



Cheap Ways to Relieve Stress

By M.J. Clark, MA, APR

"I'm so stressed out!" is a sentence I hear from many of my clients. We all have stress in our lives, and sometimes stress can seem overwhelming.

There are two elements involved in stress. There are stressors – the things outside of us, that happen to us, that we would label stressful. Stressors can be finding out your teenage daughter is pregnant, being told by a doctor that you have cancer, or having a boss you can't seem to please. The other element to stress is our anxiety – the way we react internally to the stressor. Anxiety can show itself when we have trouble sleeping, when we feel physically different (achy neck, stomach pain, headaches), or when we replay the same scene in our head over and over again. Although we can't control what happens around us, in many cases, we can control our reactions to stressors.

There are things we all know that can help us deal with stress: getting more exercise, eating right, meditating, and getting enough sleep, among others. If you are an ILS client, you may also know that aerobic breathing, journaling and writing affirmations can help lower anxiety and boost your immune system to help keep you healthier. I was recently surprised by the very simple suggestions on how to deal with stress given by Dr. Frank Lawlis in his book *The Stress Answer*.

Dr. Lawlis outlines four simple things people can do to relieve stress. And they are not only simple; they are free, which is important during this time of financial strain for many of us. Here are the four suggestions he gives:

1. **Breathe deeply.** Dr. Lawlis says shallow breathing (breathing in short bursts from our lungs) cuts off oxygen. When we are dealing with anxiety, we often take short breaths. When we force ourselves to breathe more deeply, we supply more oxygen to our body. I tell clients to breathe aerobically, from their abdomen. When you breathe this way, as you take in air, your stomach should balloon out. When you release the air, your stomach should go back in. Breathe in through your nose, and exhale through your mouth. Try each time to lengthen the amount of seconds it takes you to breathe in and out to slow your breathing.
2. **Listen to music and dance.** Dr. Lawlis says that the brain follows the body's rhythm. So if the brain is in an unhealthy pattern, like replaying a stressful situation over and over in your head, dancing to music breaks that pattern, and the brain moves in a different direction. He suggests drum music is especially helpful, such as music by the Blue Man Group.
3. **Celebrate progress or success.** When we are busy, it seems celebrating success is often the first to go. Celebrating small successes does wonders for our soul, and it keeps team members energized for the next project too! When we take time to notice an accomplishment, and pat ourselves or our team mates on the back, we begin thinking more positively about our overall situation.
4. **Smell something.** Dr. Lawlis says research shows a direct connection between our nose and our brain. The stimulation of a new smell creates a new brain pattern. So when you feel anxious, go buy yourself a bouquet of flowers and smell them deeply, or wear new cologne, or cook something new that will stimulate your brain.

I challenge you to try one of these simple techniques within the next 24 hours and see if you can feel a difference. And if you do, consider making it part of your daily or weekly routine.