

Practical Health



Ten Ways to Reduce Stress in Everyday Life that take less than 5 minutes

by Susan Living

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Susan Living is a health coach, writer and speaker. She provides small business owners with unique, low-cost and practical solutions to improve the health and productivity of their staff. Susan is passionate about health and well-being and getting the message out there that vibrant health is attainable by all. Visit her website to find out more.

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May you take with you as you read...
an increased sense of your own power of choice -
your freedom to take what you like into your body;
to choose health even when faced with negativity,
pain and disease;
to see opportunity for growth
rather than limitation and mostly,
to celebrate and appreciate your body and mind;
they do amazing things every moment of every day.

Susan Living

What is practical health?

Health is a 100% practical concept. No matter how many books you read or practitioners you see, if it's not a part of your daily life and attitude, no results will be forthcoming.

I created this report to put some perspective on what health actually means. It is an abstract concept, after all. It's so subjective, how do we actually quantify it? If you're reading this, chances are you already know that health is so much more than simply an absence of disease. So, before we begin, I'd like you to ask yourself: What does health look like to me? What does health feel like and how will I know it when I've got it?

For some, it may be a clear, calm mind. For others, feeling physically energetic so they bounce out of bed and straight into their morning exercise program. Maybe it's feeling good doing EVERYTHING you need to be it work, cooking, cleaning, driving, enjoying your children and doing for them, having really stimulating conversations or looking after yourself. Perhaps that's what health looks like: simply making health important enough in your daily life so you do what's necessary to prolong your time on earth.

Good. Have you done it? Don't read any more until you have put your thoughts and ideas down about health - remember, it's a 100% practical thing! Picking up a pen is doing something while continuing to read may not be. So pick up a pen and make this relevant to you now!

Practical health is stress reduction

What does health have to do with stress? EVERYTHING. I'm not going to go too deep into preventative medicine philosophy or new age thought here, but as you know, more and more of us are embracing the idea that our physical, mental and emotional/spiritual health are interlinked and interdependent. In fact, we can't experience change in one area without it being reflected in another. We can't experience a chronic physical condition without it affecting our thoughts and personality. Whether we are feeling animated and passionate or depressed and lifeless, our bodies will clearly reflect what is going on.

So, I begin with stress because it's an issue the majority of us are well and truly familiar with. In fact, 75% of us experience stress on an ongoing basis, one recent study cited. We know what it feels like: the build up of pressure in our minds of all the things we have to do; the tightness and tension in our neck and shoulders; the short temper, frustration and impatience that we know is not who we really are; the tossing and turning or waking up in the night with a merry-go-round of worried thoughts in our heads and the damage to our personal relationships - the misunderstandings and the arguments.

What do we do about it?

I'm certainly not going to tell you to exercise or eat healthy. Those 2 things undeniably reduce stress and improve health in a major way and are a great foundation but there's a ton of information already available and many outstanding health practitioners who are expert on these topics.

The question is, why aren't more of us looking after ourselves the way we know we should? We know this basic stuff about food and exercise so why aren't more of us doing it? All we need to do is look at the number of people who join a gym initially excited but fail to commit or the number of people who diet their whole lives in an effort lose weight. It's challenging and confronting to look at what's really going on behind our habitual patterns of behaviour, especially when it comes to food and exercise and inevitably, there is some degree of stress behind this resistance to change.

Instead of telling you what you already know, I'm going to make this simpler because health is simple. It's black and white. We know it when we feel it and we sure as hell know it when it's absent. I've been a practitioner for over 13 years and the most common thing I've heard people say about why they haven't been stretching or why they haven't changed a particular part of their life is "time". Not enough of it. Does this sound familiar to you? Have you heard those same words come out of your own mouth? Because I'm passionate about health and well-being, I've put together the following free report to demonstrate that the basics don't have to take time and to serve as a guide and a stimulus on your own journey to better health and happiness.

It seems that many, when stressed, seek for a solution outside themselves - people tend to go get a massage or relax with a glass of wine (or two). They might go on holiday or have the thought "I just need to get away. Things will be better if I get away." Instead, this report is about you finding what you need inside yourself, within your daily activities and life as it is right now.

So enjoy the following 10 ways to reduce stress in everyday life that take less than 5 minutes a day and let me know how you go! I love hearing people's stories of how they've improved their lives through self-education and the practical application of health.

10 Ways to reduce stress in everyday life that take less than 5 minutes a day

The following are in no particular order of importance and please don't think you need to do ALL of them (unless, of course, you want to). Even one activity from the following list, done consistently can change the way you respond to stress and that's where peace of mind and health begin.

1. Avoid television, news broadcasts on the radio and gossip/fashion magazines

Give them up completely for 2 weeks. See if you feel better, clearer, more positive and energised. It's a big ask but use this as an experiment. There's so much information and stimulation in our daily lives that it makes sense to minimise clutter as much as possible. Notice the decrease in mental chatter and negativity when we are choosy about what we take in - it may even become a lifestyle choice for you.



2. Develop more presence and be in the moment

Become aware of your senses - what you can see, hear, touch, taste and feel at times throughout the day. Right now in fact, as you look at your computer screen or hold this report in your hands, what can you feel in your



body? What's the sensation of your bum against your seat? Take a moment to pause before moving toward a ringing telephone, putting your shoes on, doing the dishes or getting in and out of your car. The more physical awareness and presence you develop as you move through your day to day activities, the less mental worries and thoughts about the future you will have. Slow down, move a little more deliberately as you walk or pick things up and take time to really notice what's happening around you. Your mind will feel sharper, clearer and less stressed.

3. Squeeze half a lemon and drink it in hot water first thing every morning

Cleansing and detoxifying, this simple drink will boost your liver function and stimulate your digestive system. Lemons are alkalinising and will help to combat acidity in the body. Much better than a cup of coffee to wake you up!



4. Breathe deeply whenever you can

Breathing is essential. If we don't do it, we die so it makes sense to make the most out of the breathing process. Only one trick here, you have to actually do it. Whether it's lying on your bed at night or in the morning as you wake up, focusing on slowly and gently expanding your belly with your breath. Don't put too much effort into it - just slowly and gently feel your lungs receive the air. You can even assign certain triggers to remind you breathe deeply like speaking on the phone, taking a break from work or before or after eating. Sitting in traffic is a great time to practice deep breathing. Come up with your own times to practice. Notice when you're only using the top part of your chest and are breathing shallowly. In particular, when feeling stress overwhelm you, start to focus on taking slow and deep breaths - you will feel more present and more relaxed almost instantly. Do this for 5 minutes or as long as you can. Your body and your mind will thank you for it!



5. Do a creative workshop every day

Take 5 minutes. Write down what you want in your life. I don't mean vague statements like "inner peace" or "happiness". I mean, what would your life look like if you had those things? Is it a beautiful relationship with your partner? Is it a red Jeep Wrangler? Or a house on Hedges Ave? Be specific. This is not about the "how", leave that up to the universe. This is simply about making yourself feel good NOW by focusing on the positive or things that make you feel genuinely good. You might like to use a daily blog for this purpose or check out the website 43 Things.com and put down some ideas on 43 things you'd like to do between now and check-out time. Enjoy the process, be as creative as you like! I created a slideshow of images which capture precisely what I want in my life, put it to one of my favourite songs and watch it daily. It never fails to make me feel good, uplifted, positive and definitely less stressed.



6. Put your legs up the wall

Or Viparita Karani as it's known in Sanskrit is wonderful at calming the nervous system, it increases blood flow to the brain and relaxes the mind. Oh! And it feels REALLY good too! Do this for a minimum of 5 minutes - preferably as soon as you walk in the door after a long day. Take your shoes off and pop a pillow or two underneath your hips if you like. The family can wait and meal preparation can wait. Give to yourself first. See picture.



7. Be honest with someone every single day



I'm not talking about "Piss off! You're a bloody idiot!" kind of truth, rather speaking from the heart about what you truly feel. This is a skill and needs to be practiced. Many of us have spent our whole life giving to others or giving in to others and at the time, it may in fact seem like the easy way of reducing conflict. The reality is however, if we are not authentic, resentment grows and adds to our stress levels while we run around trying to make other people happy. This is a sure recipe for stress and unhappiness so give it a whirl! The next time someone asks you to do something, pause for a moment and before answering or moving to do it, look inside and see if it's the best action for you to take right now. If not, tell the truth and feel the lightness that comes with being authentic. You will feel stronger, clearer and better about yourself if you communicate (in a loving way of course) how you really feel.

8. Practice Active Listening with your family, friends and workmates



Listening and true listening are two very different things. We all know what it feels like to have someone smile and nod at us with a blank expression in their eyes. Not very pleasant. What true listening does (otherwise known as “active listening”) is take the focus off you and your concerns and put them on the other person.

It goes a little something like this...

THEM: “My bloody car just broke down, now I can’t do what I wanted to do and I’m gonna be late and I’ve got an important meeting!”

YOU: “So there’s a problem with your car and you don’t have much time and it’s really vital that you get to work ASAP.”

THEM: “Yeah!”

YOU: “So, what’s the best thing for us to do?”

This is about validating someone’s experience before jumping in and giving advice even though you really want to help them. This is empowering and a really pleasant way to be listened to. It also takes the pressure and responsibility off you having to solve their problems. Try it and see how this can transform your relationships - it creates a sense of mutual respect and open-ness which is really tangible and goes a long way toward reducing stress in your life.

9. Learn some simple time-management techniques



All of us are busy and time-poor. “Not enough time” (followed closely by “not enough money”) is our biggest complaint. But do we really have “not enough time” or are we simply doing too much? We all have the same 24 hours in a day. Why do some of us feel relaxed and satisfied with what we are getting done? Why do others feel stressed and pressured and run around in panicked frenzies of activity and still feel like we don’t get done what we want to? Start by keeping a diary of your time. See how much you are squeezing into one day and ask yourself if it’s healthy for you to continue doing this.

Do up a table of Monday to Saturday with enough room in each column to write down how much time you spend on your daily activities: getting ready in the morning; driving; preparing meals; eating; working; checking emails and family time etc. Make it as simple or as detailed as you like. This activity has the potential to transform your entire way of looking at time. I once found myself being dominated by stemming the flow of emails and obsessed with clearing my inbox but then, I developed the habit of simply checking emails twice a day. No more. This freed up my mind and my time and has allowed me to become so much more effective! Keep this diary for a 7 day period or longer if you like and see what you discover about yourself and your approach to the time you do have. Mastering time is key to mastering stress levels.

10. Look at yourself in the mirror every day and tell yourself what you like and appreciate about you.

It sounds a bit silly, I know but it's nonetheless very effective for developing greater peace and acceptance. How often do you acknowledge yourself? It's easy for us to see the negative aspects but do you celebrate the good things you do and your achievements? How often do you acknowledge the incredible body you walk around in? We focus on the thorns - look at that pimple/I'm putting on weight etc etc. I'm talking about the bigger picture here. "How wonderful that I feel pain-free today" "It's SO good I can walk!" "Goodness, my skin is amazing the way it's so waterproof and holds me together!" "I really like my teeth." "How great is it that I can breathe freely and easily!" "My body is amazing!"



As you begin to honour yourself more and more in this way every day, to congratulate yourself and acknowledge what you do well, you will become more loving to others and yourself. Most have heard the saying "you can't expect others to love you unless you love yourself" and this is a very profound statement that many of us pay lip service to and comprehend at only a surface level.

So I ask you, how do you show yourself that you love you? We expect others to demonstrate their feelings for us by giving respect, attention, time, gifts perhaps and by listening to us. How do you show yourself that you care?

There are many, many levels of self-love of course: you can clean yourself and dress nicely; you can surround yourself with positive people; you can exercise and eat well; you can leave situations that are toxic or you can leave or change your environment. You can also be loving with the thoughts in your mind. Be loving with the thoughts that seek to criticise or condemn. Be loving with the thoughts that compare you to others. Be loving with the thoughts that say “I’m not good enough”.

In a nutshell, thoughts (more than situations) create stress so the more loving we can be with our thoughts and ourselves, the less stressed we will feel.

This is a practice and a journey. It doesn’t matter how you do it but start. Right now. Acknowledge and celebrate the unique, capable, intelligent and caring person you are.



So, there you have it. Ten very simple and practical things you can do in your daily life to reduce stress that take less than 5 minutes. As a side effect of reducing stress you can also expect to experience the following: a lightness of step and increased energy; better communication in every relationship in you have; a longer and healthier life and a greater acceptance of what's happening right now. Life will always be life and throw curve-balls at us from time to time, we can't avoid that no matter how much we want to. But by increasing your inner ability to deal with stress you will find these experiences will have less impact and you will be able to rebound and grow stronger, deeper and healthier as a person because of it.

I hope you enjoyed reading this report as much as I enjoyed writing it for you. Drop me a line if you like! I'd love to hear your story of how practical stress reduction has helped.



In ever increasing health and happiness,

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