



## *Imagine a morning like this!*

*With your partner, discuss the picture below and then complete the following sentences.*



*She seems...*

*I'd imagine she's...*

*She looks/looks like*

*If I were her, I'd...*

*By the looks of it, she's...*



### Discuss!

How do you currently cope with stress in your life?

Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unproductive?

These **coping strategies** below may temporarily reduce stress, but do you agree they cause more damage in the long run?



### Can you add any more to the list?

Smoking	Finding comfort in Over-the-counter medication
<b><u>Binge-drinking</u></b>	Over-sleeping
<b><u>Over-indulging on</u></b> junk or comfort food	<b><u>Procrastinating</u></b>
<b><u>Zoning out</u></b> for hours in front of the TV or computer	Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
<b><u>Withdrawing from</u></b> friends, family, and activities	<b><u>Taking your stress out on</u></b> others ( <b><u>lashing out</u></b> , angry <b><u>outbursts</u></b> , physical violence)
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



**Rank the following stress management tips in order of their importance.**

1 = Most important, 10 = Least important

- Avoid Caffeine, alcohol and nicotine
- Indulge in physical activity
- Get more sleep
- Try relaxation techniques
- Open up to someone
- Keep a stress diary
- Take control
- Manage your time
- Learn to say 'no'
- Rest and recover



Follow our 10 simple tips to help manage and reduce your stress levels.

## 1. Avoid Caffeine, Alcohol, and Nicotine.

**Avoid, or at least reduce your consumption of, nicotine and all drinks containing caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine, alcohol and nicotine are stimulants and so will increase your level of stress rather than reduce it.**

Swap caffeinated and alcoholic drinks for water, herbal teas, or diluted natural fruit juices and aim to keep yourself hydrated as this will enable your body **to cope** better **with** stress.

**You should also aim to avoid or reduce your intake of refined sugars** - they are contained in many manufactured foods (and even in savoury foods such as salad dressings and bread) and can cause **energy crashes** which may lead you to feel tired and irritable. In general, try to eat a healthy, well-balanced and nutritious diet.

## 2. Indulge in Physical Activity

**Stressful situations increase the level of stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol in your body.**

These are the “fight or flight” hormones that evolution has **hard-wired** into our brains and which are designed to protect us from immediate bodily harm when we are under threat. However, stress in the modern age is rarely remedied by a fight or flight response, and so physical exercise can be used to metabolize the excessive stress hormones and restore your body and mind to a calmer, more relaxed state.

When you feel stressed and tense, go for **a brisk walk** in fresh air. Try to incorporate some physical activity into your daily routine on a regular basis, either before or after work, or at lunchtime. Regular physical activity will also improve the quality of your sleep.



## 3. Get More Sleep

**A lack of sleep is a significant cause of stress. Unfortunately though, stress also interrupts our sleep as thoughts keep whirling through our heads, stopping us from relaxing enough to fall asleep.**

Rather than relying on medication, your aim should be to maximise your relaxation before going to sleep. Make sure that your bedroom is a tranquil oasis with no reminders of the things that cause you stress. Avoid caffeine during the evening, as well as excessive alcohol if you know that this leads to disturbed sleep. Stop doing any mentally demanding work several hours before going to bed so that you give your brain time to calm down. Try taking a warm bath or reading a calming, undemanding book for a few minutes to relax your body, tire your eyes and help you forget about the things that worry you.

You should also aim to go to bed at roughly the same time each day so that your mind and body get used to a predictable bedtime routine.

## 4. Try Relaxation Techniques

**Each day, try to relax with a stress reduction technique. There are many tried and tested ways to reduce stress so try a few and see what works best for you.**

For example, try self-hypnosis which is very easy and can be done anywhere, even at your desk or in the car. One very simple technique is to focus on the positive aspects of your life. Think of all the people, things and successes you have to be grateful for. Practice gratitude at any stage during the day when you are feeling down. If you find your mind has wandered or you become aware of intrusive thoughts entering your mind, simply disregard them and return your focus to the chosen word or phrase. If you find yourself becoming tense again later, simply silently repeat your word or phrase.



## 5. Open up to Someone

**Just talking to someone about how you feel can be helpful.**

**Talking can work by either distracting you from your stressful thoughts or releasing some of the built-up tension by discussing it.**

Stress can **cloud your judgement** and prevent you from seeing things clearly. Talking things through with a friend, work colleague, or even a trained professional, can help you find solutions to your stress and put your problems into perspective and throw a new objective view on it.

If your stress is caused by a person rather than a situation, then maybe try talking it through with the person who is acting as the 'stressor'. This will help you **to vent** your emotions and feelings and get everything out in to the open rather than **bottling it up**, and may actually help to clear up some of the problems.

## 6. Keep a Stress Diary

**Keeping a stress diary for a few weeks is an effective stress management tool as it will help you become more aware of the situations which cause you to become stressed.**

Note down the date, time and place of each stressful episode, and note what you were doing, who you were with, and how you felt both physically and emotionally. Give each stressful episode a stress rating (on, say, a 1-10 scale) and use the diary to understand what **triggers** your stress and how effective you are in stressful situations. This will enable you to avoid stressful situations and develop better **copng mechanisms**.



## 7. Take Control

**Stress can be triggered by a problem that may on the surface seems impossible to solve. Learning how to find solutions to your problems will help you feel more in control thereby lowering your level of stress.**

One problem-solving technique involves writing down the problem and coming up with as many possible solutions as you can. Decide on the **pros and cons** of each one and select the best solution. Write down each step that you need to take as part of the solution: what will be done, how will it be done, when will it be done, who is involved and where will it take place.

## 8. Manage Your Time

**At times, we all feel overburdened by our 'To Do' list and this is a common cause of stress. **Accept that you can't do everything at once and start to prioritise your tasks.****

Make a list of all the things that you need to do in order of genuine priority. Note what tasks you need to do personally and what can be **delegated to** others to do. Record which tasks need to be done immediately, in the next week, in the next month, or when time allows.

By editing what might have started out as an **overwhelming** and unmanageable task list, you can break it down into a series of smaller, more manageable tasks spread out over a longer time frame, with some tasks removed from the list entirely through delegation.

Remember as well to create buffer times to deal with unexpected and emergency tasks, and to include time for your own relaxation and well-being.



## 9. Learn to Say 'No'

A common cause of stress is having too much to do and too little time in which to do it. And yet in this situation, many people will still agree to take on additional responsibility. Learning to say “No” to additional or unimportant requests will help to reduce your level of stress, and may also help you develop more self-confidence.

To learn to say “No”, you need to understand why you find it difficult. Many people find it hard to say “No” because they want to help and are trying to be nice and to be liked. For others, it is a fear of conflict, rejection or missed opportunities. Remember that these barriers to saying “No” are all self-created.

You might feel **reluctant to** respond to a request with a straight “No”, at least at first. Instead think of some pre-prepared phrases **to let** other **people down** more gently. Practice saying phrases such as:

*“I am sorry but I can't commit to this as I have other priorities at the moment.”*

*“Now is not a good time as I'm in the middle of something. Why don't you ask me again at....?”*

## 10. Rest and Recover

If you are feeling unwell, do not feel that you have **to carry on regardless**. A short spell of rest will enable the body to recover faster.

People who are stressed find it almost impossible to stop and take some time out as they are continuously working through their 'to do' list but soon enough, it **catches up on you** and the stress on the mind presents itself in physical form in the body. Take some time off! Rest, **rejuvenate** and recover....and don't feel guilty about it. You deserve it and your mental state needs it.