ✓ You are responsible for, and have had some input into, all that happens, and has happened, in your life. Be willing to recognise that **you** are in **total control**. Be willing to **give up** victim status;

- ✓ Get clear on your outcome, what are you really trying to achieve? – are you trying to prove someone else wrong, to force someone else to be different, to have something to complain about, to get sympathy or attention? Do you really want to reduce your stress?
- ✓ Above all, **know** that you **can cope**. Avoid the stress caused by fear of the unknown. **Imagine** the worst possible scenario. Find out **how** you would deal with it. Then **get on** with handling the **present**.

I hope that by reading this third article in the series you have now realised that stress is quite normal to all of us and occurs in everyday life. Feeling stress is **your** choice and you can choose to continue or to stop. There is no such thing as a universal stress. Some people are able to cope much more successfully if they become aware of techniques and methods which assist in lowering stress levels so if you want to know more, or want to speak with me, you can contact me as follows:

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