

Stress-less

SELF HELP

By Deborah Magnum-Copelli

Do you ever feel like stress is getting the better of you, your staff, or some of your clients? Even though we work in the glamorous industry of beauty, spa and wellness, we all still experience stress to some degree. Wouldn't it be nice to discover how we could work in a way to minimise our stress and help others around us manage theirs too? When stress gets out of control it leads to anxiety and then when the pressure mounts we expand into catastrophic thinking and excessive rumination where the past starts to creep into the present. We can begin to experience our world in a series of myopic mini-dramas. We've then digressed, and might even be on the road to high angst, which is much better served on the silver screen rather than in our business or at home. Sounding at all familiar? Perhaps so, and perhaps not, but it's difficult to cope day to day without some strategies in place to get a grip on stress. If you're finding you're not as flexible as you used to be and you have a difficult time with over-thinking everything or pre-thinking how things might turn out, continuously processing things you "should" have done instead of being satisfied with what is, then you might be headed for some anxious patterns.

We all have stress and some of it is quite useful, motivating us to move forward, meet deadlines and achieve our goals and dreams. This is called eustress, or short-term stress. It's also the one that keeps us alive when we are in danger; better known as the fight or flight syndrome. When the brain perceives some kind of stress, it starts flooding the body with chemicals like epinephrine, norepinephrine and cortisol. This creates a cacophony of reactions such as an increase in blood pressure and heart rate, and your senses suddenly develop a laser-like focus so you can avoid physically stressful situations, like jumping away from an approaching bus.

And then there's the bad stress, also called distress or chronic stress; this one produces too



much adrenalin and a heightened, sustained amount of cortisol. This is the "killer" one and can lead to a whole host of follow-on problems from digestive issues and weight gain to hormone imbalances, diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, cancer...the list goes on. It can leave you feeling wired but tired. And stress really takes its toll on your brain health and function as well, with free radicals building up, leaving you feeling anxious, forgetful, and with excessive worry.

So, it goes without saying that we all need a bit of stress every day to keep functioning and performing at our wakeful best. And the little bursts of acute stress that occur every so often are not harmful, provided we have equal rest to counteract them. It's the sustained stress, day in and day out, that has proven

age management | FEATURE

to be most harmful to our body and our brain function. If stress causes you to lose sleep, eat junk food, drink too much alcohol, or smoke cigarettes to relax, then these are contributing as well to your overall free radical load.

Given the free radical scenario, think about what stress might be doing to our largest organs, the skin and hair. Are you noticing some of your clients seem to have more eczema, dry skin, break-outs, cold sores or even rosacea and hair loss? These can all be related to stress as one factor will often represent the combination of many other presenting issues as well.

If we can get a handle on that balance of stress in our lives, offsetting it with quality deep relaxation and sleep, we'd be much better equipped to take on whatever life goals and work pursuits we aspire to attain.

I'd like to present you with a simple solution to start your journey into de-stressing. Following is one of my self-guided meditations for de-stressing, which you can read slowly and softly onto an audio recording application on your mobile or your computer, and then play it back to relax and enjoy for yourself. Just remember to read it slowly and follow these easy, get relaxed instructions. Firstly, do not play the audio in your car while you or someone else is driving; it's only designed for a relaxation space where you have no responsibilities to yourself or anyone else for 20 minutes or so. Ok, get yourself into a comfortable position at your desk, or reclined in a chair with your head and neck supported. If you're at your desk, just prop your legs up and recline back on your office chair. The intention is not to fall asleep, but just to become deeply relaxed while listening to what you've recorded.

Self-Guided De-Stress Meditation: I invite you to sit with your arms and legs relaxed, uncrossed and tension-free. Take a full, long, deep breath in and out very slowly and repeat this several times as you exhale all of the tightness

that might be surrounding your head, neck, shoulders, your arms and down your torso, all the way through your legs and calves and out your toes. Just breathing and focusing on your breath, on relaxing your body from the top of your head all the way through and out your toes, slowly and comfortably, focusing on each body part with each breath until you are feeling more and more at ease. You may want to allow your breathing to just become natural again, noticing the stillness within yourself, focusing on all the different body sensations of comfort, peacefulness, easiness, and calmness.

And if you haven't already, in your own time you may want to allow your eyes to relax and close, gently and peacefully.

You may notice while you are breathing, on your own timing, releasing and letting go of everything in a focused and absorbed way, immersing yourself perhaps in beams of warm sunlight that feel so familiar when you relax completely in the sun, as if you were somewhere far away, listening to the sounds of water lapping upon the sand, or distant sounds of singing birds carried in the breeze, the sun enriching you with vitamin D and comforting your thoughts with

ease, those peaceful sensations coming into focus and those that remain in the background moving in and out of your absorption.

And I wonder if you've already started to notice the smells in that faraway place where you've taken yourself, are they floral or spicy, or perhaps the texture on your skin as you lie so still and quiet, or even the images you may have in your mind now. Sensations that only take you deeper into that full and wonderful place of relaxation, that place only you know, as it's your sanctuary, your place of complete rest, joy and pleasantness. And I wonder if you've begun to notice how your breathing has calmed and relaxed and how you're feeling more at ease with each slow and rhythmic breath you breathe now, that's right...

And as you relax into this, I don't know if you'll choose to let go of different thoughts and feelings so that you can be completely present here with yourself, and focused and absorbed there with

your visions of there, wherever your relaxation space might be, but I do know that you can put the thoughts that no longer serve you somewhere else far removed from where you are now, perhaps in a box, and you can throw all those useless thoughts in that box somewhere far away, perhaps over a mountain or deep under the sea, never needing to be recovered again.

And isn't it interesting to notice how you've begun to relax very profoundly so you can take in information you wish to take in or not take in, and you might find it easy to focus more intently on what it is you wish to focus on, absorbing the most joy, comfort and relaxation, focusing on what's inside your body and what's outside your body, and what's bringing you further off into going wherever you wish to go, exploring within yourself, with your thoughts now and for the future, not needing to be here or there in any particular way, but just being, listening, just a little bit at a time, that's right...

And I'm curious to know if your conscious mind might just expect to be able to experience complete comfort and ease while your unconscious mind can expect something even deeper...it really doesn't matter if you consciously allow yourself a lighter state of deep meditation or a deeper state of light meditation, you really needn't know what to expect, but just taking the time to go inside, just like you are doing now, it's easy to notice how there's a part of you that knows how to breathe deeply, so you can always expect that part to be there, so that those deep and comforting

breaths just seem to come... and part of you might be aware at the moment that knows about later, and sooner or later you can have the confidence of knowing over time that change will happen. Change happens all the time; it's happening now, the time is moving forward, with each beat of our hearts and with every breath there's cell regeneration, we are progressing in time, moving closer to our goals and objectives, just as another baby is being born somewhere in the world, another sunflower is opening up to the sunlight in the morning and another lotus is closing its beautiful blossom to rest and regenerate for the sunset, so that the following day it can open again and continue its progression and forward cycle. That's right...

Often people come to meditation to change their past, but we can't take back the past, that minute ago, or that 12 years ago; it's really about changing the future because the past is gone and unchangeable and the present is in the here and now as you sit here breathing, existing, relaxing and enjoying full deep comfort, peace and stillness. The future is forward after what's just occurred in

the now. Just as your breathing is now and in the future now, and there is a part of you that knows about later, and sooner or later, you can have the confidence of knowing that when you wake tomorrow your issues and concerns will all be solved. When you

“We all have stress, and some of it is quite useful, motivating us. But there's also bad stress. If we can get a handle on the balance of stress in our lives, offsetting it with deep relaxation and sleep, we'd be much better equipped to take on whatever life goals and work pursuits we aspire to.”

open your eyes tomorrow and each morning after that, you might notice that you've slept through the night and that if you were to waken, you'd fallen back into a very deep sleep as soon as your head touched the pillow...that's right.

It's so freeing, allowing yourself space and relaxation just for you to choose to be calm, centred, focused and knowledgeable about how to relax and be comfortable at any time and in any place under any circumstances. And should you have any challenges that come your way, you can be confident that you have learned all the skills you need to meet those in a calm and focused way, just as you've learned here now how to just breathe and relax fully.

You may have already started to become aware of the changes you have incorporated unconsciously from the inside to the outside that allow you to move from where you were only minutes ago to where you are now, more relaxed, focused, more in control of your resources, more confident in your abilities to cast away thoughts that are unhelpful or unuseful, and knowing that you have the choice and control to see what's a priority at appropriate times and zone out and relax, putting unhelpful thoughts far away as they are not needed. You know you can accomplish all that you want to achieve because time is a continuum and sometimes the deadlines out there are unrealistic and only create more of what we don't want in our lives when we know we can do whatever we set out to do within what is reasonable for us, and we know we have the confidence to know that opportunities will come again and again, and in the time when they are most useful for us. Just as you know that your pillow represents sleep, you can feel free of any chatter in your mind that's part of your past because you are much more than your past, you are now able to move forward feeling fully confident, relaxed and free of any issues you may or may not have had.

And so as your conscious mind slowly starts to assimilate all your accomplishments and the learnings from your unconscious mind and all the steps and resources you have already to bring with you out of this meditation, when you are ready you can start to come back into the room, back to the here and now, stretching and moving your body again, opening your eyes when you are ready and in your own time, coming back in the room. And... Welcome Back! ■