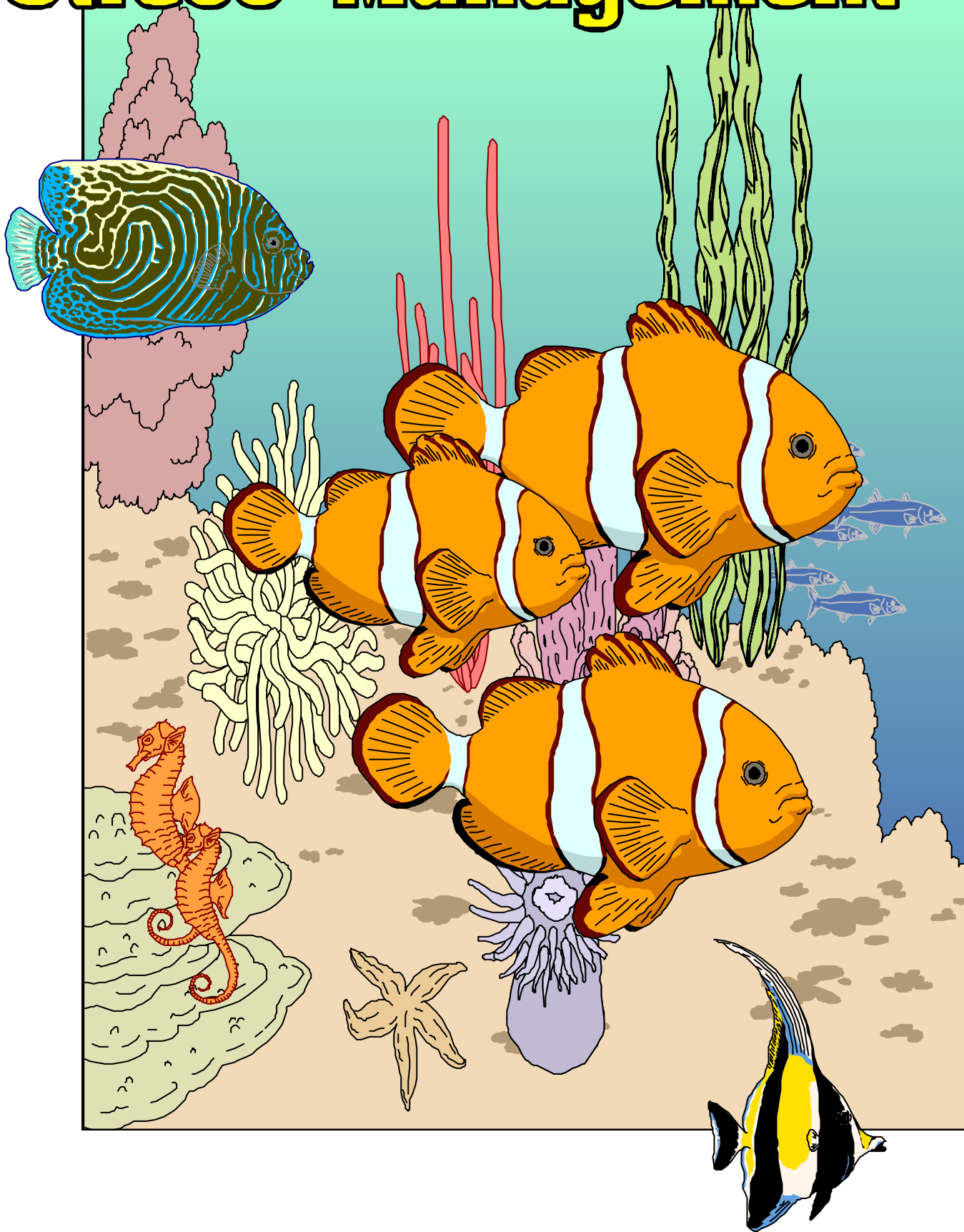


Stress Management





If you are experiencing a lot of stress at the moment you are not going to want to try anything too complex or time-consuming.

If you are feeling extreme exhaustion, anxiety, anger, depression or emptiness the following techniques may help bring quick relief. Read through the list and try those which you predict could work for you.

Rag Doll



This technique has been described by Dr Audrey Livingstone Booth, director of the Stress Foundation in England. It is designed to shut off your stress response completely. The directions are as follows:

"Sit in an armless chair. Do ten deep slow breaths and with every outgoing breath breathe out quite forcefully, deflating like a balloon, and begin to flop forward at the head and neck. Gradually flop further forward with each breath out, letting the shoulders and arms fall further forward until you are hanging limply from the waist like a rag doll. Hang there for moment or two and then come up very, very slowly. Rest your head back on the chair and breath slowly, gently and easily with your hands resting limply and lightly on your lap. Sit quietly like this for as long as you can manage. When you are ready to move again, take a deep, forceful energising breath."

Support



Find some time to talk with someone whom you trust and who know you, cares about you and who, if possible, appreciates your achievements. Don't feel guilty about taking up their time. Tell them honestly how you feel and describe the specific things which are getting to you.

Replay of Past Achievements



Find some time to be alone. Think back to those times when you felt good about something that had gone well for you. Recall any specific positive comments other people may have made in recognising what you did. Replay each scene, slowly savouring the positive feelings you experienced at the time.

Take a Warm, Slow Bath



Soaking in a warm bath with bath salts or scented lotions can afford great relief of physical tension. If you bathe for approximately thirty minutes and then go straight to bed and relax for another thirty minutes, you will have a potent anti-stress remedy.

Listen to Music



Listening to music for an hour or more can be very relaxing. You may want to take a music break at a regular time in your day. Lying down listening to your favourite piece of classical music can slow your system right down.

Pieces that have no harsh cadences and that can evoke pleasant tranquil images irrespective of your musical tastes are *Canon in D Major* by Pachelbel (this has been in the classical "Top Ten" continuously for around 20 years) and Baroque chamber music by J.S. Bach (e.g. *The Brandenburg Concertos*) and Vivaldi (e.g. *Concertos for Lute and Mandolin*).

Start your day with music that makes you feel lively, optimistic and joyful. Music that contains melodic, not unexpected, changes in key or tempo can send a tingle down your spine. Brisk tempo music can help get you in the mood for a challenging day ahead. Decompress at day's end with music that is moderately slow (*andantes*) or slow (*adagios*).

They reduce blood pressure and slow your heart by encouraging it to beat in time with the music. For many people the most soothing, tranquil sounds are recordings from nature: from waves to whales. They can keep alive our sense of awe and connectedness with nature.

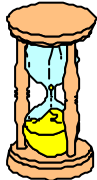
Exercise



There are two forms of exercise which can relieve your stress. If you have been exercising regularly, then I suggest a vigorous period of no less than twenty minutes where you jog, swim, play squash. etc. Alternatively, if you are not a regular exerciser, go on a long walk at a steady pace, stopping every so often to catch your breath.

The best exercise in the world is walking. Taking it to "puff level" for a little while where having a conversation or singing is difficult (but not impossible) is the ideal. It flushes the arteries, lubricates joints, and gets more oxygen to the brain.

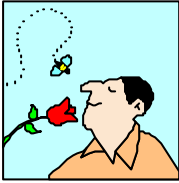
Time Management



If you are stressed because you've got too much to do and you haven't been getting everything done, write down on a sheet of paper everything you want to get done over the next week.

Place a '3' next to the things you have to get done, a '2' next to the important but not essential activities, and a '1' next to the ones which would be nice to accomplish but are not essential. On a separate sheet of paper titled 'What I Will Get Done Tomorrow', list all the activities that have a '3' beside them which you have to get done tomorrow. Schedule '2' activities if time permits. Forget about the '1' activities. Enjoy that nice feeling you get as you cross activities off your list once completed.

Time Out



If you are feeling overwhelmed, schedule time alone when you leave school, work or get out of the house. If you have a family or are in a relationship, tell your loved ones that you need time-out. Tell them that your request have nothing to do with them and that you need time for refuelling. Then take at least one hour to be by yourself in your garden, walking through the neighbourhood or in the city. If you can organise it, going away overnight can do the world of good.

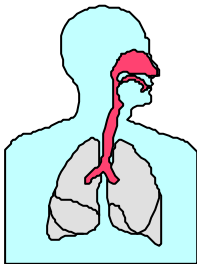
Generally psychologists have found that the fastest, most efficient way to change feelings is to change the environment.

Time with Friends



When people get very stressed, they sometimes forget about their friends. Your friends can help distract you from your work or family commitments. There is nothing like a good laugh to ease your tension. Call them up and either invite yourself over or invite them over.

Stress Control through Breath Control



Faced with a stressful situation our breathing tends to change. A simple demonstration is to make a tight fist. Try doing it now. Did you notice any variation in your breathing? Many people will momentarily hold their breath during physical and other stress situations. A sudden noise in the middle of the night will often freeze our breathing.

Everyday stressors like difficult face-to-face encounters and running late can easily alter our breathing patterns. Usually we breathe faster, shallower and we can unconsciously forget to breath. Too much of this, say over a bad year or so, can create an upset in body chemistry that results in anything from mild tension to feelings of panic.

Chronic (long-term) faulty breathing has been linked to high blood pressure and a range of other diseases.

You may wish to check your ability to relax your breathing. Ideally when under any kind of stress it should be *slow, deep and regular* (i.e. with no breath-holding). Count the number of breaths you take over 60 seconds. If you are very relaxed you are breathing at about a rate of 10 to 12 breaths per minute. This converts to 5 or 6 seconds for each breath in and out. The normal rate is up to 16 breaths per minute at rest.

To see if you breathe deeply place one hand on your stomach and the other on your upper-chest. Take in a big breath. Deep breathing shows as your tummy hand moving first. If the hand on your upper-chest moved first you are probably a shallow breather. Under stress this can mean you only get about a 1/2 to 2/3 of your body's oxygen requirement.

The 'fist' exercise above is a guide to whether or not you are more prone to breathe irregularly under stress. Occasional real-life checks are of course more valid and reliable assessments of your breathing style.

You can train yourself to breathe in a more relaxed way under stress with a couple of weeks or so of regular checks. Taking two slow, deep breaths lowers your blood pressure by 2mm of mercury instantly!

Catastrophe Scale



Think about the one thing which really seems to be causing your stress, like having too many things to do at one time, the bank account scraping bottom or having failed at something.

On a scale of 1 to 100 where 100 is the worst thing which could be happening to you, 50 is medium bad, and 10 is a little bad, how bad is it that this thing has happened or will be happening tomorrow? (Remember the scale only goes to 100!)

STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE



Here are eight questions for which you can score 1 or 0 for each.

In the last *three* days:

1. For two of them have you engaged in some activity that puffed you for a little while?
2. Have you eaten mainly (2/3) protein rich plant foods, fruit and vegetables and whole grain products?
3. Have you laughed?
4. Have you touched someone? Like humour it's good for the immune system.
5. Have you been aggressive? If you lost your cool you lost a point.
6. Did you physically relax? Not just flop in front of the TV but did something that unwinds physical tension like deep breathing.
7. Did you give yourself some mental bonuses? Did you watch a nice movie, dream a little, stop to smell the roses, go for a walk in the garden(s), read a trashy novel or magazine?
8. Have you done anything for someone else like give a compliment or write a nice note?

A score of one or two means you are seriously stressed!