

Stress Management Tips

By Thom Lester (w01059hw01@costco.com) for Costco 1059's Health & Wellness program

Many Stress Management programs are laid upon a foundation of a handful of proven concepts that are easy to incorporate into our daily routine and this paper will highlight what some might consider the top five, plus one from my personal tech-guy arsenal. Before we start, remember we have access to many health related articles under the "Your Health" tab on our Break Room PCs. These include topics such as weight management, addiction control, stress management, and many more.

So what are some key activities that can assist you in managing your stress?

First among leading reports is ***getting enough sleep***. *For most adults seven to eight hours is recommended.* The foundation of a good night's rest consists of preparing a safe, quiet, and comfortable place you can spend those seven to eight hours. Later in this paper I will touch upon an interesting technology that can assist in your rest.

Start your day with a good meal. If you include adequate time to prepare and eat a nutritious meal rather than toast with coffee, your mind/body will thank you.

Speaking of that morning cup of coffee... The average person working daylight hours has a normal body-clock-rhythm that is at a low around 10:30am and again around 3:30pm. Several studies show there are benefits to drinking a cup of coffee at these two times rather than the typical cup-upon-rising in the morning, or worse, after dinner. The reasoning is when you wake up you should be refreshed (remember our first point on getting enough sleep) so a caffeine induced jolt should not be needed. And that cup after dinner can often be the mind's way of believing it can counter the carb-downer it may experience after a big meal, though this late in the day the caffeine in the body is likely to interfere with getting a good night's rest.

Take time to relax. The word "relax" can take on a variety of activities in our minds. For some it is a walk on a wooded path or beach. For others it will be chilling with a good book or listening to some favorite music in a peaceful place. Others may incorporate technology to assist in getting the mind/body into a relaxed state. Included in the idea of relaxing is the idea of ***daily time for reflection or meditation***. Meditation can take many forms. Some involve movement like Tai Chi or Yoga, others are more passive like Qi Gong where one stands in a motionless posture for up to an hour depending on the experience of the practitioner. Doctor Louise Chang shares some useful information in a webmd.com article titled; "Blissing Out: 10 Relaxation Techniques To Reduce Stress On-the-Spot". She states; "If you're thinking meditation means twisting your body into an uncomfortable position and uttering "oohs" and "omms" for an hour, guess again. Any repetitive action can be a source of meditation. This includes walking, swimming, painting, knitting -- any activity that helps keep your attention calmly *in the present moment*. When you catch yourself thinking about your job, your relationship or your lifelong to-do list, experts say to simply let the thought escape, and bring your mind back the repetition of the activity. Try it for just 5 to 10 minutes a day and watch stress levels drop."

Proper Breathing. Most don't give a second thought to the act of breathing, yet incorporating a daily routine of taking time to focus on deep breathing is one of the easiest ways to practice being "*In the present moment*" and can also improve health. A couple of favorite breathing activities include taking in a deep breath and letting it out while dropping your chest and visualizing your stress falling away. Another is simply to breathe in deeply, expanding your belly and visualize the oxygen in that breath reaching every cell in your body. Then gently and mindfully exhale using your abdominals to push out the last bit of air in the lungs, ready for the next deep inhale.

Think Positive. Nearly everyone has been bombarded with the idea of positive thinking from books, television and talk radio. After all the hype is filtered out one thing is clear, we can benefit from thinking good thoughts rather than bad! Another tip from the webmd article states; "Thirty seconds is enough time to shift your heart's rhythm from stressed to relaxed. The way to do that: Engage your heart and your mind in positive thinking. Start by envisioning anything that triggers a positive feeling -- a vision of your child or spouse, the image of your pet, that great piece of jewelry you're saving up to buy, a memento from a vacation -- whatever it is, conjuring up the thought will help slow breathing, relax tense muscles and put a smile on your face. Creating a positive emotional attitude can also calm and steady your heart rhythm, contributing to feelings of relaxation and peace."

Stress Management Tips *(continued)*

Brain Wave Entrainment as a tool for Stress Management

Incorporating Brain Wave Entrainment (BWE) into your stress management routine can be as simple as playing freely available audio files on a computer or personal electronic device such as an iPod or smart-phone. Studies in BWE date back to the early 1900's and became popular with advances in medical and audio technologies in the 1970's. A 1973 Scientific American article by Dr Gerald Oster titled "Beats in the Brain" was the fuel that started an industry based on the findings of that research paper. For those inclined to research there is a wealth of information and free audio files on the web.

I have been studying the mind/body connection for nearly three decades and my current tools include a program called Mind Work Station (MWS); a professional level program used by the medical community to induce various states of consciousness through audio technology. MWS allows the programmer to create audio files combining various "Beat" technologies from the original Binaural Beats to Isochronic Tones, the latest in BWE technology. Often mixed with relaxing background scenes such as a beach, brook, or rain, the beats are set to various frequencies *the human brain will try to sync with* over the course of approximately five to eight minutes. From that point on the brain becomes *entrained* with the beats such that the brain/body connection will begin to mirror the brain state; Alert (Beta), Relaxed/Focus (Alpha), Super learning/Slumber/Dreams (Theta), Deep meditation/Sleep (Delta). Hallucination and similar brain states can also be induced by alternating high Beta up to Gamma frequencies.

A disclaimer: Please note that every individual is unique, though this technology is lab proven and safe for the majority. There are exceptions. One known exception is that this technology should not be used by those who have a history of seizures. And the files should NEVER be used when operating equipment or played in any vehicle. I have personally used BWE audio technology for many years on a near-daily-basis. My first experiments date back to 1976 in my electronic music studio, and in the 1990's I replaced the electronic/synthesizer hardware with computers/BWE software. I've included several mp3 audio files that I created with MWS and have made these available in our Health & Wellness area in both break rooms in CD form. If you would like to try out the files you are welcome to take the CD home overnight and transfer the files onto your computer, then please return the CD to the break room for others to have access to. I have also uploaded these and many more BWE mp3 files to my domain in this directory www.accrete.com/bwe You are welcome to download any for your personal use.

The MP3 audio files I've included on the CD are from several series I've developed over the years and are best utilized with stereo headphones.

The *Energizer* series are designed to bring the brain into a highly alert state (Beta) similar to what one might experience in mental-alertness after a brisk walk or engaging conversation. The *Chill-out* series brings the mind into a relaxed state (Alpha) utilizing what is called the Schumann Resonance which is the "pulse" of the Earth's Electromagnetic Field. This frequency is utilized on NASA missions and in the International Space Station to counter the negative effects of being away from the earth's pulse, with research showing mitochondrial DNA and cellular level restoration by utilizing this frequency. I have included 21 minute and 34 minute *Chill-out* versions giving the user a choice depending on how much time they can allot. The Schumann Resonance is also utilized in the *Restore* series designed to relax and refresh the mind/body. The *Relax* series are designed to bring the user into a deep meditative/sleepy state (Theta) and back up to an alert state at the end of the session. If you are relaxing in a chair most likely you can use these sessions for deep meditation and even super learning, though if you relax inclined on a couch you are likely to wake up an hour and a half later refreshed and wondering what happened to your time! The *Deep Relax* series are a step beyond the Relaxation series in that they are purposefully designed to take you into a deeper meditative or sleep state (Delta) and back up to an alert state. If one wanted to attempt to remain awake by sitting upright in a chair the time might include altered states of wakeful-dreaming/lucid-dreaming. *Sleep Induction* is designed to induce sleep and works well when utilizing an inexpensive pillow speaker or an mp3 player under your pillow. The Sleep Induction process can be used as many times as desired during the sleep session. For instance it might be restarted after waking up in the middle of the night to quiet the mind-chatter and fall back into a sound sleep.

Remember, a relaxing-state-of-mind is only a few deep breaths away!

Thom

May 2011