

# TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR MANAGING STRESS

Many people don't realize it, but stress is a very natural and important part of life. Without stress there would be no life at all! We need stress (eustress), but not too much stress. Eustress helps keep us alert, motivates us to face challenges, and drives us to solve problems. These low levels of stress are manageable and can be thought of as necessary and normal stimulation.

Distress, on the other hand, results when our bodies over-react to events. It leads to what has been called a "fight or flight" reaction. Such reactions may have been useful in times long ago when our ancestors were frequently faced with life or death matters. Nowadays, such occurrences are not usual. Yet, we react to many daily situations as if they were life or death issues. Our bodies really don't know the difference between a saber-toothed tiger and a teacher correcting our work. It is how we perceive and interpret the events of life that dictates how our bodies react. If we think something is very scary or worrisome, our bodies react accordingly.

When we view something as manageable, though, our body doesn't go haywire; it remains alert, but not alarmed. The activation of our sympathetic nervous system ( a very important part of our general nervous system) mobilizes us for quick action. The more we sense danger (social or physical), the more our body reacts. Have you ever been called upon to give an extemporaneous talk and found that your heart pounded so loudly and your mouth was so dry that you thought you just couldn't do it? That's over-reaction.

Problems can occur when over activation of the sympathetic system is unnecessary. If we react too strongly or let the small over-reactions (the daily hassles) pile up, we may run into physical, as well as psychological, problems. Gastrointestinal problems (e.g., diarrhea or nausea), depression, or severe headaches can come about from acute distress. Insomnia, heart disease, and distress habits (e.g. drinking, overeating, smoking, and using drugs) can result from the accumulation of small distress.

What we all need is to learn approach matters in more realistic and reasonable ways. Strong reactions are better reserved for serious situations. Manageable reactions are better for the everyday issues that we all have to face. The following hints provide you with a program for managing stress.

## **Thou Shalt Organize Thyself**

Take better control of the way you're spending your time and energy so you can handle stress more effectively.

## **Thou Shalt Control Thy Environment . . .**

By controlling who and what is surrounding you. In this way, you can either get rid of stress or get support for yourself.

## **Thou Shalt Love Thyself. . . .**

By giving yourself positive feedback. Remember, you are a unique individual who is doing the best you can.

## **Thou Shalt Reward Thyself. . .**

By planning leisure activities into your life. It really helps to have something to look forward to.

## **Thou Shalt Exercise Thy Body . . .**

. . . since your health and productivity depend upon your body's ability to bring oxygen and food to its cells. There fore, exercise your heart and lungs regularly, a minimum of three days per week for 15-30 minutes. This includes such activities as walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, aerobics, etc.

## **Thou Shalt Relax Thyself . . .**

. . . as regularly as possible. Sleep 7-8 hours a night. Take study breaks. There is only so much your mind can absorb at one time. It needs time to process and integrate information. A general rule of thumb: take a ten-minute break every hour. Rest your eyes as well as your mind.

## **Thou Shalt be Aware of Thyself.**

Be aware of distress signals such as insomnia, headaches, anxiety, upset stomach, lack of concentration, colds/flu, excessive tiredness, etc. Remember, these can be signs of potentially more serious disorders (ie. Ulcers, hypertension, heart disease).

## **Thou Shalt Feed Thyself / Thou Shalt Not Poison Thy Body**

Eat a balanced diet. Avoid high calorie foods that are high in fats and sugar. Don't use drugs and/or alcohol. Caffeine will keep you awake, but it also makes it harder for someone to concentrate. Remember, a twenty- minute walk has been proven to be a good form of relaxing.

## **Enjoy Thyself.**

It has been shown that happier people tend to live longer, have less physical problems, and are more productive. Look for the humor in life when things don't make sense. Remember, you are very special and deserve only the best treatment from yourself.

## Cost Benefit Analysis – Anger

Often we fall into patterns of reacting to events with anger – in fact, we may think that anger is natural. Think of some of the situations in which you react with anger. For example, you may react with anger when you are stuck in traffic or another driver cuts you off. Or perhaps you become angry when a clerk is rude with you, or your food server is slow.

**Describe the situation.**

**How do you feel in the situation? What are your physical and emotional reactions?**

**What actions do you take?**

*E.g., You are working on a joint project and your partner has not been pulling their weight. You become very angry, and your whole body becomes tense when they are in the room with you. You start criticizing the work they have done, and complain about the headaches you've been having lately. You end up doing most of the work yourself, and feel very resentful.*

Advantages of feelings	Disadvantages of feelings
<i>e.g., the anger I feel indicates that there may be an injustice. Being angry is better than being passive and letting everyone walk all over me.</i>	<i>e.g., I can't focus on my work when I'm angry, and I've been getting a lot of headaches and feeling tired when I get home. My partner doesn't seem to be bothered by my criticisms, and this just makes me angrier. I seem to be getting the short end of the stick all around.</i>

Am I responding appropriately? Are there better ways of approaching the situation?

E.g., I could try to discuss the situation with my partner in a calm manner. If that doesn't work, I might have to talk to our supervisor or maybe the three of us should meet. It seems that the anger is only?

## Relaxation Tips

- Practice every day to get the most out of relaxation. Aim at being able to relax anywhere, anytime.
- There are several relaxation tapes on the market. If you find tensing/relaxation sequences are not enough for you (after practicing), tapes may help you achieve relaxation.
- Free yourself of distractions: unplug the phone, turn off the television, and choose a quiet and calming space to relax.
- Imagery works well for some people. Close your eyes, picture a peaceful scene, and let the tension out of your body.
- Meditation and yoga are excellent techniques.
- Treat yourself to a massage.
- Find out what works for you. This may be a walk, more vigorous exercise, visiting with friends, or spending some time alone. For some people, spending time with pets is very relaxing. The technique itself is not important – what is important is finding something that produces relaxation in you, and that you can easily do frequently.

## Food For Strength

To effectively deal with or cope with stress in your life today, and to avoid stress and live a more positive life in the future, there are three areas in our lives that we must monitor to ensure we are doing what is right.

They are:

Diet

Exercise

Ability to relax

The area that I would like to examine here is diet. I do not plan to go into a lot of detail about calorie intake or review with you a number of foods that help bring relaxation. This will consist of a brief look at vitamins and minerals and an examination of eight (8) anti-stress foods.

Your nervous system is made up of billions of individual nerve cell. Each cell has a life of its own. The health of each cell depends upon receiving the proper nutrients it requires to function.

The blood carries nutrients to your nerve cells and also transports the waste products away from the cells. The blood receives these nutrients from the food that you eat – picking them up mainly through the intestinal walls of your body. The intestines are the places where you break down all the foods you eat.

Your blood is cleaned of the waste products it picks up from the cells as the blood passes through your liver and your lungs.

It is important to remember that your blood is neutral. It will transport to your nerve cells and to other body cells whatever you decide to give it to transport. Therefore, to strengthen your nervous system, you must know what nutrients those nerve cells need and what toxins or other substances those cells don't need. Accordingly, you must include in your diet those foods that give you the positive nutrients and exclude those that give you the negative substances.

First, let's look at the vitamins and minerals your nerve cells need to maintain optimal health.

### Vitamin C

The cold and flu vitamin. More than that when you are sick, it is "C" that acts to speed up your body's self – healing mechanisms. It plays an essential role in literally all of your body's vital functions – particularly in the functioning of the adrenal glands. The adrenals are your power houses, and if weakened through stress, the entire body is affected in several adverse ways. Stress wears you body down, "C" helps build you back up again.

## Vitamins A and D

Optimal amounts of A will help retard infections or breakdown of the success membranes during periods of chronic tension and exhaustion. Vitamin A is involved with the maintenance of healthy nerve cell walls. Vitamin D regulates your body's absorption of calcium and phosphorous, the two minerals that are essential in developing greater nerves strength.

## Vitamin E

Vitamin E is a matter of the heart. It is known as the "anti-heart attack vitamin" because of its oxygenizing effect on your muscles, especially your heart muscle. E makes it possible for the muscles and nerves to your heart to function with less oxygen and thus increases your heart's stamina. It expands the smallest of your blood vessels, allowing a greater flow of blood to the heart. This lowers high blood pressure. E (prevents blood clots from forming, and protects the lungs against environmental pollution. Vitamin E literally ensures that you live longer.

## Vitamin B – Complex

The B – complex vitamins play such an important role in strengthening your nerves that they are referred to as the "stress vitamin complex". The prevent fatigue and increase stamina, they contribute toward greater circulation of the blood. B – complex vitamins affect virtually every vital function of your body. "Pantothenic acid" is used as an anti – stress factor for its protection against toxicity, adrenal gland exhaustion and low blood sugar, just to name one of the B-complex vitamins.

Of all the vitamins and minerals, the B-complex vitamins are the most effective in helping you eliminate stress.

## Calcium and Phosphorus

Calcium is very important for the health of the nervous system; stress depletes you calcium supply. Calcium is essential in regulating your heart. It is for the normal clotting of blood. Calcium speeds up healing in the body. It maintains the balance of several other minerals which affect your nerves. Phosphorus is a partner to calcium. The two work together in your body affecting your mental clarity and general nerve strength.

## Magnesium

Calcium depends on magnesium to be assimilated by the body. There is an important balance that must be maintained between the two. Magnesium is required to help your heart beat regularly. It is a natural tranquilizer and deficiency causes nervous irritability and depression.

## Iron

Iron improves the quality of your blood. It aids in the transfer of oxygen from your lungs to your nerve cells. It acts as a natural resistant to stress, preventing that run down feeling, shortness of breath and susceptibility to sickness that chronic stress invites.

## Copper

You can't absorb iron unless you have copper with it. Because the highest concentrations of copper are found in the brain, kidneys and liver suggests that copper is a nutrient crucial to the nervous system.

## **THE EIGHT ANTI-STRESS FOODS**

### **Bananas**

The banana is a food for your nervous system. It contains vitamin A, most B-complex vitamins, and vitamin C. It is a storehouse of minerals – Iron, calcium, potassium, copper, and magnesium. Its natural sweetness does not harm the body in any way. The banana is a good “ulcer” food. It also soothes the mucous membranes and is easily digested. To obtain all of its nutrients you should scrape the inside of the peel with a spoon. Most of the nutrients reside in the peel.

### **Almonds**

Almonds contain all the B-complex vitamins, copper, iron, phosphorus, calcium, potassium. Its extremely high protein make-up gives you sustained energy over a long period of time. The almond is best eaten without the skin. The skin does not add to the nutritional benefit and is difficult to digest. Eating 5-15 will provide the full effect.

### **Raisins**

The raisin is a delicious, nutritional food which helps remedy stress. Its extremely rich in iron, and also contains calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, copper plus vitamin B1 and B6. A handful at a time is all you need. Drink a glass of water to make up for the water lost from the grape.

### **Broccoli and Spinach**

Of all foods with life, it's the fresh green vegetables that top the food list. Broccoli and spinach provide much vitality and specific nervous system nutrients. Spinach is abundant in vitamin A, broccoli in vitamin C. They have quantities of B-complex vitamins, potassium, calcium, magnesium, iron and copper. Try to prepare these foods as little as possible before serving.

## **Wheat Germ**

In wheat germ lies 70% of the value of the whole-wheat seed. It is rich in B-complex vitamins, vitamin E, iron, phosphorus, magnesium, copper and potassium. Wheat germ should be kept refrigerated and can be sprinkled on foods or added to recipes.

## **Sunflower Seeds**

It is packed full of vitamin E and some B vitamins. They should be purchased already shelled and are best if eaten not toasted without salt.

## **Milk and Honey**

A glass of warm milk sweetened with honey at bedtime is hard to beat. The calcium in the milk is good for the nervous system plus the warmth of the milk relaxes your stomach area. There are also traces of potassium, phosphorus and vitamins B and B12.

## **Survival Cookies**

2 cups butter	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups large-flake oats
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups brown sugar	$\frac{3}{4}$ cups flax seed
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups granulated sugar	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups sunflower seeds
3 eggs	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups pumpkin seeds
1 tablespoon vanilla	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups raisins
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose flour	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup wheat germ
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons baking soda	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup coconut
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt	

In a food processor or large bowl, cream butter with sugars until light. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Blend in vanilla.

In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking soda, and salt. Stir into batter. By hand, stir in remaining ingredients.

Using  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup batter for each cookie, place on parchment-lined baking sheets about 2 inches apart. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Bake in a pre-heated 350 degree oven for about 15 minutes or until cookies are crisp but still chewy. Cool on racks. Store in an airtight container or Ziploc bags.

# 15 Must – Do Annual Chores

1. **January** – Begin with the master bedroom. Clean curtains, closets, drawers and bed linens; wipe down walls, baseboards and floors.  
**Tip:** To clean mini-blinds, slip your hand into a sock and dip into soapy warm water.
2. **February** – Tackle all other bedrooms. Clean curtains, closets, drawers, dressers and bed linens; wipe down walls, baseboards and floors. If you really love clutter, set it free!
3. **March** – Bathroom, wash curtains, disgusting sink and tub drains, walls, floors, organize medicine cabinets, clean out linen closets and turn old towels into rags.
4. **April** – Kitchen, clean windows, walls, floors, sink, appliances and oil furniture. Straighten items in cabinets pantry, wipe the top of cupboards and replace old shelf paper. Save money by vacuuming the back of appliances.
5. **May** – Storage rooms, clean out freezer, closets and bookcases, wash windows, shelves walls and floors.
6. **June** – Outdoors: clean awnings, sidewalks, furniture, garbage cans and windows and screens.
7. **July** – Living room, clean curtains, walls, floors, furniture, coasters, picture frames, carpets and rugs.  
**Tip:** To clean pet hair off furniture, wear a damp rubber glove and run your along the sofa.
8. **August** – Organize and clean out closets and dressers, hallway and stairs.
9. **September** – Bathrooms, clean walls, floors, cupboards, linen closets.  
**Tip:** If a bathroom rack becomes loose, remove the screws, wrap some cotton around them, dip into glue and replace screws (or nails) in original holes. Wait until glue dries before using the rack.
10. **October** – Kitchen and dining room, repeat the task of April duties but include china cabinet.
11. **November** – Family room, clean toys and toss broken ones, wash windows, floors, walls and furniture. Polish silverware and inspect holiday placemats, dishes and decorations.
12. **December** – This is a busy time of year, therefore keep the jobs to a minimum. Take an hour to organize and clean the office and sewing room. If at all possible try to tidy high-traffic areas (especially the bathroom) because company may be on the way.

- 13. Additionally, every month** – Vacuum air supply and air return registers, check that fire extinguishers are charged, clean garbage disposal by grinding up ice cubes (freshen with baking soda and ½ a lemon), check for cracks in caulking around sinks, bathtubs, toilets, countertops, backsplashes, faucets, windowsills, clean dirty filter in range hood fan.
- 14. Every six months** – Check for exterior caulking cracks on windows, touch-up peeling paint, tighten screws and additional hardware, test smoke detectors and change batteries, lubricate doors, clean sliding door tracks with a silicone spray (not oil), oil moving parts of garage doors, check electrical cords for fraying parts, inspect roof, shingles, clean gutters and downspouts. Have a professional checkup on A/C, inspect water lines and valves for leaks, note windows and screen troubles, clean exhaust fans in water lines and valves for leaks, note windows and screens troubles, clean exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchen, weed out unused clothing that can be donated to appropriate agencies. Fertilize and clean plants by hosing them in the shower, wipe ceiling fan blades, wash out the chest freezer using baking soda and water.
- 15. Once a year** – Check attic vents for insulation blockage and signs of roof leaks, have chimney and furnace cleaned, remove water heater residue according to manual, pressure clean roof tiles, pool, deck, driveway and walks, clean dryer vent pipe (to prevent fire), shampoo carpets.

## Resources

- Family Doctor  
Have regular physicals. Don't assume troublesome or persistent symptoms are stress related. Physicians can make referrals to other professionals if necessary.
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- Psychiatrists are medical doctors who specialize in mental health. They prescribe medication, and some provide psychotherapy as well.
- Clinical psychologists have a PhD (Some may have an M.A.) and can provide psychotherapy. Hospital based psychologists are covered by public health insurance, but others may not be. Your insurance may cover in private practice.
- Family therapists and marriage counselors are trained in counseling (some may be social workers, or may have a post-graduated degree).
- Self-help groups

## Contact Numbers

<b>Social Agencies</b>	<b>Number</b>
Addictions Foundation of Manitoba	944 – 6200
Canadian Mental Health Association	982 – 6100
Child and Family Services	944 – 4050
Crisis Line/Klinik	786 - 6688
Evolve	784 - 4070
Osborne Crisis Line and Shelter for Abused Women	942 – 3052
Psychological Association of Manitoba	487 – 0784
Sexual Assault Crisis Line/Klinik	786 – 8631
Social Service, City of Winnipeg	986 – 4300
Women's Health Clinic	947 - 1517

