



## TIPS FOR AVOIDING STRESS

By Psychologist Donna Dawson

### Beating Stress at the Office:

- 1) **Regular Breaks** – try not to sit longer than two hours at a computer, even if you feel that you are on a roll. Muscles will stiffen and neck and back pain begin, and research shows that after two hours your actual productivity *decreases*. Within the two-hour time period, try to get up at regular intervals and stretch, shake out arms and legs, or walk around your desk. Also, do neck and shoulder rolls while sitting to prevent stress build-up.
- 2) **The Right Furniture** – Investing in a chair that is good for your back will pay for itself over and over again. Also, ensure that your computer, chair and keyboard are all at the right heights for working for prolonged periods without strain, and that your screen or glasses have an anti-glare component.
- 3) **Go for Bursts of Physical Activity** - walking briskly up or down flights of stairs (instead of taking the lift), will give your brain a jolt of oxygen and help to clear out any mental cobwebs. Also, take a walk during your lunch-break (never work through lunch, or productivity will go down and irritability will go up). If there's a local park near you, head for it.
- 4) **Deep Breathing** – when an anxious thought strikes, try inhaling deeply from the bottom of your abdomen on a slow count of ten, and exhaling on a slow count of ten. Do this five times. This will reduce panic reactions and help you to think more logically and calmly.
- 5) **Have a Laugh** – ‘laughter’ is strong medicine for stress, as it releases the ‘feelgood’ hormone serotonin in the brain. Try to see the funny side of things when you can, and where possible strike up a light-hearted conversation with a work colleague so that you can share a laugh.
- 6) **Rapid Relaxation** – find ten minutes a day for this when you won't be interrupted: sit in a chair with your eyes closed and put your mind in your favourite holiday place (by the ocean, up a mountain, on an island, etc.). For roughly 5 minutes, take in every detail: sights, sounds, colours, textures. For the next 5 minutes, concentrate on alternately tensing-then-relaxing every muscle-group in your body (tense up for 5 seconds, relax for 5 seconds), starting from your face and neck, and working down to your toes.

### Beating Stress Outside of the Office:

- 1) **Take up regular physical exercise** – whether it is a sport, jogging or just brisk walking. Ideally, an hour a day will give you maximum benefits at work in terms of energy and mental focus, but do what you can. Little and often works better than one weekly burst of energetic activity.
- 2) **Be careful with alcohol** – one or two drinks may feel like a quick way to relax, but done daily this can be hard on the liver and interfere with sleep. Try alternating drinks with water or soft drinks, going for halves instead of pints, and following a drinking day with a non-drinking day in order to give your liver a rest.
- 3) **Talk through problems** – whether it's a friend, family member or your partner, finding someone with whom you can discuss your day who has a sympathetic ear can do a lot to dissipate stress. Someone else can add another perspective to the

picture, and may be able to provide advice that you hadn't thought of. Also, just hearing yourself talk out loud about a problem can help your brain to see a solution more clearly.

- 4) **Watch your diet** – it is true that 'you are what you eat', so aim for a balanced diet which is low in junk-food. For example, fish is good for the brain and wholegrains (brown bread, pasta, rice, oat products) help to calm the nervous system. Also, drink plenty of water during the day, as headaches and lethargy can be the result of dehydration in a centrally-heated office.
- 5) **Spend Quality time with loved Ones** – this helps to put everything in perspective, and gives you a chance at a decent 'Work-Life' balance. Plan ahead for it, and put it in your diary if need be!
- 6) **Worst-Case Scenario** – work out in your mind what 'the worst thing that could happen' would be, and then have a contingency plan in your head for if it ever occurred. Thinking something through **all the way** like this – instead of just stopping at the anxiety part – will make you feel more in control, and able to tackle anything that arises.