

HOW TO COPE BETTER WITH THE END OF THE YEAR STRESS



Do you have a demanding job, a family to take care of, and you still need to find time in your day to sort everything out before the end of the year? If your answer to this is yes, chances are you're probably feeling stretched to the limits and guilty about not having enough time for everyone and everything. So how do you find a balance and fit everything in when there just never seems to be enough hours in a day? Here are some helpful hints and tips on how you can reduce your stress levels that will leave you feeling calmer, happier, and more positive.

Stress causes increased cortisol (our 'stress' hormone) and adrenalin levels in the brain and body. This can result in 'tunnel-vision' thought patterns and reactions, and serves to hinder good learning and decision-making. Feeling stressed also decreases the production of serotonin (our 'happy' hormone), which together with high cortisol levels and depleted adrenal glands can lead to symptoms of burnout. When we are stressed and feel that everything is too much for us, we create negative thought patterns and self-talk. Negative thoughts tend to decrease our self-esteem and don't allow us to feel that we are coping and able to succeed in achieving our goals. Therefore, it is very important to be in tune with our body and mind, and to achieve this, there are a number of factors to be aware of.

Sleep

Ensure that you sleep enough. Western research shows that we need between seven and nine hours of sleep every night. To get the most out of your sleep, make sure that your room is dark, there are no noises to disturb you, and the room temperature is not too warm. It is important to switch your cell phone and computer/laptop off after 8 p.m.,

so that your brain can cycle down and is ready to switch off when you go to sleep. The blue light of the cell phone screen inhibits melatonin production (your sleep hormone). So make sure that you switch your cell phone off an hour before you go to bed to allow your brain to cycle down to sleep better. Also, make sure that you don't watch violent or too exciting movies before going to bed, as the last pictures, feelings, and words we see and experience in the evening are the first that are worked through in our dreams. If a movie disturbs us, we generally will not have a restful and relaxing night's sleep.



Nutrition

When we are stressed and feel that we need more energy, we usually tend to look for something that gives us a boost. Sugary and fatty foods give us that boost, but they also spike our insulin/ blood sugar levels. Highly sugary foods tend to pass quickly through our bloodstream, leaving us feeling low in energy after a short period. When our blood sugar is low, we feel irritated, have no energy, and tend to develop headaches easier. Therefore, it is important to eat small, low GI meals regularly to keep our energy levels up and running, and it will help you to work longer, study better, and concentrate more.

Hydration

Being hydrated is so important. The amount of water in the human body ranges from 50-75%, so it is imperative to replenish our water balance regularly.

Time management

The older we get, the less time we seem to have. All too often, we are involved in too many things that we need to do every day and can't find the time to finish everything. So what you need to do here is only plan for 60% of the time in your day, as we need the other 40% for the unforeseen. Make a list of what you need to do every day, prioritise those activities, and try to stick to it. It is such an incredible feeling to be able to tick off what you have achieved in the day, thus boosting your self-esteem and ultimately allowing you to feel in control and calmer.



Combat anxiety and down feelings

Revisit your breathing techniques to stay calm and focus on positive thoughts and outcomes every day. We often tend to focus on negative events more than on positive events. Be aware of what is positive in the day and think about it in the evening. You will be surprised at how many positive things you are able to think of. Positive thoughts can increase your energy and strength levels by up to 25%. Be mindful and train your brain to have positive thoughts and engage in positive self talk.

Keep a good balance

Keeping a good balance in life seems to be the most difficult thing to achieve. So make sure that you are motivated, know what your goals are, be aware of how much time you spend on everything during the day and or week, and allocate time accordingly, get sleep enough, eat and drink healthily, exercise regularly, and have some free/fun time. Being out of balance often means that we overindulge, self-medicate, get sick quicker, feel deprived, and can't stick to our plans.



To live a more balanced life, what it all comes down to is being realistic about what you can do in a day. Plan your day, prioritise the activities, and try not to deviate or get side tracked once you have set your plan of action.

Implementing these tips will help you to stay sane in the “silly season” and allow you to enjoy the holiday time even more.

About the author

Andrea has studied Human Movement Science, Biokinetics, Psychology, Hypnotherapy and Neurofeedback Therapy, and has worked in schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and private practice. Currently, she is working in private practice in Westville and specialises in helping people with anxiety, depression, stress, concentration problems, insomnia, eating disorders and ADD/ADHD, as well as people who want to stop smoking, lose weight and reduce phobias. She helps a lot of people to achieve their goals and lead a happier life. Apart from counseling, Andrea uses hypnotherapy and neurofeedback to assist her clients. If you need help with finding the right balance in your life, visit the website, www.eq-advancedge.co.za to learn more about this topic.

