

## Some Simple Ways to Relieve Some Stress

(Add your own favorites at the end)

Watch a sunrise	Listen to a cat purring	Go barefoot
Sing a song	Go to the beach	Whistle
Hike in the woods	Blow bubbles	Focus on the positive
Give a hug	Ask for help	Tell a joke
Listen to music	Take a walk	Paddle a canoe
Dance	Meditate	Play with a dog
Have a cup of tea	Complete something	Lie in the sunshine
Take a break	Play with a child	Talk to a friend
Throw a ball	Hum a tune	Take a deep breath
Keep a journal	Play a drum	Write a poem
Get up early	Prioritize	Practice patience
Stroke a pet	Read some fiction	Do Tai Chi
Lend a hand	Have an idle chat	Sit still
Plant a flower	Indulge a "guilty pleasure"	See a movie
Get a massage	Watch fish swim	Set limits
Play a sport	Say "No"	Paint a picture
Walk in the rain	Take a country drive	Enjoy a reverie
Take a bubble bath	Go to bed on time	Walk a labyrinth
Ask for what you need	Make love	Write a letter
Watch a fire or candle burn	Stretch	Take a nap
Give a compliment	Smile	Feed birds and squirrels
Take some photos	Sleep in	Pull some weeds
Make a list	Clean something	Run in the park
Say a prayer	Arrange flowers	Eat some chocolate
Tell a story	Do a puzzle	Practice kindness
Focus on your senses	Laugh out loud	Watch a sunset

(Adapted by Lisa D. Butler, Ph.D. from materials retrieved 6/22/2010 from <http://www.lessons4living.com/stresscat.htm>)

## 21 Ways to Reduce Stress During the Workday

By Saki Santorelli

1. Take five to thirty minutes in the morning to be quiet and meditate, and/or lie down and be with yourself... gaze out the window, listen to the sounds of nature, or take a slow quiet walk.
2. While your car is warming up, try taking a minute to quietly pay attention to your breathing.
3. While driving, become aware of body tension, e.g., hands wrapped tightly around the steering wheel, shoulders raised, stomach tight, etc., consciously working at releasing, dissolving that tension... Does being tense help you to drive better? What does it feel like to relax and drive?
4. Decide not to play the radio and be with your own sound.
5. On the interstate, experiment with riding in the right lane, going five miles below the speed limit.
6. Pay attention to your breathing and to the sky, trees, or quality of your mind, when stopped at a red light or toll plaza.
7. Take a moment to orient yourself to your workday once you park your car at the workplace. Use the walk across the parking lot to step in to your life. To know where you are and where you are going.
8. While sitting at your desk, keyboard, etc., pay attention to bodily sensations, again consciously attempting to relax and rid yourself of excess tension.
9. Use your breaks to truly relax rather than simply "pausing." For instance, instead of having coffee, a cigarette, or reading, try taking a short walk – or sitting at your desk and renewing yourself.
10. For lunch, try changing your environment. This can be helpful..
11. Try closing your door (if you have one) and take some time to consciously relax.
12. Decide to stop for one to three minutes every hour during the workday. Become aware of your breathing and bodily sensations, allowing the mind to settle in as a time to regroup and recoup.
13. Use the everyday cues in your environment as reminders to "center" yourself, e.g., the telephone ringing, sitting at the computer terminal, etc.
14. Take some time at lunch or other moments in the day to speak with close associates. Try choosing topics that are not necessarily work related.
15. Choose to eat one or two lunches per week in silences. Use this as a time to eat slowly and be with yourself.
16. At the end of the workday, try retracing today's activities, acknowledging and congratulating yourself for what you've accomplished and then make a list *for tomorrow*. You've done enough for today!

17. Pay attention to the short walk to your car – breathing the crisp or warm air. Feel the cold or warmth of your body. What might happen if you open up to and accept these environmental conditions and bodily sensations rather than resist them? Listen to the sounds outside your workplace. Can you walk without feeling rushed? What happens when you slow down?
18. At the end of the workday, while your car is warming up, sit quietly and consciously make the transition from work to home – take a moment to simply be – enjoy it for a moment. Like most of us, you’re heading into your next full-time job – home!
19. While driving, notice if you are rushing. What does this feel like? What could you do about it? Remember, you’ve got more control than you might imagine.
20. When you pull into the driveway or park on the street, take a minute to orient yourself to being with your family members or to entering your home.
21. Try changing out of work clothes when you get home. This simple act might help you to make a smoother transition into your next “role” – much of the time you can probably “spare” five minutes to do this. Say hello to each of your family members or to the people you live with. Take a moment to look in their eyes. If possible, make the time to take five to ten minutes to be quiet and still. If you live alone, feel what it is like to enter the quietness of your home, the feeling of entering your own environment.

Adapted from materials retrieved 7/26/2010 from  
<http://www.bemindful.org/mindmastery.pdf>

## STRESS JOURNALING

Having a journal can help relieve stress through writing about irritations, which can guide you to work through issues. Journals can include what bothers you and why, things you would like to change or things that would work for you<sup>6</sup>. Journals can also include why these stressors bother you, how they make you feel, and how to respond<sup>3</sup>.

Here is a breakdown of a "thought record" journal<sup>4</sup>:

### **Step 1: The Situation**

Write about what triggered your stress: Who? What? Where? When?

### **Step 2: Interpretation**

Write down your thoughts, beliefs and assumptions about the situation.

### **Step 3: Challenging Evidence**

Reread what you have written. Ask yourself if you are engaging in a negative thinking pattern. Write down statements that challenge your negative thoughts. Ask yourself these questions:

- Have I had any experiences that show that this thought is not completely true all the time?
- Am I jumping to conclusions that aren't justified by the evidence?
- Were there strengths or positives in me or in the situation that I am overlooking?
- If my best friend or someone I love had this thought, what would I tell them?
- If my best friend or someone who loves me knew I was thinking this way, what would they say?
- What evidence would they point out to show me that my thoughts aren't completely true?
- What have I learned from past experiences that could help me now? What have I done before to feel better about this?
- Two years or two months from now, will I see this situation differently than I do today? Will I even remember it?
- Am I blaming myself or someone else for something that I or they don't have complete control over?

### **Step 4: A More Balanced Interpretation**

See if you can rewrite your thoughts about the event in a more balanced way. Try to stick to the facts.

## TIME MANAGEMENT<sup>11</sup>

As you know, or will soon find out with the numerous amounts of papers, group projects, and additional assignments, time management skills are critical! Below you will find information about creating Prioritized To-Do Lists, Scheduling, Goal Setting, and Ending Procrastination.

### Creating To-Do Lists/Prioritizing

Keeping a To-Do List helps you get organized, which is essential to balancing the demands of the MSW program, and minimizing stress. When creating a To-Do List, make sure to capture all of the tasks you have to complete.

Another important aspect of keeping a To-Do list is prioritizing your work. By prioritizing work, you plan the order in which you'll do things, so you can tell what needs your immediate attention, and what you can quietly forget about until much later. Keep in mind that a To-Do list varies from person to person. A To-Do list can be daily or weekly, choose one that best suits you.

### Preparing a To-Do List is a three-step process:

1. Start by writing down the tasks that face you, and if they are large, break them down into smaller pieces.
2. Review jobs and allocate priorities from A (very important) to F (unimportant). If too many tasks have a high priority, run through the list again and downgrade the less important ones.
3. Rewrite the list in priority order. Now you will be able to tackle these in order of importance. This allows you to separate important jobs from the many time-consuming unimportant ones.



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<sup>11</sup> Mind Tools (2007). *Essential skills for your excellent career*. Retrieved June 28, 2007 from, <http://www.mindtools.com/>

## Scheduling

Effective scheduling is one of the most important time management skills you can use! Scheduling is the process by which you plan the use of your time. In order to schedule efficiently, you need an effective scheduling system. There are a variety of options to choose from including a dairy, calendar, planner, PDA, or software such as MS Outlook. CTools also has a calendar function! Keep in mind that self-care should be scheduled into your time.

Scheduling is then a five-step process:

1. Identify the time you have available.
2. Block in the essential tasks you must carry out.
3. Schedule in high priority urgent tasks and vital "house-keeping" activities.
4. Block in appropriate time to handle unpredictable situations, events and/or circumstances.
5. In the time that remains, schedule the activities that address your priorities and personal goals.

## Goal Setting

Goal setting is a powerful process for personal planning that can ease the stress of the MSW program. The process of setting goals helps you figure out what you want to achieve. By knowing what you want to achieve, you know where you must concentrate your efforts.

The following broad guidelines will help you to set effective goals:

**Be precise:** Set a specific goal, recording dates, times and amounts so that you can measure your progress.

**Set priorities:** If you have several goals, give each a priority. This helps you to avoid feeling overwhelmed, and helps you to focus on the most important ones.

**Write goals down:** This crystallizes them and gives them more power.

**Keep goals small:** Keep the goals you are working towards small and achievable. If a goal is too large, then it can seem that you are not making progress towards it. Keeping goals small and incremental gives more opportunities for reward, thus making you feel more accomplished.

**Set realistic goals:** It is important to set goals that you can achieve.

## Ending Procrastination

There is no time for procrastination while getting your MSW! Time flies by so quickly, so don't wait until Thanksgiving break to start your Fall semester assignments. You must try to minimize or end your procrastinating ways early! So to overcome procrastination you must first recognize that you're doing it, then figure out why, and lastly get over it!

### Step 1: Recognize that you're procrastinating

If you're honest with yourself, you'll be able to know when you're procrastinating

Below are some common warning signs:

- Filling your day with low priority tasks from your To-Do list
- Immediately going to get coffee or check emails when sitting down to start a high-priority task
- Leaving an item on your To-Do list from a long time even though you know it is important
- Saying "yes" to unimportant task that others ask you to do to fill your time with these instead of completing your important tasks

### Step 2: Figure out why you're procrastinating

The two common reasons for procrastination are:

1. Finding the task unpleasant
2. Finding the task overwhelming

*If you are putting off a task because you just don't want to do it you need to find ways of motivating yourself. The following approaches can be helpful:*

- Make your own rewards. For example, promise yourself a trip to the mall or a tasty snack if you complete a certain task
- Ask someone else to check up on you. Peer pressure works!
- Identify the negative consequences of NOT doing the task

*If you're putting a task off because it is overwhelming here are some tips:*

- Break the project into a smaller, more manageable tasks
- Start with some quick small tasks even if these are not the logical first actions. This will make you feel as though you are achieving things, and perhaps the whole project won't be so overwhelming

# **Energy Management For Care Providers**

By Karl LaRowe, MA, LCSW

## **BODY AWARENESS**

When you are in a rush and begin to feel the tightness in your shoulders – slow down for just a second. Place your attention in the parts of your body that feels tense. Allow your conscious awareness to just enter into these places like a soothing mist. Visualize and feel your tension being soothed and liquefied. Allow yourself to breathe out a sigh of relief and visualize the tension escaping with your breath.

## **DISCHARGING AND RE-CHARGING**

When you notice that you are feeling tired and drained try the following exercise. In a seated position with your back straight, place your hands in your lap. Allow your attention to focus on the tightness in your neck and shoulders. As you slowly breathe in, tighten and rotate your neck and shoulders pulling them up as though you could touch your ears. Visualize all of your breath and energy going straight to where you feel your stress and tension. Hold this position for just a moment as you visualize the tension and stress breaking into tiny pieces. With a gush of relief allow all of your breath and tension to rush out with your breath as you drop your shoulders. Slowly and deeply take in a deep refreshing breath visualizing the oxygen filling, soothing and re-energizing every nerve and cell in your body. Slowly exhale and repeat the exercise as needed.

## **ABSORBING AND GROUNDING**

When you are confronted by a sudden, unexpected crisis or difficult situation that threatens to knock you off balance, stop! Relax and breathe. Allow your attention to return to your body. Slightly bend your knees, relax your shoulders and breathe deeply from your stomach. Allow the shock wave to pass through your body without tensing and holding onto it. Imagine the energy is passing through you and being grounded like an electrical current. Regain your emotional balance and re-focus on discovering a solution.

## **JOINING AND MIRRORING**

When you are engaged in a communication or in a relationship and you want to develop rapport allow your body to be relaxed, loosen your shoulders and breathe out any tension. Imagine your body and mind becoming open and receptive to the Energy in MOTION of the person you are engaged with. Momentarily suspend thought and judgment to become a participant/observer. Simultaneously feel the flow of your own internal energy as you join with your



partner while observing their breath, body posture and movement. Allow yourself to effortlessly mirror their posture, movements, rhythm, tone and quality of voice. Develop a harmonious flow as you dance in movement and conversation.

### **VISUALIZING PEAK PERFORMANCE**

Each day before you go to work spend just 10 minutes visualizing and rehearsing your day. Find a comfortable place where you won't be disturbed, sit with your back straight, hands on your stomach and breathe slow, deep, relaxing breaths. Allow your attention to sink into a safe, comfortable place deep in the center of your being. From this place of comfort and safety visualize your upcoming day. Whenever you notice tension in your body or restriction in your breath relax, breathe and visualize yourself mirroring and joining with the person and/or situation that is causing your tension. Become the skillful participant/observer and allow your creative imagination to discover win/win solutions to every challenge. See and feel yourself in a state of flow as you effortlessly dance through your day!

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## **Meditation Poem (On breathing)**

From The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching, by Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced Tick-Not-Han)

The fourth element of our body is air. The best way to experience the air element is the practice of mindful breathing. "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out." After saying these sentences we can abbreviate them by saying "In" as we breathe in and "Out" as we breathe out. We don't try to control our breathing. Whether our in-breath is long or short, deep or shallow, we just breathe naturally and shine the light of mindfulness on it. When we do this we notice that, in fact, our breathing does become slower and deeper naturally. "Breathing in, my in-breath has become deep. Breathing out, my out-breath has become slow." Now we can practice, "Deep/slow." We don't have to make an extra effort. It just becomes deeper and slower by itself, and we recognize that.

Later on, you will notice that you have become calmer and more at ease. "Breathing in, I feel calm. Breathing out, I feel at ease. I am not struggling anymore. Calm/ease." And then, "Breathing in, I smile. Breathing out, I release all my worries and anxieties. Smile/release." We are able to smile to ourselves and release all our worries. There are more than three hundred muscles in our face, and when we know how to breathe in and smile, these muscles can relax. This is "mouth yoga." We smile and are able to release all our feelings and emotions. The last practice is, "Breathing in, I dwell deeply in the present moment. Breathing out, I know this is a wonderful moment. Present moment/wonderful moment." Nothing is more precious than being in the present moment fully alive and aware.

*"In, out  
Deep, slow  
Calm, ease  
Smile, release  
Present moment, wonderful moment.*

If you use this poem during sitting or walking meditation, it can be very nourishing and healing. Practice each line for as long as you wish.

Another practice to help us be aware of our breathing is counting. As you breathe in, count "one" and as you breathe out, count "one" again. Then "Two/two," "Three/three," until you arrive at ten. After that, go back in the other direction: "Ten/ten," "Nine/nine," and so on, until you arrive back at one. If you do get lost go back to "one" and begin again. Relax. It's only a game. When you succeed in counting, you can drop the numbers if you like and just say "in" and "out." Conscious breathing is a joy."

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Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk. His lifelong efforts toward peace -- particularly during the war in Vietnam - inspired Martin Luther King, Jr. to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. He lives in exile in a small community, Plum Village ([www.plumvillage.org](http://www.plumvillage.org)), in France where he teaches, writes, gardens, and works to help refugees worldwide.

Retrieved 8/8/2010 from [http://www.cyber-key.com/mj/meditation\\_TNH.html](http://www.cyber-key.com/mj/meditation_TNH.html)

## Creating Your Special Place

In creating your own special place, you will be making a retreat for relaxation and hearing your inner voice.

A special place might be at the end of a path that leads to a pond. Grass is under your feet, the pond is about 30 yards away and mountains are in the distant. You can feel the coolness of the air in this shady spot. The birds are singing. The sun is bright on the pond. The flowers' sweet smells attract the bees buzzing over them.

Or your special place might be a sparkling clean kitchen, with cinnamon buns baking in the oven. Through the kitchen window you can see fields of yellow wheat. A wind chime flutters in the breeze.

*Try taping this exercise and playing it, or have a friend read it to you slowly.*

To go to your safe and special place, lie down, be totally comfortable. Close your eyes... Walk slowly to a quiet place in your mind... Your place can be inside or outside... It needs to be peaceful and safe... Picture yourself unloading your anxieties, your worries... Notice the view in the distance... What do you see?... What do you smell?... What do you hear?... Notice what is before you... Reach out and touch it... How does it feel?... Smell it... Hear it... Make the temperature comfortable... Be safe here... Look around for a special spot, a private spot... Find the path to this place... Feel the ground with your feet... Look above you... What do you see?... Hear?... Smell?... Walk down this path until you can enter your own quiet, comfortable, safe place.

You have arrived at your special place... What is under your feet?... How does it feel?... Take several steps... What do you see above you?... What do you hear?... Do you hear something else?... Reach out and touch something... What is its texture?...

Sit or lie in your special place... Notice its smells, sounds, sights... This is your place and nothing can harm you here... If danger is here, expel it... Spend a few minutes realizing you are relaxed, safe and comfortable.

Memorize this place's smells, tastes, sights, sounds... You can come back and relax here whenever you want... Leave by the same path or entrance... Notice the ground, touch things near you... Look far away and appreciate the view... Remind yourself this special place you created can be entered whenever you wish. Say an affirmation such as, "I can relax here," or "This is my safe and special place. I can come here whenever I wish."

Now open your eyes and spend a few seconds appreciating your relaxation.