



STRESS MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Exercise

Of all the tools in your stress management tool kit, exercise is the one that best meets your body's needs in times of stress. That's because stress triggers an ancient response designed by nature to help you meet danger: the "fight or flight" response.

The Physiology of Stress

Following a stressful event, a whole series of physiological changes gets your body "revved up" for physical effort. Your heart beats faster, your breathing becomes more rapid, muscles tense and your blood pressure goes up. Your blood sugar rises so that you have access to quick energy.

When You Can't Run or Fight

In ancient times, you would release all this extra tension when you ran away from the tiger or fought off whatever danger was at hand. In the modern world, stress-producing events rarely call for a physical response. When a traffic tie-up makes you late for an important meeting, you can't get out and attack the offending vehicle. You end up carrying around all the extra tension, feeling like a walking pressure cooker—unless you release it the way nature intended, in the form of physical exercise.

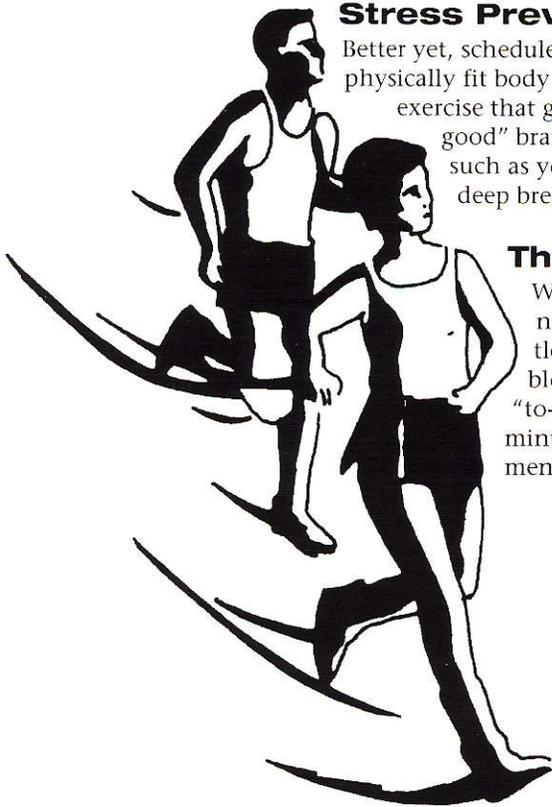
Almost any kind of exercise will do. Even walking around the building or going up a flight of stairs when tension rises can make a difference. If you can't leave your work area, stand up, walk around and do some stretches and knee bends right where you work.

Stress Prevention: Regular Exercise

Better yet, schedule regular exercise—at least 30 minutes three times a week. A physically fit body is better able to withstand the stresses of modern life. And aerobic exercise that gets your heart pounding for at least 30 minutes releases the "feel good" brain chemicals that reduce stress and depression. Non-aerobic exercises such as yoga also help by stretching and relaxing the muscles and inducing deep breathing and a state of meditation.

The Choices Are Many

What's your pleasure? Walking, cycling, swimming, dancing and running are only some of the choices available to you, many requiring little equipment or expense. Meanwhile, the next time you feel ready to blow your top because someone has just added another item to your "to-do" pile or criticized your pet project, get up and take a brisk 10-minute walk outside. It will ease your tension and put you in the best mental state for dealing calmly and sensibly with the demands of life.



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