

# How to Stress Less and Smile More

*The six fundamental steps to improved health, greater happiness and life balance!*

By Lisa Branigan, Life Coach

More than two-thirds of visits to doctors' surgeries are for stress-related illnesses. Stress has been linked to headaches, backaches, insomnia, anger, cramps, elevated blood pressure, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and lowered resistance to infection.

For women, stress is a key factor in hormonal imbalances resulting in menstrual irregularities, PMS, fibroids, endometriosis and fertility problems. Stress can also be a factor in the development of almost all disease states, including cancer and heart disease; the leading cause of death in Australian women.

In most cases stress is a result of letting life get out of balance. This happens when we put all our energy into only one or two areas of our life (usually work) and ignore the rest. We take on too much, over-promise, don't delegate and push our own wants and needs into the background by always looking after others needs first. We overload ourselves to the point where we are forced to stop attending to what is important to us, such as time for our interests and time to spend with our families.

If stress is a major issue for you there are steps you can take to restore balance to your life - so you can stress less and smile more.

## **Step One: Develop extreme self-care**

Most people suffering stress have become good at practising extreme self-neglect! They don't eat well, rarely exercise or take time out and probably can't remember the last time they had a holiday.

If you are one of these people you need to take your self-care to new heights, above and beyond your normal limit. When you take care of your own needs first you are building a reserve of energy and resources that will enable you to sustain extreme self-care with enough left over to care for others.

Creating 10 delightful daily habits that give you enjoyment is a great place to start. Here are some suggestions.

Stretch for 2 minutes

Laugh for 5 minutes

Floss your teeth

Read to a child

Hug a loved one

Go for a 10-minute walk in the park

Listen to your favourite song

Write in a journal

Eat 3 fruit and 5 veg

Read a chapter of your favourite book

Drink 2 litres of water

Go to bed early

The key to gaining accumulated benefits from your daily habits and practising extreme self-care is to do them each day. Start with one habit and commit to practising it for seven days, then add another, practising both for another seven days. Continue adding your habits until you are practising all 10 items on your list daily.

### **Step Two: Eliminate tolerations**

Tolerations are situations and conditions you put up with that drain you physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. They include crossed boundaries, unfinished business or projects, others' bad behaviour, frustrations, unwanted commitments, clutter, messy surroundings, broken items, being over weight, weeds in the garden and debt.

List five tolerations that drive you nuts about your job, life, and health and home and then devise a plan to get rid of the first 'intolerable' toleration on your list this week. Notice how this makes you feel, how it lifts a weight off your shoulders. Now think about how much better you will feel when you get rid of the other four tolerations on your list! When you've completed the elimination of the first five tolerations you've listed, start a new one and keep working until you have zero tolerations in your life.

### **Step Three: Having your needs met!**

Unmet needs cause us to become upset, angry, stressed and depressed. The key to satisfying our personal needs is to identify them. Identify needs that feel authentic, not ones that may look good to others or are superficial. Be aware that what you consider to be a need (such as to be loved) may be covering a real need (self-esteem). Ideas of personal needs are:

Calmness	Respect	Security
Freedom	A life purpose	Being loved
Being listened to	Satisfying work	Balance
Independence	Honesty	Responsibility
Feeling valued	Loyalty	A career
Stability	Being busy	Children

It may be necessary for you to tell others what your needs are and learn to ask for support.

### **Step Four: Smile often and laugh more!**

Scientists have found that laughter stimulates the release of beneficial brain neurotransmitters and hormones, which can reduce stress, improve our immune system and give us a general sense of wellbeing. Some doctors are using laughter therapy to replace anti-depressants and to reduce the use of painkillers. According to researchers faking laughter will also produce the same health and wellbeing results as real laughter.

Do you need to improve your ability to laugh more? Bronwen Williams from Laughter Works Australia recommends that upon waking we should sit upright in

bed or in a chair and smile vigorously and ridiculously. This muscular action induces the release of endorphins and within minutes we actually feel happy!

Bronwen writes that: “Positive self-talk can be very empowering, so let's begin our days with loud statements such as I love laughing! People love hearing me laugh! Laughing makes me happy and healthy! I have a beautiful smile! Lets express not suppress, lets laugh and live longer!”

### **Step Five: Set Goals**

Without goals we have no direction in life. We are lost! When we are lost we become stressed and overwhelmed. Goals help us navigate our lives with greater ease and reaching goals fulfils us, making us happier.

One way to find out what your real goals are is to write a list of 100 things you'd like to accomplish before you die and then start working on your list today!

When you set a goal it tells your subconscious mind what is important to you and to be on the lookout for things, people, opportunities or situations that will enable you to move towards your goal. Establishing goals is a tool we can use to have what we want and need in our personal and professional lives.

### **Step Six: Create a supportive environment**

Our surroundings can be supportive and give us energy or drag us down and leave us stressed and tired. An inspiring, enjoyable environment filled with positive things and people energises us and we feel happier. We all need good support structures to help our lives flow with less effort and to remain balanced.

Five important life support structures are:

- People: family, friends, life coach, accountant, doctor, housekeeper
- Places: your office, desk, car, home
- Things: your phone, computer, home decor
- Processes: filing system, record keeping, time management program
- Inner Environment: your outlook on life, self-esteem level, thought processes

Examine these five categories and look at who or what you use to support you in each area. Are you truly being supported? What do you need to change to feel more supported in all areas of your life?

Start making the easiest changes first. Just as it can take time to end up stressed, overwhelmed and out of balance, it also takes time to make positive changes in your life. Sometimes trying to implement change (even for the better) can itself cause stress and prevent a person remaining motivated.

Making changes in your life can be stressful, even if the changes are aimed at reducing stress. For this reason it is important to work on each of the steps one at a time, mastering each before moving on to the next. If you discover you can't make

the changes on your own, get support from a counsellor, doctor, naturopath, friend, peer or life coach who specialises in stress issues.

Above all, keep in mind the benefits you will enjoy when you've mastered the steps to stress less and smile more!

- Lisa Branigan specialises in coaching women who are stressed, tired and overwhelmed with their busy lives. For further information:  
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