

Five tips for de-stressing in the midst of your hard work

Stress is not bad. It is your body's way of helping you deal with the heavy lifting of life. Your stress response helps you keep going and it gives you the energy you need to cope with the tasks at hand.

However, our bodies were not meant to be in stress mode all the time. If you are stressed all the time, parts of your body go into overdrive, which leads to sickness, instability, heightened agitation, and an inability to think and process.

You are probably reading this right now because you are feeling stressed out. So you are saying, "Yeah, I know too much stress is not great! It is not feeling good right now!"

Managing and reducing stress takes practice, especially in our current way of living. We live in a hyper-fast, over-stimulated world. Learning how to live a different way requires practice. However, I can give you a few quick tips that can help right now! (And later if you want to figure out how to live into a different way of being I can support you in that, too.)

Okay, let's get you feeling less stressed!

Tip 1: Take a breath

When I was 11, I was terrified of math tests. They scared me to the point of tears. My dad, who always tried to help me with my arithmetic, gave me the best help when he taught me how to breathe. He said that I should breathe in and count to 3, hold my breath while counting to 3, and then breathe out while counting slowly to 3.

I did not get miraculously better at multiplication.
However, I did calm down enough to keep trying without tears.

Your breath is always available to help when you feel stress.

Try it now. Stop and set everything down. Put your hand on your belly. Take three or four deep breaths. Hold for a count of three. Exhale.

You can do this on the bus, at work, even with a toddler at your feet.

When everything tightens up and you think you may not survive, always come back to your breath.

Tip 2: Take a break

This is one of the MOST important ways to respond to stress. AND it is really hard when you're in the midst of major stress. **Taking a break reduces the constant stress response and allows your body and mind to recalibrate.**

PLEASE do this! Walk away from your work for 15 minutes. Walk away from your crying child for 5 minutes. **Putting your head down and just pushing through does not make anything better. So walk away.** Go outside. Get a glass of water. Take a shower. Take a drive. Call a friend. Take a break!

Short breaks help. But we need longer breaks, too. Take your vacations. Take two days away from your family. Take a long weekend. Take a sick day and go to a movie.

Tip 3: Move your body

Yes, you have heard it before. I know you're saying, "I know, I know, I should go for a run, or join a class, but I don't have time, or I don't have the energy." **It's OK to start small.**

Take a walk around the block. Move at a speed that raises your heart rate a bit. Find a friend you can exercise with. Find one class that fits into your schedule once a week. Take a dance break!

Moving your body gives you the capacity to respond with clarity to whatever is happening in your life.

Tip 4: Identify the stress and respond

In order to manage and reduce stress you need to know its source.

Ask yourself, "Why am I feeling this stress?"

Your mind might race with this question. That's OK. Continue to breathe. Get out a sheet of paper and write down the thoughts that are coming to you.

Pick the top three things that are bringing you stress: Your kid? That work project? An illness? Money?

Make a plan to do one SMALL thing in the next two days about one of your stressors.

(Make a phone call. Schedule an appointment. Talk to a supervisor.)

Taking even one action will help.

Tip 5: Reduce your load

If you are under a lot of stress something has to give. **If you want to reduce stress you need to take something off your plate. How? You can take something off your plate by saying, “No” or asking for help.**

I have the hardest time with this one. I pack and stack my calendar with commitments.

Still, clearing some breathing room in your calendar is one of the best overwhelm reducers. You may not want to say goodbye to that thing, but if you do not clear something out, everything will get overwhelming and there will be a lot less joy in your day.

Ask yourself, of everything I am doing right now, what are two things I can stop doing.

You may have noticed this requires first looking at everything you are doing! So get your calendar out and make a list.

What are the three most important commitments in your life right now?

Line up your calendar and commitments to those things. Stop doing at least two others. Say, “No.” Ask for help. Say, “I am sorry I cannot do this anymore.” Lessen a few commitments.

This step requires you to do an ego check. **You do not have to do it all.** In fact, someone else can step into that space that you are leaving and do a bang up job.

One more trick: See what can wait. What do you have on your plate right now that you can take off your plate until next month? Or even six months from now?

Okay let's recap.

Stress is not bad. It is here to help us respond. However, too much constant stress is not good for our health, our brains, and our relationships. Reducing stress takes practice, commitment and support. But you can do something right now. Small actions help.

These tools are always available and they really work: Breathe, take a break, move your body, identify the stress and respond, and take something off your plate.

Do you want to learn more about how to find more joy and live with less stress?

Join me in The Room Next Door!