

Overcoming Stress: Seven Ways To Manage Stress In The New Year

By Constance Weygandt

Constance Weygandt is an author, speaker and balance mentor. For more information on health and fitness or to receive her newsletter, visit her website at <http://www.balancedwellnessonline.com>

Because of the fast paced nature of our society, overcoming or reducing stress has made it to the list of top ten New Year's Resolutions. Approximately 19 million Americans suffer from stress related illnesses. The hormone, cortisol, is released during stressful events. When stimulated constantly, over time, it can lead to mental disturbances and a risk of infection and disease. Learning to manage stress leads to healthier and happier living.

Here are seven solutions for regulating stress.

- **Adequate Sleep.** Sleep is the number one defense against stress. It allows the mind and body to rejuvenate. When we awaken refreshed, we are more able to handle stressful situations. For the average person, adequate sleep is eight to ten hours of uninterrupted sleep.
- **Meditation.** Meditation is the opposite of the fight or flight mechanism. It is a deep state of restful awareness that counters stress. Practicing twenty minutes a day helps us to remain calm in stressful situations. Deep breathing, relaxation techniques or visualization are all helpful in lowering cortisol levels.
- **Exercise.** Resistance Training or lifting weights has proven to be very effective in controlling stress. A high intensity workout, of no more than sixty minutes, is a successful strategy in stress management. A moderate aerobic workout, such as walking or bicycling for thirty to forty minutes, three times a week, is also effective. A balance of both types of exercise is optimal.
- **A Balanced Diet.** A healthy diet containing B vitamins and magnesium helps to relieve chronic tension. B vitamins are essential for stress management. Magnesium helps to ease muscle tension, stress and anxiety. When exercising to reduce stress, a balance of carbohydrates and protein is necessary.
- **Laughter.** Laughter boosts the body's immune system and reduces the amount of hormones, such as cortisol, that your body produces during stressful times. One way of using laughter is to picture the ridiculous. The next time you feel that you are losing your mind, picture your brain flying out of your head and landing someplace silly, like in the soup. Go to a good comedy show or rent a tape. As well as reducing stress, laughter has healing properties.
- **Attitude.** Chronic stress is a factor of how we perceive the events surrounding us. We can remain optimistic when confronted with challenges or a new situation. How we perceive situations is a choice. When looking at a situation, break it down into manageable components. Instead of making sweeping negative statements, look at the situation realistically and create steps for resolving it.
- **Be social.** Studies have shown that people who are more active socially are better able to handle stressful situations. If you don't have one, set up a network of friends and family who are listeners. When you feel stressed, call someone in your network to talk or set up a date to do something fun. Allow your friends to be supportive.

Try one or more of these solutions if your New Year's Resolution is to reduce stress in your life. Any one of these will aid you in reducing stress levels. Choose one that is slightly above your comfort zone but workable for your lifestyle. Learning to manage stress will lead to a happier, healthier you.