

How to fight modern lifestyle stressors

Chapter 01: Learning to pinpoint stressors and deal with them

Stress is an inevitable part of life and, sadly, whilst completely eliminating daily stressors may not be a realistic goal or expectation, you can learn to deal with certain stressors in a more productive way. Therefore being able to pinpoint the things which are likely to cause you to experience stress, will help equip you to constructively handle them in order to not become completely overwhelmed.

When you feel more confident in your ability to cope with stress in more effective ways, you also ultimately gain confidence in your own stress-management skills, resulting in greater feelings of happiness. So, let's have a look at some common stressors,

which many of us are faced with, and give you some effective tips on how to deal with each of them.

Chapter 02: Don't multitask for time management

Sometimes you may feel as if you don't have enough hours in the day to get everything done, leaving you feeling stressed and rushed. Feelings which often lead to you to attempt multitasking and finishing everything at once. However, multitasking is proven to leave one feeling mentally drained and impairs the ability to do any one task well. This is because our brains are actually only able to concentrate on one thing at a time, so when you are multitasking you are ultimately forcing your brain to jump from gear to gear as it struggles to

catch up with whatever it is you're focusing on.

It appears to make sense that when you feel rushed that you would try and complete things more quickly, however, this can result in you feeling overwhelmed and causing you to make mistakes. Losing your keys, forgetting those papers, spilling your coffee, missing that appointment. Whatever it is, when you feel rushed or overwhelmed you lose your perception of the moment and your ability to think clearly.

So, what to do when you find yourself in this kind of experience? Firstly, even if you feel pressed for time, take a moment to pause and regroup with yourself. This can be as easy as stopping what you're doing and focusing fully on three natural breaths. Just three breaths can leave you feeling renewed enough to begin dealing with the tasks ahead, and can help you focus immediately and calm your nervous system. Now take a moment to allow yourself to focus fully on three natural

breaths, as they flow in and out of the body.

Now, pause and notice how it felt to focus on those three breaths. What did you experience? Did the breaths change in between? Do you feel more calm now? See, just three breaths, which is such a simple thing to do, can really feel like a journey into stillness and relaxation when you allow yourself to be fully immersed in them.

If you begin to implement a practice such as this when you feel overwhelmed by tasks, allowing yourself to take a moment to stop, you can then regroup with yourself and begin doing less with more focus. For example, making a mental list of the tasks that need doing, whilst keeping yourself grounded with the breath so that you may focus fully on one task at a time. Then give this task your whole attention until it is complete before moving on to the next. This may be hard at first but by keeping grounded, breaking things down and maybe even allowing yourself more time

to get things done you will find that you become more efficient, make less mistakes, and feel happier.

Chapter 03: Reframing travel delays

Do you know that sinking feeling when you have things to do but delays on your daily commute, such as being stuck in traffic or a breakdown on public transport, leave you feeling that you are wasting your time? No matter how you travel, commuting can be one of those avoidably frustrating things because delays are usually completely out of your control, thus it can be easy to become overwhelmed and feel almost personally victimized by the circumstance.

Even though these times are inherently a little stressful, it is possible to reframe the narrative you have about this seemingly wasted time. My advice is to flip your internal narrative regarding the circumstances and, instead of seeing the time as wasted, rather view it as time which you

have gained for yourself.

If you're driving, put on an interesting podcast, play some music which makes you feel good, or mentally list some things which you are grateful for that day. If you are on public transport, and have a big to-do list, start writing your lists down so that you sense that you're beginning to organize what needs to be done, take the time to answer some emails with your phone, or maybe even put on a relaxing meditation to transport yourself to a beautiful place within your mind. Remember, the time is only wasted if you allow it to be, and you will become overwhelmed by feelings of stress or frustration only if you allow yourself to be.

If you find that your sense of frustration gets too much, practice some techniques to bring yourself into the present and stop your mind from running wild. For example, repeating the mantra, "I cannot control this, but I am grateful for the time I now have for myself", either silently or out loud until your mind is a little

more clear, or perhaps bringing your awareness into the breath and the body, noticing each as a field of sensation which anchors you into the present moment. Maybe doing this by noticing the weight of your feet on the surface beneath you, or by taking a few slow deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Chapter 04: Designated reply times

In today's world it can seem impossible to escape constant contact. A constant which sometimes even leads to the experience of stress when just thinking about replying to all the incoming emails and texts. That's why it is important to remember that some things can wait, and that you do not need to answer everything straight away. Especially as by always immediately jumping to answer you may find yourself losing focus on all the things that you need to get done and falling behind on other tasks.

It is best to designate specific times throughout your day to

answer emails and texts in order to deal with this 'contact pressure'. Inform others that between such and such time, for example between 9am and 11am, or 4pm and 6pm, is when they can expect a reply, because you will only be answering then. Let them know that if it is a very urgent matter, they are free to call you instead. In doing so you'll likely notice that you get many less 'urgent' matters coming up throughout your day, but also that your former sense of urgency to answer others immediately will subside as you get used to the idea that things will not stop or fall apart if you're not on hand all the time.

Chapter 05: Don't resist emotions

Most Western cultures teach you to 'swallow' your emotions, and keep going no matter what. Some even see the ability to repress emotions and continue on as a badge of success. Unfortunately, though, when you suppress your emotions you can begin to feel ungrounded and disconnected from yourself. Feelings of disconnect and

ungrounding which may even lead to feeling unsafe.

While it is true that you need to keep your emotions in check throughout the day and not allow yourself to become overwhelmed by every emotional whim, it is equally important not to succumb to the pressure to be happy, upbeat and hardworking all of the time.

When you allow yourself to be present and aware of your emotions, accept them as they occur, and don't judge yourself as weak when you experience difficult emotions, you actually begin to process them more quickly, and may even realize that they are not as intense or heavy as they may have originally seemed.

So, rather than repressing and resisting negative emotions, instead practice the following. When you notice an uncomfortable emotion, face it head on by labeling it and acknowledging that you are experiencing it. For example, repeating, "I am experiencing anxiety right now"; or, "I am

experiencing stress right now". Then recognize that each experienced emotion is actually just trying to protect you. Emotion is preceded by thought, which causes the body to respond in order to survive, resulting in the emotion we feel. For example, when you have an anxious thought, your heart rate may increase and your mouth may begin to feel dry, resulting in the emotional experience of anxiety. So, in knowing this, silently thank the emotion for coming, and then consciously tell it that you are OK and happy to let it go.

Chapter 06: Grounded during conflict

It is commonplace to experience frustrating exchanges or encounters from time to time, and often the most stressful interpersonal conflicts that you experience are with those who are close to you. Nonetheless, it is your responsibility to manage your own emotions and not allow these conflicts to ruin your mood or day.

When you find yourself in

conflict it is firstly important to remain grounded within, before responding to the other party. To stay grounded try utilizing conscious control of the breath in order to find a sense of calm, as rhythmic deep breathing stimulates the relaxation branch of the autonomic nervous system. A good breathing technique for this can be any breath in which you breathe deeply into the belly on the inhale, allowing your diaphragmatic muscle to extend fully, followed by a slow and steady exhalation. Even more effective than this is taking a deep breath in through the nose, holding the breath for a few seconds, and then slowly exhaling through the mouth. Then repeat this breathing pattern a few more times until you feel a little less anxious and stressed.

Once you feel calmer, you will have greater peace of mind and the capacity to make better decisions regarding your exchanges with others, rather than allowing yourself to react amidst a whirlwind of potentially heated emotion.

Chapter 07: Limit input from your environment

You may be receiving constant stimulation from your environment, potentially without even noticing. For example, constant use of technical devices can keep your nervous system on overdrive and even result in a state of chronic stress. Leaving you feeling stressed and depleted. A good example of this undercover stressor is the blue light you are exposed to from your devices, which is scientifically proven to increase your levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, that can also negatively affect your quality of sleep.

Now, it would be unrealistic to suggest eliminating this type of input all together. Instead, limit your screen time per day. Something which can now be done on most devices by setting an alarm for when an assigned time limit has been met, or perhaps by changing the settings so that you will no longer receive notifications from apps after a certain time of the day. Although there is no exact

number for how many hours of screen time adults should have daily, many studies suggest less than two hours as a health limit, with only 30 minutes of that including social media.

It is also suggested that, upon waking and before going to sleep at night, you resist the urge to check your phone for at least 15 to 30 minutes. Instead, try and get some natural light in your eyes from the sun, or perhaps even use this time to practice some relaxing breathing or meditation techniques. A simple breathing technique could include breathing in for a count of five, and then exhaling for a count of five, and then repeating this five times. Or perhaps, if you wish to incorporate a simple meditation, you could close your eyes and imagine yourself in your favorite place in nature. Building this scene with as much detail as possible, the smells, the sounds, the temperature, even the imagined physical feeling of being there in the moment.

Chapter 08: Don't obsess over sleeping

When we experience stress, most of us notice that our sleep quality also becomes affected, and it is in fact known that stress can cause sleep disorders, such as insomnia, and that insomnia can, in turn, cause stress disorders. So as you can see these two together can result in a vicious cycle, which may become difficult to stop.

This phenomenon of sleep-and-stress cycle is due to an overactive mind. See, the body does not know the difference between a stressful thought and a physical threat. So if you go to bed with many thoughts whirring through your mind, your levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, will stay high, causing your body to stay alert and thus causing sleep difficulties.

When you find that you are unable to sleep, rather than trying to force sleep to come, focus on purely resting, rather than trying to fall asleep. You can also practice some slow deep-belly breaths during this time, so that you have something else to focus your awareness on rather than focusing fully

on the frustration that you are not asleep. To take these deep breaths, focus on extending the space below your belly button on your inhale, hold the breath for a few moments, and then exhale slowly through the mouth, letting the belly button fall back towards the spine. I even like to visualize and imagine that my breath moves in and out of my body, like an ocean wave, when I do this for a little extra relaxation.

Another suggestion for quieting the mind is to practice a body scan meditation technique in order to find rest and relaxation. A body scan meditation is very simple and easy to practice. Simply start by focusing on your feet, imagining that the breath moves from the toes to the ankles, then from the ankles to the knees. From the knees to the hips. Hips to chest. Fingers to wrists. Wrists to shoulders. Shoulders to neck. Neck to top of the head. Eventually all the way from the toes to the crown of the head with each breath. If you find that you are still unable to focus on purely resting and are instead obsessing on lack of falling asleep, I suggest

that you get out of bed. This may sound counterproductive, but if you remain in bed, and especially if this happens several times, it is likely that you will begin to condition yourself to associating your bed with stress. Therefore it will become a place where you no longer feel safe to sleep. Try going to another room, keep the lights low and do something relaxing such as reading a book. Chances are you may even find yourself asleep on the couch before you know it.