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MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

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Motivated Vol 7, Issue 1
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Just as I was starting to work on this issue, I read an article by a friend who wrote that he would have described himself as a fairly easygoing personality. He doesn't get ruffled or upset too easily when things go wrong.

But then he took an online stress diagnosis. He usually doesn't bother with these types of tests, but this time some friends had recommended it. The test was hosted on a reputable medical site, so he thought he'd give it a go.

He went into it gamely admitting to himself that he was under a bit more pressure than usual and that he should expect that to be reflected in his results. After answering the series of questions, he was shocked—even accounting for his extra pressure his score was much higher than he thought it would be. The site's verdict: "You need to manage your stress urgently!" [You can test yourself here: <http://www.elibay.com/stresssystemstest.html>]

Reading his story was perfect timing—it not only helped my work on this *Motivated* issue, but after I took the test and got the same results, rather than only passing on advice and solutions, I could take them to heart myself as well.

I hope reading the stories and articles on how to manage and find relief from stress in this issue of *Motivated* will help you as much as it did me.

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

Smooth Sailing on Stormy Seas

By David Bolick, adapted

For a good bit of my life, I've been a worrier. My take on the "power of positive thinking" and "look on the bright side" philosophy was, "Bah, humbug! That kind of advice is for wimps. I'm a realist. When the going gets rough, I worry about it! No apologies." It's not that I'm a pessimist; it's just that I'd fret when things happened that I couldn't control. (I have to admit that I'd fret a fair bit over things I could control, too.)

It should come as no surprise then that over time I had unknowingly developed an ulcer, which then became aggravated. [Note: Stomach ulcers are caused by different things, including the bacteria *H. pylori* or overuse of painkillers. Stress can be a contributing factor.]

I first noticed the symptoms on the eve of an expedition into "uncharted seas" with a fair amount of risk and stress involved, but I managed to muddle through. My ship was leaky, but I was able to bail the water out and keep sailing.

This went on for several years, until one day when instead of tapering off and going away on their own, the symptoms came on stronger than ever—and then intensified some more. I couldn't manage them the way I usually did, and I began rapidly losing weight. My ship was sinking! The doctor's diagnosis was a bleeding ulcer and severe gastritis. He prescribed antibiotics and told me

to watch what I ate. After a time in "dry dock," the leak was patched, the symptoms cleared up, and I'm happy to say that they haven't bothered me for about eight years now.

But I don't think this voyage would have ended so happily had I simply limited myself to the doctor's advice. The state I was in drove me to look to what else I needed to change as well, and the message to me was direct: "Get with the program, sailor! Stress management is for you too."

And here's where the story gets interesting. My life went on without any major revamping. I still get hit with worry, but instead of continuing along on that track, I catch myself and realize I'm getting off course. Then I either get my bearings on my own, or ask my wife or someone else to help me, and that does it. The first step was accepting that I needed to change—that no matter how careful I was about diet and exercise, large helpings of worry and stress were harmful.

Over time, and with God's help, I was released from being a chronic worrier, and if I could do it, I am sure you can too! ■



10 Simple Ways to Relieve Stress

By Nathan Reese, adapted
Medically Reviewed by George Krucik, MD, MBA

It might surprise you to learn that the concept of stress is a fairly recent discovery. It wasn't until the late 1950s that endocrinologist Hans Selye first identified and documented stress. While symptoms of stress existed long before Mr. Selye, his discoveries led to new research that has helped millions combat stress. We've made overcoming stress easy by compiling a list of the top 10 ways to relieve stress.

Listen to music. If you're feeling overwhelmed by a stressful situation, try taking a break and listening to relaxing classical or other soothing music. Playing calm music has a positive effect on the brain and body, can lower blood pressure, and reduce cortisol, a hormone linked to stress. If classical really isn't your thing, try listening to ocean or nature sounds. It may sound cheesy, but they display similar relaxing effects to music.

Call a friend. If you're feeling overwhelmed, take a break to call a friend and talk about your problems. Good relationships with friends and loved ones are important to any healthy lifestyle, and there's no time that this is more evident than when you are under a lot of stress. A reassuring voice, even for a minute, can put everything in perspective.

Talk yourself through it. Sometimes calling a friend is not an option. If this is the case, talking calmly to yourself can be the next best thing. Don't worry about seeming crazy—just tell yourself why you're stressed out, what you have to do to complete the task at hand, and most importantly, that everything will be OK (trust us, it will be).

Eat right. Stress levels and a proper diet are closely related. Unfortunately, it's when we have the most work that we forget to eat well and resort to using

sugary, fatty snack foods as a pick-me-up. Try to avoid the vending machine and plan ahead. Fruits and vegetables are always good, and fish with high levels of omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to reduce the symptoms of stress. A tuna sandwich really is brain food.

Laugh it off. Laughter releases endorphins that improve mood and decrease levels of the stress-causing hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Laughing tricks your nervous system into making you happy. However, bursting into a fit of giggles at your desk may not be the most appropriate way to deal with stress. Our suggestion: watch some classic comedies. You'll soon be cracking up, rather than cracking up.

Try green tea. A large dose of caffeine causes a short-term spike in blood pressure and may cause your hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis to go into overdrive. Instead of coffee or energy drinks, try green tea. It has less than half the caffeine of coffee and contains healthy antioxidants, as well as theanine, an amino acid that has a calming and soothing effect on the nervous system.

Bemindful. While most of the tips we've suggested provide immediate relief, there are also many lifestyle changes that can be more effective in the long run. The concept of "mindfulness" is a large part of meditative and somatic approaches to mental health. Mindfulness incorporates physical and mental exercises that prevent stress from becoming a problem in the first place. Try joining a class, or look online for free classes and exercises.

Exercise (even for a few minutes). Exercise doesn't necessarily mean power lifting at the gym or training for a

marathon. A short walk around the office or simply standing up to stretch during a break at work can offer immediate relief in a stressful situation. Getting your blood moving releases endorphins and can improve your mood almost instantaneously.

Sleep better. Everyone knows stress can cause you to lose sleep. Unfortunately, lack of sleep is also a key cause of stress. This vicious cycle causes the brain and body to get out of whack and only gets worse with time. Make it a point to get the doctor-recommended seven to eight hours of sleep. Turn the TV off earlier, manage your time, and do your best to get into bed. It may be the most effective stress buster on our list.

Breathe easy. The advice "take a deep breath" may seem like a cliché, but it holds true when it comes to stress. For an easy three- to five-minute exercise, sit up in your chair with your feet flat on the floor and hands on top of your knees. Breathe in and out slowly and deeply, concentrating on your lungs as they expand fully in your chest. While shallow breathing causes stress, deep breathing oxygenates your blood, helps center your body, and clears your mind.

Stress is an unavoidable part of life, but that doesn't mean you should ignore it. Too much untreated stress can cause potentially serious physical and mental health problems. The good news is that in many cases, stress is fairly manageable. With some patience and putting into practice a few useful strategies, you can reduce your stress, whether it's family stress, or stress at the workplace. ■

CREATIVE SILENCE

By Sumit Dhamija

Where I live, there are wide, sweeping farmlands, huge mountains jutting their peaks into the sky, and broad rivers lazily moving over rocks. The land is as peaceful as it always has been, but the people who live here, like anywhere in the world, are often stressed.

Dr. Hans Selye, a prominent medical research scientist, has observed, “In this hurry-up world we are subjecting ourselves to too many stresses. We hurry constantly and worry incessantly.” Unfortunately, many have yet to learn to develop inner peace.

An excellent technique for overcoming stress is the practice of silence. It entails going into a quiet place and doing your best to be still and shift your mind into neutral. William James (1842–1910) said, “It is as important to cultivate your silence power as it is your word power,” and Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) declared, “Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together.”

I recently read an interview with a rubber manufacturer who pointed out that his industry did not learn to make efficient tires until they were redesigned to absorb road shock rather than merely to resist it. We too would be more successful if we learned to relax and let the pressures and stress of life flow right through us rather than rigidly battling them. ■



LAUGHING WITH ABANDON

By Theresa Nelson

How easy it is to listen to the advice of others and change ourselves into something we are not. To quit being our unique and wonderfully made selves, and to base our worth on what others think.

An elderly family member came for a visit. “A lady does not laugh with her mouth wide open, head thrown back, submitting all viewers to the spectacle of her tonsils,” she advised.

I was crushed. “Do I really laugh like that?”

She did an imitation of me that was pretty frightening.

I grew careful. I would catch myself laughing, enjoying the moment, but then my relative’s words and impersonation would flash through my thoughts. So I’d close my mouth a little to shield spectators from the sight of my back teeth, lower my chin until I was looking straight ahead, and try to relax my lips into a smaller, more controlled shape and manner.

I wanted to enjoy life, laugh with abandon, but my self-consciousness haunted me and was stealing my joy.

Then one day I forgot and laughed like I had before. The sun kept shining. No one said my tonsils were unusually shaped. No one moved away calling me a hyena. I began laughing again, enjoying the sound and rhythm.

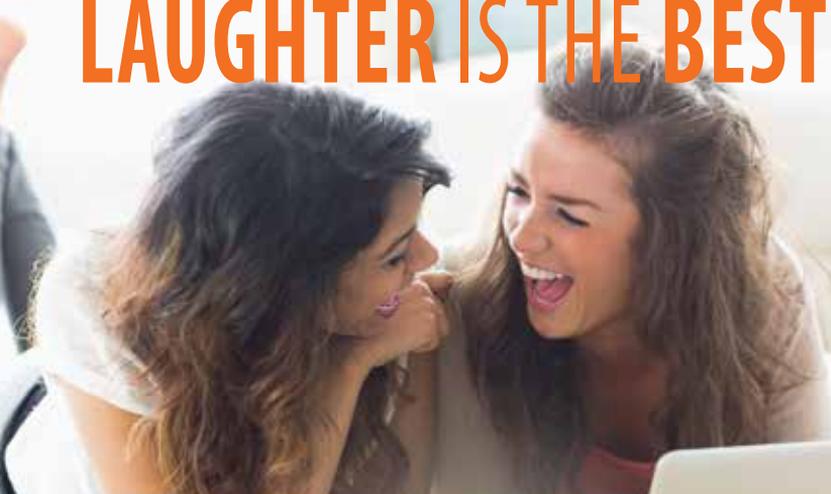
One day while in Ireland with family, my daughter, who loves to snap pictures unawares, took a candid camera photo of me laughing. It is one of my favorite images.

We had stopped on the sidewalk during our walk around Dublin and had started joking with each other. In the picture I am sharing a laugh with my dad. My arm is reaching out to touch him, my head is tipping back, my mouth is opening wide, and I am laughing. Not just with my voice and lips, but with my whole body. My whole being.

That’s how I want to approach life. Laughing. Truly laughing and enjoying this temporal, messy, and yet wonderful life that is God’s gift to me. ■



LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE



The health benefits of humor and laughter

Adapted Web Reprint, excerpts

Humor is infectious. The sound of roaring laughter is far more contagious than any cough, snuffle, or sneeze. When laughter is shared, it binds people together and increases happiness and intimacy. Laughter also triggers healthy physical changes in the body. Humor and laughter strengthen your immune system, boost your energy, diminish pain, and protect you from the

emotional health.

Laughter makes you feel good. And the good feeling that you get when you laugh remains with you even after the laughter subsides. Humor helps you keep a positive, optimistic outlook through difficult situations, disappointments, and loss. Even in the most difficult of times, a laugh—or even simply a smile—can go a long way toward making you feel better.

The Benefits of Laughter

Physical Health Benefits:

- Boosts immunity
- Lowers stress hormones
- Decreases pain
- Relaxes your muscles
- Prevents heart disease

Mental Health Benefits:

- Adds joy and zest to life
- Eases anxiety and fear
- Relieves stress
- Improves mood
- Enhances resilience

Social Benefits:

- Strengthens relationships
- Attracts others to us
- Enhances teamwork
- Helps defuse conflict
- Promotes group bonding

damaging effects of stress. Best of all, this priceless medicine is fun, free, and easy to use.

With so much power to heal and renew, the ability to laugh easily and frequently is a tremendous resource for surmounting problems, enhancing your relationships, and supporting both physical and

And laughter really is contagious—just hearing laughter primes your brain and readies you to smile and join in the fun.

Laughing with others is more powerful than laughing alone. Shared laughter is one of the most effective tools for keeping relationships fresh and exciting. All emotional sharing builds strong and

lasting relationship bonds, but sharing laughter and play also adds joy, vitality, and resilience. Laughter unites people during difficult times.

One essential characteristic that helps us laugh is not taking ourselves too seriously. We've all known the classic tight-jawed sourpuss who takes everything with deathly seriousness and never laughs at anything. No fun there!

Some events are clearly sad and not occasions for laughter. But most events in life don't carry an overwhelming sense of either sadness or delight. They fall into the gray zone of ordinary life—giving you the choice to laugh or not.

Life brings challenges that can

either get the best of you or become playthings for your imagination. When you “become the problem” and take yourself too seriously, it can be hard to think outside the box and find new solutions. But when you play with the problem, you can often transform it into an opportunity for creative learning.

As laughter, humor, and play become an integrated part of your life, your creativity will flourish and new discoveries for playing with friends, coworkers, acquaintances, and loved ones will occur to you daily. Humor takes you to a higher place where you can view the world from a more relaxed, positive, creative, joyful, and balanced perspective. ■

A Stress Anecdote

Adapted Web Reprint

The opportunities for laughter in the world are many, but if we do not look for them, then life can often be dull and gloomy. Try to find happiness in little things around you, spend time with people who can give you hope, and you will see a new side of life. Here is a humorous anecdote that will give you a good laugh.

Stress Management

Sometimes it's hard not to get all stressed-out from teaching. I remember one particular day, not long ago, a colleague walked into the teacher's room and saw me madly dashing about trying to make photocopies, cue a tape, and looking through some resource books for a good warm-up.

I must have looked quite stressed out because she asked me what was going on. I breathlessly explained that I was trying to get ahead with my lesson planning because someone was going to have to sub for me the next day.

“Are you sick?” she asked worriedly.

“No, no, nothing like that,” I answered while still having my nose in a book, turning off the photocopier, and rewinding a tape. “I've been asked to give a presentation.”

“On what?” she said.

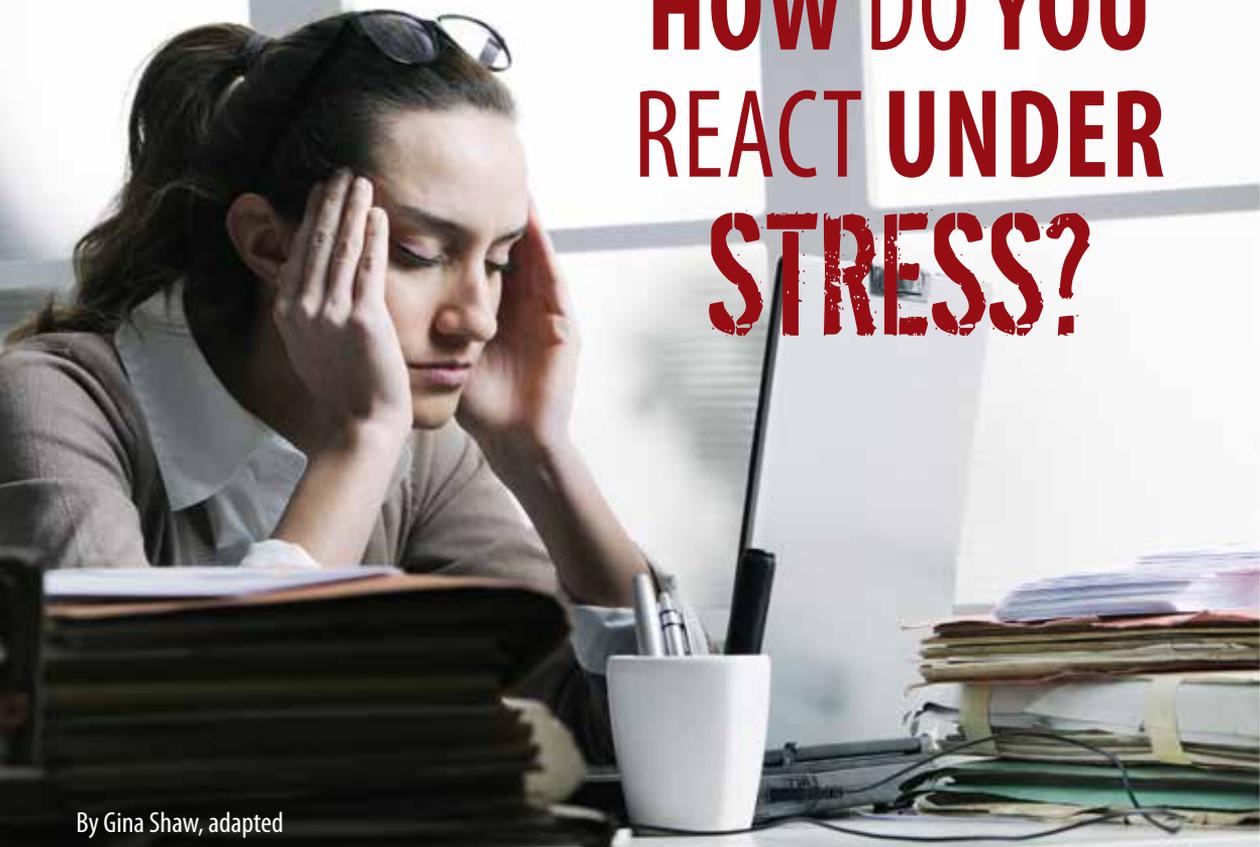
“Stress management,” I replied.

At that moment, there was complete silence. We just looked at each other for a few seconds and then burst out laughing. ■

—Linda Bawcom



STRESS TEST: HOW DO YOU REACT UNDER STRESS?



By Gina Shaw, adapted

Everybody has a different response to stress. Some people turn to unhealthy habits like eating junk food or vegging in front of the TV. Stress can make it hard for some people to sleep. There are a few common “stress personalities.” See which one you might have, and learn how to handle stress in a healthy way that sets a good example for your kids.

- 1.** You get cut off in traffic—for the fifth time today. Are you more likely to:
 - a.** Hurl a few profanities and hit your steering wheel.

- b.** Swallow your rage and think about anything but traffic.
- c.** Pop a pill for your pounding headache.
- d.** Take some deep breaths.

2. The laundry is piling up, the toilet’s overflowing, the kids are screaming, and your partner asks when dinner will be ready. Do you:

- a.** Yell, “When you figure out how to turn on the stove!”
- b.** Hide in your bedroom and watch TV.
- c.** Eat a big bowl of ice cream.

- d. Calmly ask your partner to tackle the toilet while you take the kids for a walk around the block to reset.
3. You've missed an important work deadline and your boss is upset. Do you:
- a. Get mad at the co-worker who let you down on the project.
 - b. Lay low in your cubicle until the storm passes.
 - c. Lie awake all night worrying that you'll get fired.
 - d. Write down your worries on a piece of paper. Crumple it up and throw it away. Then, make a plan and talk about next steps with your boss.

Answer Key

- If you mostly answered D, congratulations! You're a stress-fighting champion who really knows how to handle stress in healthy ways. Keep up the good work and carry on!

- If you mostly answered A, you tend to be an "over-reacter" to stress. You may yell, throw things, or slam doors, and lash out when you get stressed.

- Mostly Bs, and you're a "withdrawer." You probably pull away from conflict and stress and isolate yourself.

- Mostly Cs, and you're what psychologists call a "somatizer." You're likely someone who feels stress as physical symptoms like headaches, stomachaches, and sleep problems. Or you may turn to unhealthy behaviors like eating junk food.

No matter your stress personality, the key is to find healthier ways to deal with your stressful feelings—and then explain

to your kids how they, too, can feel better by using those same helpful coping tools.

If your kids see you handle stress with unhealthy habits, like stress-eating, they can learn to do the same things. Actions often speak louder than words when it comes to parenting.

First things first: Coping with stress in a healthy way doesn't mean completely overriding or suppressing your natural reactions. Instead, manage your reactions and move on.

If you're an "over-reacter," try another way to physically express your emotions besides screaming at people. Go for a run or take a walk with the kids. Or get into the water if you can. Physical activity can do more than just help you burn off angry energy. Explain to the kids that exercise triggers the "feel-good" part of the brain. You should feel better and more relaxed when you've spent some time moving.

If you're a "withdrawer" and tend to slide away and hole up, set a timer. Go off and withdraw for 5 or 10 minutes, but when the timer goes off, come back and face the situation. You may want to listen to soothing music or try meditation while you take your sanity break, and make sure it's away from junk food.

If you're a "somatizer" and you feel your stress through headaches, stomachaches, and other physical symptoms, you might benefit from doing a writing exercise. Write a letter to the person who's the biggest source of your stress, or write about the stress to someone you respect: God, your mother, your beloved grandmother, or a friend. Then turn the paper over and write a letter back to yourself from that person. You'll be amazed at what a release you feel. ■

STRESS Relief

NOTABLE
QUOTES



Stress is not what happens to us. It's our response to what happens. And response is something we can choose.

—Maureen Killoran

The truth is that stress doesn't come from your boss, your kids, your spouse, traffic jams, health challenges, or other circumstances. It comes from your thoughts about these circumstances.

—Andrew Bernstein

Our anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, but only empties today of its strength.—Charles Spurgeon

It makes no sense to worry about things you have no control over, because there's nothing you can do about them, and why worry about things you do control? The activity of worrying keeps you immobilized.—Wayne Dyer

Stress is the trash of modern life—we all generate it but if you don't dispose of it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life.—Terri Guillemets

Believing that you must do something perfectly is a recipe for stress, and you'll associate that stress with the task and thus condition yourself to avoid it.

—Steve Pavlina

For fast-acting relief, try slowing down.—Lily Tomlin

Your sense of humor is one of the most powerful tools you have to make certain that your daily mood and emotional state support good health.—Paul E. McGhee, Ph.D.

Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.—Chinese Proverb

