Fifty-Two Stress Reducers

[This list was contributed by Dr. Joseph A. Cimino, D.C.]

1. Get up fifteen minutes earlier in the morning. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful.

2. Prepare for the morning the evening before. Set the breakfast table, make lunches, put out the clothes you plan to wear, etc.

3. Don't rely on your memory. Write down appointment times, when to pick up the laundry, when library books are due, etc. ("The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory."—Old Chinese Proverb)

4. Do nothing which, after being done, leads you to tell a lie.

5. Make duplicates of all keys. Bury a house key in a secret spot in the garden and carry a duplicate car key in your wallet, apart from your key ring.

6. Practice preventive maintenance. Your car, appliances, home, and relationships will be less likely to break down/fall apart "at the worst possible moment."

7. Be prepared to wait. A paperback can make a wait in a post office almost pleasant.

8. Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.

9. Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank get below one-quarter full; keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of home staples; don't wait until you're down to your last bus token or postage stamp to buy more; etc.

10. Don't put up with something that doesn't work right. If your alarm clock, wallet, shoe laces, windshield wipers - whatever - is a constant aggravation, get it fixed or get a new one.

11. Allow 15 minutes of extra time to get to appointments. Plan to arrive at an airport one hour before domestic departures.

12. Eliminate (or restrict) the amount of caffeine in your diet.

13. Always set up contingency plans, "just in case." ("If for some reason either of us is delayed, here's what we'll do..." kind of thing. Or, "if we get split up in the shopping center, here's where we'll meet.")

14. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this

weekend.

15. Pollyanna-Power! For every one thing that goes wrong, there are probably 10 or 50 or 100 blessings. Count 'em!

16. Ask questions. Taking a few moments to repeat back directions, what someone expects of you. etc., can save *hours* (The old "the hurrier I go, the behinder I get" idea.)

17. Say "No!" Saying "no" to extra projects, social activities, and invitations you know you don't have the time or energy for takes practice, self-respect, and a belief that everyone needs quiet time to relax and be alone.

18. Unplug your phone. Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep or read without interruption? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect. (The possibility of there being a terrible emergency in the next hour is almost nil.) Or use an answering machine.

19. Turn "needs" into *preferences.* Our basic physical needs translate into food, water and keeping warm. Everything else is a preference. Don't get attached to preferences.

20. Simplify, simplify, simplify...

21. Make friends with nonworriers. Nothing can get you into the habit of worrying faster than associating with chronic worrywarts.

22. Get up and stretch periodically if your job requires you to sit for extended periods.

23. Wear earplugs. If you need to find quiet at home, pop in some earplugs.

24. Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.

25. Create order out of chaos. Organize your home and workspace so that you always know where things are. Put things away where they belong and you won't have to go through the stress of losing things.

26. When feeling stressed, most people tend to breathe in short, shallow breaths. When you breathe like this, stale air is not expelled, oxidation of the tissues is incomplete, and muscle tension frequently results. Check your breathing throughout the day, and before, during and after high-pressure situations. If you find your stomach muscles are knotted and your breathing is shallow, relax all your muscles and take several deep, slow breaths. Note how, when you're relaxed, both your abdomen and chest expand when you breathe.

27. Writing your thoughts and feelings down (in a journal, or on paper to be thrown away) can help you to clarify things and can give you a renewed perspective.

28. Try the following yoga technique whenever you feel the need to relax. Inhale deeply through your nose to the count of eight. Then, with lips puckered, exhale very slowly

through your mouth to the count of 16, or for as long as you can. Concentrate on the long sighing sound and feel the tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.

29. Inoculate yourself against a feared event. Example: Before speaking out in public, take time to go over every part of the experience in your mind. Imagine what you'll wear, what the audience will look like, how you will present your talk, what the questions will be and how you will answer them, etc. Visualize the experience the way you would have it be. You'll likely find that when the time comes to make the actual presentation, it will be old hat and much of your anxiety will have fled.

30. When the stress of having to get a job done gets in the way of getting the job done, a diversion—a voluntary change in activity and/or environment may be just what you need.

31. Talk it out. Discussing your problems with a trusted friend can help clear your mind of confusion so you can concentrate on problem-solving.

32. One of the most obvious ways to avoid unnecessary stress is to select an environment (work, home, leisure) which is in line with your personal needs and desires. If you hate desk jobs, don't accept a job which requires that you sit at a desk all day. If you hate to talk politics, don't associate with people who love to talk politics, etc.

33. Learn to live one day at a time.

34. Every day, do something you really enjoy.

35. Add an ounce of love to everything you do.

36. Take a hot bath or shower (or a cool one in the summertime) to relieve tension.

37. Do something for someone else.

38. Focus on understanding rather than on being understood; on loving rather than being loved.

39. Do something that will improve your appearance. Looking better can help you feel better.

40. Schedule a realistic day. Avoid the tendency to schedule back-to-back appointments; allow time before appointments for a breathing spell.

41. Become more flexible. Some things are worth not doing perfectly and some issues are well to compromise upon.

42. Eliminate destructive self-talk: "I'm too old to..." "I'm too fat to...," etc.

43. Use your weekend time for a change of pace. If your work week is slow and

patterned, make sure there is action and time for spontaneity built into your weekends. If your work week is fast-paced and full of people and deadlines, seek peace and solitude during your days off. Feel as if you aren't accomplishing anything at work? Tackle a job on the weekend that you can finish to your satisfaction.

44. "Worry about the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves." That's another way of saying: take care of the todays as best you can and the yesterdays and tomorrows will take care of themselves.

45. Do one thing at a time. When you are with someone, be with that person and with no one or nothing else. When you are busy with a project, concentrate on doing *that* project and forget about everything else you have to do.

46. Allow yourself time - every day - for privacy, quiet and introspection.

47. If an especially unpleasant task faces you, do it early in the day and get it over with; then the rest of your day will be free of anxiety.

48. Learn to delegate responsibility to capable others.

49. Don't forget to take a lunch break. Try to get away from your desk or work area in body and mind, even if it is only for 20 minutes.

50. Forget about counting to 10. Count to 1,000 before doing or saying anything that could make matters worse.

51. Have a forgiving view of events and people. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world.

52. Have an optimistic view of the world. Believe that most people are doing the best they can.

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