

PERSONAL GROWTH FOR WOMEN

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**10 EASY STEPS TO
DESTRESS**

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ten easy steps to destress

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

By Pam N. Woods



Do you feel tense and anxious at work? Do your co-workers and/or boss make you crazy? Is your personal life less than blissful? If so, you've got stress. If you're like most people, you've sought refuge from this situation by trying a quick fix or two like calling a friend, walking the dog, or going away for the weekend in an attempt to escape it all. But you know the truth—these strategies only serve as temporary diversions as nothing consequential in your life has changed. And, when you get back to your routine, you're likely to be confronted by and react to the same old stressors again.

Stress is America's #1 health problem, according to the American Institute of Stress. And, Vern S. Cherewatenko, M.D. and Paul Perry, authors of *The Stress Cure*, report it is more prevalent in women than men. Why? Women are more concerned with the everyday demands associated with their employment, spouse, children, money and surroundings.

Stress is internal, which explains why you might react differently to an event than your neighbor. You may experience stress as tightness in your shoulders while someone else may feel a queasy stomach. In any case, it's universal that it can wreak havoc on your health when allowed to continue. So, what can you do?

The easiest way to mitigate the effect of stress is to take charge of the one and only thing you have the power to control...YOU. Then, be conscious of what you can't control and let it go for good. By doing so, you'll be more durable when the going gets tough and by taking charge of your life, external things will change in response to your internal changes.

Here are 10 steps to destress for your present and future:

1. HEAL YOURSELF

Experts from the disciplines of psychology to medicine agree that practicing self-care is the key to eliminating stress. The most effective steps you can take are the simplest: exercise, a healthy diet, regular sleep, minimal alcohol intake and nix smoking. Make these wholesome activities a lifestyle choice—you deserve it! Another benefit: your children will also learn self-care as you are modeling the behavior.

2. GET ORGANIZED

Physical clutter reminds us of things that need to be done and that's stressful. Remove your physical clutter and you'll eradicate your mental clutter, plus you'll feel energized. The recipe for eliminating clutter is the same regardless of the room or space you're working on. In short, begin by defining the purpose of your room, then identify the major categories to be kept in your space, sort all your belongings into those categories, edit each category, and finally, put your possessions in a pleasing and practical place.

3. SET BOUNDARIES

Boundaries act as a filter to keep you safe from the hurtful behavior of others while allowing in the love, support and nurturing actions we all need. Set your boundaries by: (a) determining what others cannot do to you or in your presence and (b) sharing this information respectfully with anyone who is stepping over one of your boundaries.

4. TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

Put together a list of all the things you love to do but haven't regularly made time to do. Put your list in priority order and enter the top five items into your calendar. Your list may include things as simple as journaling, reading a great book, taking a bubble bath, yoga, etc. You'll be more successful getting to these activities when you give them a time and place on your calendar.

5. BE POSITIVE

William James, the father of modern psychology said, "The greatest discovery of my generation is that man can alter his life simply by altering his attitude of mind." In other words, what you say and what you tell yourself impact the present and create your future. Love yourself and use the power of positive words, pleasing thoughts and affirming beliefs to live the life you want to live.

6. WORK IN A CAREER YOU LOVE

If you're like most people, you spend the majority of your waking hours at work. You'll know you're in the right profession when you wake up anxious to go to work, you want to do your best daily, and you know your work is important.

7. SURROUND YOURSELF WITH A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

You are who you spend time with. Hang out with people who love and accept you just the way you are, are interested in you (not what you can do for them), lift you up (not wear you down), solve problems quickly, don't gossip or complain and know how to have fun. Anything is possible with the right support.

8. LEARN TO SAY "NO"

We've all been influenced by people in our life who tell us we should do this or we ought to do that. As a result, we may end up living a life that others have decided for us versus living the life we want. So, the next time you think of something you

ought to do or someone else suggests you should do, take a breath and ask yourself if it's something you want to do. If not, just say, "no, thank you." When you say no to things you don't care to do, you are saying yes to you and this will free up your time and energy for the things you choose to do. Bottom line: you'll be happier.

9. ZAP TOLERATIONS

A toleration is something that irritates you and drains your energy because it needs to be done, fixed, removed, or changed. If you're like most people, you may be tolerating 100 or more things! Put together a list of all the things that bug you, e.g. a dripping faucet, money concerns, your weight, shopping and running errands, not enough time, computer files out of control, your hair, a room that needs to be painted, etc. When your list is complete, group like items and see if one solution will eliminate multiple tolerations. For example, if you have piles of clothing in each bedroom, dirty windows and dust bunnies on your floor, hiring a housekeeper will zap all three tolerations. Line up a housekeeper today. Then, commit to spending a chunk of time each week to zap your other tolerations. If you have a toleration that you don't have the skill or know-how to fix, consider calling an expert or seek out a skilled professional to trade services with.

10. GET YOUR NEEDS MET

A "need" is not an option, it is something you must have to function fully. It is differentiated from a "want" in that a want is optional. Unmet needs can drive you to distraction and worse. Determine what needs you have that aren't being met, if any, and then take the appropriate action to get them fulfilled. Example: If you've taken a big hit and are going through a career transition, ask a good friend to call you two or three times a week to check in with you and give you support. Other options include joining a group of people in a like situation or hiring a coach who specializes in career transitions. When you acknowledge and satisfy your needs, you will be free to focus on other areas of your life.

If you want to be happier and more successful, minimize your stress by focusing on the things you have the power to control. 

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