

April, 2010 Newsletter

## More Joy, Less Stress in Eight Easy Steps

Reducing stress is important, we've all heard it. Stress not only impacts your happiness, but your health. The American Academy of Family Physicians reports that two-thirds of all doctor visits are due to stress-related ailments. It's also believed that 80 to 90 percent of all diseases are stress-related. And if you're female, stress may be even more damaging to you health. Study after study has found that women suffer from both stress and depression more often than men.

For some of us, our biggest stressors might be weather-related situations, such as tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, fires and hurricanes. Similarly, for most of us, we get stressed out thinking of deadlines and commitments, but stress has many other causes. It can be triggered by emotions – anger, fear, worry, grief, depression or even guilt. And stress can actually lead to high blood pressure, heart problems, fatigue, muscle and joint pain, headaches and other illnesses and chronic health conditions. If you want to avoid these problems, here are my favorite eight tips to reduce stress, promote relaxation, and bring a sacred balance back into your body and world.

### One

Redirect you energies inward – Stress is a major problem in modern life. Technological advances have increased the pressure to keep busy, even during leisure hours. We talk on the telephone while we drive, watch television while we read, conduct business while we listen to the radio. Clearly we are over stimulated, receiving more information from television, computers, radio and satellites than our ancestors of several generations ago ever could have imagined! Given our current rushed pace, we have little time to relax and cultivate relationships with our spouses, children, friends and nature. I see unrelenting stress as a sickness of epidemic proportions – a “busyness” or “hurry” sickness.

What causes our need to rush and discount our own physical health needs? We can blame it on economics – and the need to make enough money to pay for our chosen

lifestyles. We can blame it on the fact that everything's moving so fast, and we have to, too. But I believe the real cause is something deeper. By crowding our schedule with "more" – more socializing, more eating, more work, more activity and more appointments – we may be trying to fill the emptiness we feel inside ourselves.

When you constantly direct your attention and energies outward, it's easy to lose the sense of inner wonder, calmness, balance and beauty where true happiness, joy and peace originate. By slowing down and redirecting your energies inward, not only will you train your brain to relax, you will begin to reestablish the wholesome sense of self-worth necessary to positively change your life. Meditation and deep breathing are godsend for returning you to joy, peace and balance.

## Two

Get moving! That's right – exercise is one of the best ways to reduce stress in your life: it relaxes muscles and eases tension. Want proof? A study at the University of Southern California shows that patients who took a vigorous walk and raised their heart rates to more than 100 beats per minute reduced the tension on their bodies by 20 percent. This effect was greater than a second group of patients who were given a tranquilizer! So go for a walk, hit the gym and do some weight-bearing exercise, or give yoga a try. Studies have shown that those who practice yoga have lower stress hormones than those who don't.

## Three

Meditate and breathe deeply. Really, it's that simple. And don't worry – you don't have to be a Buddhist monk to know how to meditate. Simply find a special, quiet space in your home. Spend at least 15 minutes there first thing in the morning and before going to bed. Sit and close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply, focusing on the sound and rhythm of your breathing. Mentally visualize peace and calmness. Your day will start and end on stress-free note.

## Four

Eat a stress-relieving diet. Can what you eat really help relieve stress? You bet! You can take stress off your digestive system by eating at least seven servings of fresh fruits and vegetables every day. They are high in water content and, therefore, easily digestible. Especially beneficial are antioxidant-rich leafy greens, such as romaine lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, kale and collards. Also, to benefit from an array of antioxidants, choose an array of colors when it comes to your fruits and vegetables. Here's a great way to think of nutritious food: Produce is the most important health care money can buy.

## Five

Keep your body hydrated. Our bodies are 70% water. Our cells are 70% water, and our planet Earth is 70% water. That's no coincidence. Each day we need to drink at least eight glasses of water. At a cellular level, dehydration makes us as droopy as a neglected violet. Lack of moisture in faces causes wrinkles the way lack of moisture in plums causes prunes. Drinking "liquids" won't do. Although herbal tea, freshly extracted vegetable juice and diluted fruit juice can count in the water tally, coffee, tea, colas and alcoholic beverages actually dehydrate the body. They're wet, but they're not water; in fact, they're antiwater.

We need to maintain proper fluid balance for brain and kidney function, to rid the body of waste material and toxins and to maintain radiant health. Water is also a safe, cheap and effective appetite suppressant. Often when we think we're hungry, we're actually thirsty. Get into the habit of carrying a reusable, earth-friendly bottle of water when you walk or drive. If it's there, you're more likely to drink it. You can refill it from your filtered or purified water source at home.

## Six

Catch plenty of Zzzs. Lack of sleep undermines your body's ability to deal with stress. That's why it's important to get eight hours of rest per night. One way to tell if you're getting enough shuteye is to see if you wake at a regular time without an

alarm. If you require a buzzer to get out of bed in the morning, you're not getting enough sleep.

## Seven

Laugh a lot. Worried about something? Maybe you're stressed out about your relationship with a loved one, the monthly bills that are stacking up, or the poor grades your son or daughter is suddenly bringing home from school. What ever it is, one way to mollify this stress is to make sure your life is filled with laughter.

According to researchers, laughter releases endorphins into the body that act as natural stress beaters. In fact, a good belly laugh gives your heart muscles a good workout, improves circulation, fills your lungs with oxygen-rich air, clears your respiratory passages, stimulates alertness hormones, helps relieve pain, and counteracts fear, anger and depression, all of which are linked to illness and stress. So be sure to schedule time into your busy schedule to be with friends and family who make you smile and laugh, and go to movies or read a book that tickles you funny bone. Just make sure you're getting plenty of things to giggle about in your life.

## Eight

Be thankful ~ and reap the health benefits. Each and every day, take a moment and be grateful for all you have in life. Gratitude, after all, is a great stress-buster. What you think about consistently brings more of the same into your life. So focusing on the positive, even during difficult times, is the best way to reduce and alleviate stress and transform you life.

## Blessings