

Twelve Powerful Yet Simple Stress Management Techniques



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Twelve Simple Yet Powerful Stress Management Tips

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Introduction

On October 22, 2016 I experienced a life-changing event, and I didn't even know it. I had a heart attack. And I walked around for two days before seeing a doctor only because I had already scheduled an annual check-up.

Being admitted to the hospital for a heart attack was the worst day of my life... but I learned something. Balance in life is key and I finally came to really KNOW IT.

I want my heart attack to matter. Heart attacks are the #1 killer of women in the US and most Western countries. If I can help to make a difference in your heart health, then it will have been worth it.

On my blog and Facebook page I share how I have been managing my disease – through nutrition, exercise, mindset, and especially stress management-- all with the goal of improving heart health.

I walk the talk...

I was the student before becoming the teacher...

I practice this lifestyle...

Here are the stress management techniques that I have made part of my life which has helped me to overcome the consequences of having a heart attack.

I hope you find them useful and make them part of your daily life as well.

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- 1. Smile.** Even if you're not feeling happy, and especially when you're feeling stressed. A simple smile has a measurable effect on your overall well-being. Smiling can generate mood enhancing hormones such as endorphins while lowering cortisol and other stress hormones. It can even lower blood pressure! Besides when you smile you look better, you look more competent, and you are more likeable. So, smile!
- 2. Breathe.** Breathing is the only thing you can do completely consciously or completely unconsciously. It's run by two different sets of nerves and muscles – voluntary and involuntary system. It is a powerful way for us to access the involuntary nervous system. Disturbances in the involuntary nervous system are responsible for a great deal of chronic disease.

We can balance our sympathetic nervous system (revs us up to fight or flight response) with the parasympathetic system which calms us down. Deep belly breathing - deeper, slower, quieter and more regular – can help us decrease blood pressure, get to sleep easier, and is a powerful anti-anxiety technique. Learn how to breathe right. It doesn't cost anything, there's no equipment needed, it's simple and you can do it anywhere. Watch me explain and demonstrate how to do breathing techniques.



- 3. Look for Humor.** Laughter activates the immune system, decreases stress hormones, causes pain reduction, muscle relaxation, decreases blood pressure. Belly laughter even causes a cleansing effect similar to deep breathing.

Watch funny movies, find humorous YouTube videos (I personally love the dog, cat and baby videos), or Facebook pages dedicated to humor, hang out with funny people, or go to a comedy club!

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- 4. Meditate.** Studies show that meditation not only lowers blood pressure but also can amp up your immune system while improving your ability to concentrate.

Maybe you're like me. I never thought I could actually sit down long enough and learn to meditate. I had the classic monkey mind – I could never stop thinking. But having a heart attack certainly will make you rethink what you're capable of. But please don't wait until you have a health crisis. Learn to chill out with meditation well before you "need" to. Many yoga studios have meditation classes, there are apps for your phone such as **Head Space** or **Calm** for you to try on your own. There are lots of different ways to meditate – so explore what is right for you.

With meditation, I have learned to go deep. It allows me to connect with what some call the "Universal Field" or what I call God. As a result of meditation, I sleep better, I am less reactive, and like the calmness and feeling I get that it's going to be alright. [Check out this video where I interview my transcendental meditation instructor.](#)

- 4. Exercise.** One of the best stress-busting strategies is to start exercising.

Aerobic exercise boosts oxygen circulation and spurs your body to make the feel-good chemicals called endorphins. Aim for 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three to four times a week.



If you're not active now, start with walking. As you get in greater shape, consider doing interval training. Walk a minute, jog a minute and repeat for 10 min. Interval training is great for burning fat, increasing cardio vascular health, no equipment is necessary, it increases your metabolism, and it's efficient.

Two weeks of high-intensity intervals improves your aerobic capacity as much as 6 to 8 weeks of endurance training. A study presented at the American College of Sports Medicine Annual Meeting in 2011, showed that just 2 weeks of high-intensity intervals improves your aerobic capacity as much as 6 to 8 weeks of endurance training.

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- 5. Stop Multi-Tasking.** Contrary to popular belief, multitasking doesn't save time. In fact, it will probably take you longer to finish two projects when you're jumping back and forth than it would to finish each one separately. I know I was – and still am – guilty of this, though I'm getting better. It takes a while to get rid of a habit you've had for years.

What tends to save the most time is to do things in batches. Pay your bills all at once, then send your emails all at once. Each task requires a specific mindset, and once you get in a groove you should stay there and finish.

In fact, you can experience up to 40% reduction in productivity by multi-tasking and you miss out on life by not noticing what is happening around you when focused on too many things.

- 6. Pray.** Science has shown religious practices are good for your health. They promote greater well-being, greater happiness, better mental health, greater social support, and ultimately better physical health and faster recovery. It doesn't matter what your understanding of God is - if you are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist – regardless of religious denomination - the benefits of prayer were significant.

For the scientists and skeptics, brain scans were done on Franciscan nuns and on Buddhist monks during prayer and meditation showing the frontal lobes are activated (the same parts of the brain that get activated when we have conversation with others) while the parietal lobe goes dark (that part of the brain that gives us a sense of self).



In prayer, we have a “conversation” with God. Research conducted at Harvard affiliated Massachusetts General as well as other institutions show the positive effects of prayer on health.

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For myself, I found comfort in knowing that others were praying for me. It is one of the first requests I made after I was hospitalized. My husband called our church to ask the prayer network to pray for me.

- 7. Learn to Say No.** Don't over commit. Stress is caused by agreeing to do something that you don't have the capacity for at that particular time. As you go through your day, note which tasks cause you stress. How can you eliminate or limit them? Also note which tasks give you pleasure and find ways to do more of that.

To learn to say no confidently, we have to first understand why we agree to something that ends up causing us so much stress. Some common reasons people find it hard to say no are:



- Not wanting to let people down
- Desire to conform
- Fear of conflict
- Fear of opportunities lost

Remove guilt from the situation. Don't agree to something if your gut instinct is to say no, especially if you are only agreeing due to feelings of guilt.

- 8. Keep A List Of Daily Accomplishments.** The brain registers small goals the same as large ones. If you fail at a big goal, you can easily trigger the release of stress chemicals, whereas every small accomplishment releases dopamine and motivates you to achieve more success.

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But you have to deliberately become conscious of them! At the end of the day, write down all your small accomplishments and then take 2-3 minutes to savor them. Put a reminder in your calendar to help you do this. Research shows that if you do this for just one week your self-esteem will continue to grow over the next 3 months!



- 9. Control your environment.** Turn off CNN (AKA constant negative news) and other news channels. If it's important, you will find out about it. Do the same with social media. Unfriend or block "friends" that say upsetting things. I had my heart attack 2 weeks before the 2016 election and had ENOUGH! I now have selected thought leaders that I "follow first" and good stuff always comes up in my feed.

Avoid Energy Vampires, you know, the Debbie Downers in your life. If they are family, find ways to limit time with them. Surround yourself with good, positive people. If they aren't in your life currently, get some good books or listen to some great self-help audios while you are in the car. Listen and fill your head and heart with what they have to say.

I highly recommend the following books as a great start:

The Magic by Rhonda Byrne
You Can Heal Your Life by Louise Hay
Having It All by John Assaraf
Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill
Creative Visualization by Shakti Gawain
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey
The Power Within by Tony Robbins

Here is a list of some of the podcasts I listen to:

Happier with Gretchen Rubin
The TED Radio Hour
The Tony Robbins Podcast

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You can check out Meetup.com to find meetings with interests similar to yours such as biking, cooking, pets, outdoor adventure, photography – just about anything that floats your boat. By finding interests you love and other people who love them as well, it is very likely you will find upbeat positive groups of people that could very well become your new friends.

- 10. Get Your Z'zzzzs.** Lack of sleep influences how much stress you experience. A recent study examined the effect of sleep on stress.

Participants took an exam that was mildly stressful. Compared to those experiencing a typical night of sleep, those in the sleep deprived condition experienced higher levels of stress.



Other researchers, and your own life experience I'm sure, shows that a lack of sleep leads to more stress and psychological strain.

For my 19 Tips To Get Better Sleep, [click here](#).

- 12. Gratitude.** Gratitude may be one of the most overlooked tools that EVERYONE has access to every day. Developing gratitude doesn't cost any money and it certainly doesn't take much time, but the benefits are enormous. Gratitude doesn't just make you feel like a better person, it's actually good for your health.



When I am grateful, I feel more connected with myself and with my environment. This is the opposite of what happens when I'm stressed out. I've written several blog posts about gratitude. Here are [Seven Reasons Gratitude Is Good For Your Health](#) and [How To Create Personal Resilience](#).

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I hope you've found these stress management techniques to be of help. To start with, just pick one or two. When you feel like you've mastered them, add another one and keep doing so until you have your stress under control.

I didn't start with all these steps overnight. It's something I worked up to. While medical intervention was necessary as part of my recovery from a heart attack, I believe managing stress is the single biggest factor in my successful recovery. A recent stress test and echocardiogram shows that my heart is back in excellent shape!

Let me know if you have questions or comments. And please pass this along to friends who need to hear it. You can find me on my website at www.AudreyWeidman.com or message me on my [Facebook page](#).

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