

5 Steps to reduce Relationship Stress

by S. Fenella Das Gupta PhD (Neurosci.), MFTi # 52805.

At some point in our lives, we have all experienced stress in our most intimate relationships. This stress cannot be underestimated. The ripples are felt at both an emotional and physical level. In fact medical research has shown that difficulties in relationships precipitate so much stress that it can affect every biological system of the body.

There are however a few basic steps that you can take to cope better with stress. You can't avoid it, but you can manage it.

1. Physical Exercise: It is often reported that physical exercise is put on the back burner when relationship stress is in the foreground. Although this may be the last thing on your agenda, research has shown that regular exercise, as little as 30 minutes 3 times a week reduces anxiety, tension and anger. Physical exercise promotes a sense of well being allowing one to ward off negative emotions that can sometimes cause one to "get even", play the victim or obsess. "Just Do It!".

2. Nurture yourself emotionally and physically: When we are balanced emotionally and physically, we often make the time to nurture ourselves. We call these treats and we give ourselves treats when we think we deserve them. When we are stressed, we feel lousy and we don't always think we deserve them. 'Don't believe everything you think'. Treat yourself and you will restore the balance which will ultimately help you deal whatever you face. Get back to basics such as reading a good book, taking a hot bath, getting a manicure. Small things will help. And at times of stress, do not underestimate the support that can be gained from maintaining a close circle of friends. Not isolating yourself from others is key.

3. Pace yourself; Slow down and take a deep breath. Research has shown that slowing things or yourself down, will allow you to feel more in control which will ultimately reduce your stress level.

4. The one-minute meditator: Stuck in traffic? Try it out. Slowly draw in a deep breath through your nose. Feel your chest and belly expand. Hold that breath for a count of 3. Exhale *slowly* through your mouth and allow your body to relax in to the chair. Repeat 4 more times.

5. Let go of problems that are beyond your control: This is a challenge, but can be surpassed. When faced with a painful situation learn to let it go. Spend time figuring out what is best for you and then come back to it. Stay focused on what you have control over and let go of the rest.

Common pitfalls when trying to deal with the rollercoaster of emotions include turning to destructive habits such as high risk activities, drinking or taking drugs. Avoid them. If you are hurt or angry, it is best to find someone safe to vent to and get out those feelings. Psychotherapy may be useful to help you sort through the complex emotions in a supportive non-judgmental manner.

Above all, try not to fret, you will make your way through this stressful time *in the best way you can*. Be gentle with yourself. You can do it.

S. Fenella Das Gupta, Intern IMF #52805, has a Marriage and Family psychotherapy practice in Petaluma under the supervision of Margie Jamin MFT, MFC #34363. She enjoys working with the complexities of relationship issues, digging deep to look at the roots. You may wish to visit her website at www.innermirror.com

