

Stress-Busting Tips

Divorce is one of the most stressful life events you can experience, but there are some valuable ways — both physical and mental — you can reduce your anxiety levels.

COUNT TO TEN. Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit — perhaps a park bench during your lunch break, or a favorite chair at home. Don't lie down unless you're certain you won't fall asleep. Start to take slow, deep breaths. Think "one inhale" as you breathe in, and "one exhale" as you breathe out; you'll count the next breath as "two inhale, two exhale," up to "ten inhale, ten exhale." Then start again from "one inhale." If you lose your place, start again from "one inhale." The counting helps to focus and quiet your mind, shutting out intrusive, stressful thoughts. Continue counting your deep breaths for 10 minutes once or twice a day.

LAUGH IT OFF. From a tiny giggle to a side-splitting guffaw, laughter can help to reduce stress. Research has found that laughter initiates the release of beta-endorphins — the same "feel-good" natural relaxants that are released during exercise. Endorphins also block cortisol, a hormone that can affect your blood pressure, immune system, and weight. Rent a comedy video or go see a funny movie; read a book that has you in stitches; subscribe to your local comedy TV station; and hang out with people who make you laugh. Or pick up a copy of *Health, Healing, and the Amuse System: Humor as Survival Training* by humor-research pioneer Dr. Paul McGhee at www.laughterremedy.com.

JUST WALK AWAY. Any exercise, even a leisurely 20-minute stroll, has

the ability to reduce stress. Make your walk extra-relaxing by listening to a soothing audiotape and/or by taking your walk in pleasant surroundings. Keep your eyes open, though: you don't want to walk into traffic or other pedestrians!

WRITE IT OUT.

You've probably heard about the power of journaling: writing down your thoughts, feelings, and experiences on a daily basis can help to unburden both your mind and body. So for the next couple of weeks, try to spend at least 20 minutes a day writing in a journal. Jot down the details of a stressful day or an encounter with your ex. You're not looking for prizes for style or grammar here: the point is to get as much into your journal and off your chest as quickly as possible. You can keep your journal(s) for future reference — so you can see how far you've come — or you can burn them as part of a "letting go" ritual.

TUNE IT OUT. Slow music has been shown to ease anxiety as well as lower blood pressure and heart rate. Try something from the Solitudes collection; some of their titles feature only nature sounds (waterfalls, babbling brooks, gentle surf breaking on the seashore), and others combine nature



sounds with music. Check out the "Relaxation" section under "Discography" at www.solitudes.com.

PRACTICE YOGA. Hatha Yoga can help you release built-up tension and stress, strengthening the body while calming the mind. Once you've learned the poses (preferably from a qualified instructor), all you need is a quiet, comfortable place and about 20-40 minutes each day to breathe and stretch your stress away. "People who practice yoga and meditation report they have more self-confidence, sleep better and eat better and that their stress and anxiety levels are greatly reduced," says Helen Goldstein, director of The Yoga Studio in Toronto. "And 20 minutes of meditation has the positive effects of two-to-three hours of sleep." ■

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