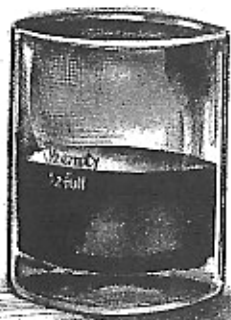


**Step 1** **STRESS MANAGEMENT**  
**Change your outlook**

*Half-empty or half-full?*



*Changing your outlook is the key to managing stress throughout your life*

Without a positive attitude, stress management won't work, at least for any length of time.

Your *attitudes* are the perspectives from which you view life. They come from past experiences. Your attitudes affect how you *feel* about a situation. It's your *feelings* that determine how stressful something is. In managing stress, it's important to identify negative attitudes that may be affecting your feelings. Start by becoming aware of how you talk to yourself. *Self-talk may be spoken words or unspoken thoughts.*

***Do you say negative things to yourself?***

Words like, "I can't," "If only I could," or "I should have" are self-defeating and can lead to feelings of guilt and frustration.

***Do you overgeneralize?*** Overgeneralizing means you believe that something bad that happened once will keep happening over and over. You see one negative event as a never-ending cycle.

***Do you filter?*** A person who filters picks out one negative detail in a situation and dwells on it, seeing the whole situation as negative.

***Do you jump to conclusions?*** Jumping to conclusions means you interpret a situation negatively even when there are no facts to support it.

***What can you do?***

Every time you feel stressed, try to identify the negative thought you had just before or during the upsetting episode. Because these thoughts have created your stress, changing them can help you reduce your stress.

***Here is an example:***

*Imagine you have an important meeting and you are stuck in traffic. You start to worry, you feel a headache coming on, your muscles begin to tense. You picture the worst consequences for being late.*

*Now imagine a moment when you realize that your worry isn't moving the cars any faster. You take a deep breath and tell yourself to relax. You decide that when you get to the meeting, you will simply communicate what happened. You put on your favorite music and remind yourself that **you can choose how you will respond.** You take another deep breath, sit back, and enjoy the time you have alone.*

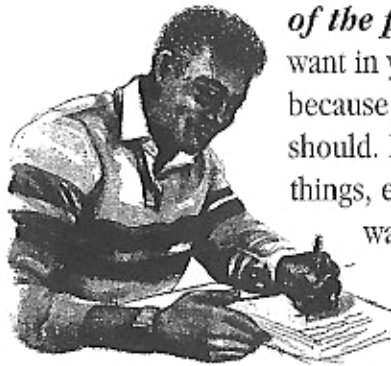
***You have just made the shift from negative to positive thinking.***

When it comes to changing your outlook, it's essential to replace old habits with new ones—word for word, thought for thought. Positive self-talk is the key to changing your outlook.

**S**top negative thoughts by replacing them with positive thoughts.

**Step 2** *Eliminate as many stressors as possible*

*If having too much to do is part of the problem*, decide what you *don't* want in your life. This includes doing things because you said you would or feel you should. It includes trying to do too many things, even if some of them are things you want to do. List the activities that cause you to feel stressed; then make a plan to get rid of them.



*Make a list of the things that cause you to feel stressed*

*If personal goals are contributing to your stress*, re-evaluate them. There's nothing wrong with self-motivation, but setting impossible goals and driving yourself to meet them is a sure-fire prescription for stress. If your goals are more realistic, you'll have a better chance of meeting them and a smaller chance of being stressed if you don't.

*If financial pressures are getting you down*, take steps to get out of debt. Figure out how much you owe and set up a plan to clear your debt as soon as possible. Then, stop shopping as a leisure activity, leave your credit cards at home, and make a commitment to stay out of debt in the future.

*If the pace of life is causing your stress*, decide what you can do to slow down. Get up half an hour earlier to avoid rushing. Plan ahead and organize your time.

**Other ways to relieve stress**

No matter how hard you try, you won't be able to eliminate all the sources of your stress. The following stress management techniques will help you relieve the stress you can't avoid.

**Step 3** *Learn how to relax*

Many of us think watching television or reading a magazine is relaxing. But experts say these activities may not be relaxing at all, especially if you are thinking about problems while you're doing them.

Relaxation involves learning skills that help relax your mind *and* your body. These relaxation exercises will help clear your mind of distracting thoughts and worries.

**Sigh breathing**

- Sit up straight in a comfortable chair.
- Inhale deeply through your nose.
- Pucker your lips (as if you are going to whistle) and exhale slowly through your mouth for as long as you can. Let out a big sigh as you exhale.
- Practice sigh breathing at least 10 times. Concentrate on the long sighing sound and feel the tension disappear.



*Exhale slowly through puckered lips. Let out a sigh as you exhale.*

## Deep breathing



Put one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest.

- **Sit or lie down.** Notice the depth and rhythm of your breathing. Breathe normally for a couple of minutes.
- **Put one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest.** Now breathe more with your abdomen and less with your chest. Feel how your abdomen goes up and down, but your chest does not.
- **Take a deep breath through your nose.** Let your abdomen fully expand. Hold your breath for 2-3 seconds.
- **With your lips puckered, exhale slowly through your mouth.** Breathe out as completely as you can. Do deep breathing for several more minutes.

## Autogenics

Autogenics involves using mental or verbal cues to tell your body how to relax. Sit in a comfortable chair. With your eyes closed take a few deep breaths. Mentally focus on the part of your body being talked about as you repeat these phrases:

*My mind is calm.  
My forehead is cool and quiet.  
My arms are heavy and relaxed.  
My abdomen is soft and warm.  
My legs are heavy and relaxed.  
My breathing is gentle and even.*

Do this 2 or 3 times until you feel relaxed.

## Progressive muscle relaxation

When a muscle has been tense for a few seconds, its natural tendency is to relax. That's what progressive muscle relaxation is all about. You tighten different muscle groups and then let them go, to see how a relaxed muscle feels.

- **Sit in a comfortable chair or lie on the floor.** Take a few breaths.
- **Focus your attention on your right hand.** Make a fist and tighten it as hard as you can. Keep it tense for 5 or 6 seconds.
- **Let go, open your fist, and see how your hand relaxes.** Keep your hand relaxed for about 20 or 30 seconds.
- **Repeat the exercise.** Make a tight fist. After about 6 seconds, let go. Watch how your hand relaxes. Then compare your right hand, which is relaxed, with your left hand. Do you feel a difference?



Make a tight fist, hold it for a few seconds, and then let go.

- **After your right hand, tense your right arm, then your left hand and your left arm.** Next tense the muscles in your forehead, around your eyes, and in your cheeks. Then go to the muscles in your stomach, thighs, calves, and feet.

*In time, you'll be able to relax your muscles simply by making mental contact with them.*

## Imagery



*Picture yourself in a pleasant, restful place.*

Imagery is a form of daydreaming in which you picture yourself in a restful place. Some people relax at the thought of lying on a beach watching the waves lapping at the shore. Others picture themselves beside a fire in a cozy mountain cabin. Find a scene that works for you.

- **Sit or lie down. Close your eyes.**
- **Take a nice, full, cleansing breath.** Breathe out as fully as you can. Take a few more deep breaths.
- **Now, think about your favorite place.** Open your senses to everything around you. Hear the sounds. Feel the breeze on your face. Involving all your senses makes your favorite place seem more real.
- **Continue to breathe deeply.** Send the energy of your breath to warm and soften your tense muscles. Let your body relax.
- **Spend a few more minutes in your favorite place.** Feel your body become heavy as you relax.
- **When you are ready, let your attention come back into the room.**

*Imagery may be easier to do if you listen to relaxation tapes created for that purpose.*

## Meditation

Meditation is the art of focusing your attention so completely on one thing that you block out everything else around you. Researchers have found that it promotes deep relaxation and mental stillness.

The object of meditation is to achieve a peaceful state by emptying your mind of distracting thoughts and worries.

- **Choose a place where you won't be disturbed.** Sit in a comfortable chair or on the floor. Close your eyes.
- **Relax your body by shaking your shoulders.** Inhale and exhale deeply and slowly a few times. Clear your mind of thoughts and concerns.
- **Choose a one-syllable word to focus on.** Repeat the word silently to yourself, giving your full attention to the word as a word, not to its meaning. Repeat your word without a break so outside thoughts do not enter your mind. When your mind wanders, pull it back and continue on.
- **Remain as still as possible.** At first, it may be difficult for you to sit perfectly still and focus your attention for more than 5 or 10 minutes. This will take practice.



*With practice you should be able to work up to 20 minutes once or twice a day.*