

The National Service Stress Survival Guide

FACILITATOR MANUAL & PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

RATIONALE

Whether it's mid-year or the beginning of a new term, members and staff alike may seem tense or sluggish. Reduced creativity, a sense of apprehension, and an increase in illness may result from something experienced every day — stress. The National Service Stress Survival Guide, a curriculum for stress management, has been designed to alleviate these challenges. This training tool is can be easily adapted to meet the needs of your program participants.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Webster's Dictionary defines stress as “a factor causing mental or emotional strain or tension.” Stress can serve productive purposes in life. It keeps us alert and provides an internal source of motivation. Long-term or chronic stress, however, can cause a variety of physical, emotional, and behavioral manifestations. Headaches, insomnia, forgetfulness, and depression are just a few stress responses. These negatives can be avoided through proper stress management strategies that boost immunity, improve overall outlook, and make work and life more pleasurable.

WHAT'S INSIDE: INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

The curriculum guides you through eight steps to effective stress management:

1. Adjust your attitude
2. Make your job work for you
3. Thrive on challenge
4. Eat for performance
5. Exercise
6. Time management
7. Financial management

8. Get your feelings out

Group and individual exercises provide opportunities for self-assessment and reflection, as well as fun and educational interaction.

This curriculum is designed in a user-friendly format and comes complete with a guide for facilitators, informational handouts, self-tests and a resource list for participants. The length of the session can be adjusted based on your opportunity to select any number of the suggested exercises.

STRESS MANAGEMENT SESSION

Preparation

1. Make sure you (and/or other facilitators) are extremely familiar with the session content and flow.
2. Decide on the length of session. Exercises can be eliminated to save time. If conducted with all eleven exercises, this session can take up to three hours. Do a hypothetical run through and estimate the time needed for yourself!
3. Remember that the suggested duration for exercises indicate minimum standards. Feel free to spend additional time on those activities most relevant to your participants.
4. Create a cover page for participant handout packet. Include:
 - a. Name of your program, the training event, and facilitator
 - b. Estimate of session duration. Make sure to include breaks!
 - c. For every hour, build in a five-to-10 minute stretch period
 - d. General session outline (See below).

Here's an example of a general session outline:

In this session we will cover:

1. What is stress?
2. What causes stress?
3. What the effects of stress can be. . .
4. How to effectively manage stress.

Room arrangement

- Make sure you have reserved appropriate space. Can you move around the chairs? Is it too hot or cold? Will people be able to hear the facilitators clearly? Have you managed to keep distractions to a minimum?
- A casual arrangement is best for this session. Try alternative seating, such as pillows on the floor or whatever is most comfortable. Consider low lighting, candles, or anything that sets an appropriate tone.
- Have flipcharts and markers on hand.
- Have your handouts ready to go!

Once you have brought everyone together:

- Introduce the facilitator(s), and explain your role; you will be guiding them through this session. The people in the room are experts on their own personal “stress” and “stress management,” so sharing with one another is a key to learning.
- Review the outline for the session. Make special note of breaks or any difficulties you may be anticipating with the schedule. Be sure to point out “basic needs” issues – where the bathrooms are and when the next meal will be!
- Let people know that this is intended to be a fun and interactive session!

OPENING

Set Ground Rules and Expectations for the session. Write items on a flipchart and leave it posted during the program. Make sure to remind participants that once they set ground rules, it becomes their responsibility to stick to them!

Example Ground Rules: Everyone needs to participate, no sideline conversations, etc. **Example Expectations:** Have fun, learn about stress management, gain skills that can be used immediately.

Tip: Keep the Expectations on hand. You will return to them at the end of the session.

When you complete this process, and are ready to cover content, just follow the rest of the step-by-step guide!

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE - ICEBREAKER

Time: 10 – 15 minutes

- Choose an icebreaker which is appropriate for the situation.
- If participants are not familiar with each other, do a “get-to-know-you” exercise to increase comfort level.
- If participants are familiar with each other, do a more interactive exercise, something funny which allow them to “practice” some of the de-stressing techniques they will learn about later.

After the icebreaker, review the introductory information at the top of the participant handout. Cover “What is stress?” and “What causes stress?” on pages 12-13.

EXERCISE 1: BRAINSTORMING STRESSORS

Time: 10 - 15 minutes

Materials: Flipchart and markers

1. Ask participants to brainstorm any item or situation that causes them stress. Ask a volunteer scribe to list the responses on flipchart paper. (**Examples:** Lack of money, demanding boss, uncertain future, etc.)
2. After they have called out a significant list, ask them to think about the types of categories these “stressors” fall into. Ask the scribe to record these as well. (**Examples:** work related, financial, family or relationships, etc.)
3. Once categories are defined, ask participants to think about how they react to these stressors. Brainstorm reactions, and have the scribe keep the list. (**Examples:** Sweaty palms, headache, racing heart, etc.)
4. Move into the section, “Stress response and stress manifestations.” A list of stress manifestations is located on page 14.

Fun alternative: Participants select a “stress manifestation” and act it out for the group to guess.

EXERCISE 2: STRESS BAROMETER

Time: 10 - 15 minutes, depending on discussion

Materials/prep: Signs posted around the room reading, “Not at all stressed,” “Somewhat stressed,” and “Totally stressed out!” taped to the wall in a continuum. See page 15 for the “How stressed are you?” resource.

1. Ask members to get up and stand in the area that describes their state of stress during the last month.
2. Once the members have moved and self-identified, ask them to make a note of the stress-level of the group as a whole (is it high or low?) and discuss what some of the main reasons may be.

This exercise allows you and the participants to get a sense of where everyone “is at” in terms of stress level.

EXERCISE 3: STRESS SELF-TEST

Time: 10 – 15 minutes

1. Have participants complete the stress test. See page 25 for this exercise handout.
2. Lead a facilitated discussion regarding results. How many participants scored low? How many scored high? Who was surprised by their results? Why?
3. Cover, “What does it take to manage stress effectively?” and introduce “Steps to stress and life management.” This content is covered in materials on pages 16-23.

EXERCISE 4: LAUGHTER AS MEDICINE!

Time: 10 minutes

1. Find a way to induce laughter!
 - If the group is well acquainted, have them lie down on the floor, on their backs, with their heads on each other's stomach. As soon as one person starts laughing, the domino effect should take place!
 - If participants are a little less familiar with each other, have them pair off. They should stand face-to-face with their partner, and one should try to make the other laugh. End result ... they will both be laughing!
2. Once everyone has laughed have participants sit down to process. Ask them how laughing made them feel, if they really enjoyed it, and what effect they think laughter might have on stress. Make a transition into the section on **attitude**.
3. Cover, "Adjust your attitude!" and move into, "Make your job work for you" on pages 16-17.

EXERCISE 5: GROUP PROCESSING: JOB STRESSORS AND STRATEGIES

Time: 20 minutes

Materials/prep: Flipchart paper and marker for each group/Break into groups of four

1. Ask each group to come up with three common job stressors and three strategies to combat their job stress. Ask them to apply this to their current position.
2. Tell the groups to select a scribe and spokesperson.
3. When they have completed the task (roughly 10 minutes) each group will report their answers back to the larger group. (Scribe holds up the paper and the spokesperson talks about their findings.)

4. At the end of the reports, briefly discuss the similarities and differences in the responses.
5. Cover, “Thrive on challenge” and introduce, “Eat for performance” on page 18.

TIP: Let participants know that you will take the flipchart paper and make a handout based on the “Strategies to combat job stress” answers. This will provide them with a practical, tangible reminder of the session.

EXERCISE 6: FITNESS PROFILE

Time: 10 – 15 minutes

1. Have participants fill out the fitness profile. See page 26 for this exercise handout.
2. Discuss results as a group.
3. Cover, “Nutrition suggestions,” and “Exercise!” on pages 19-20.

EXERCISE 7: YOGA

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Materials: Yoga postures handout. See pages 27-29 for this exercise handout.

1. Have someone who is interested in yoga talk about it (very short introduction including its calming and overall fitness benefits).
2. Have the volunteer lead the group through some simple yoga/relaxation moves.
3. Discuss points on **time management**. This content is located on page 21.

EXERCISE 8: TIME MANAGEMENT

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Materials: Daily/Weekly time sheet or grid

1. Make up a daily and weekly schedule worksheet to be distributed to participants.
2. Ask participants to take a few minutes to fill in how they have spent their time over the course of the last week. Include time spent sleeping.
3. Once this is filled out, lead a discussion about how time is being spent. How much time at work, hanging out, eating, sleeping, etc.? With everything on paper, is it easier for them to identify ways to adapt their schedule to fit in more of the things they would like to do? Discuss the idea of using a daily or weekly “to do” time list in order to prevent wasted time.
4. Cover, “Financial management” on page 22.

EXERCISE 9: SAMPLE BUDGET

Time: Five minutes

Materials: Sample budget on flipchart based on typical expenses and a national service participant allowance.

1. Show participants how easy preparing a personal budget can be.
2. Cover, “Get it out!” on pages 22-23.

EXERCISE 10: LISTENING PAIRS

Time: 15 – 20 minutes.

Prep: Divide participants into pairs

1. Once participants are in pairs, have them sit facing each other.
2. Explain the directions: One participant is to talk about an issue/stress in their life for five minutes, while the partner sits silent and only listens. After five minutes, the participants should switch roles. Each participant will be able to experience both the “speaking” and “listening” roles. Make sure to let them know when the five minutes are up.
3. Once this section is complete, process the exercise. Ask the participants:
 - How did they feel just talking? Was it easy or hard? Why?
 - How did they feel just listening? Was it easy or hard? Why?
 - Do they think that listening and talking about stress can have a positive effect?

WRAP IT UP!

Do a review of the major session points and ask for feedback or questions before you move into Exercise 11.

EXERCISE 11: PERSONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Time: 10 minutes

1. Have participants complete and keep their “Personal stress management plan.” See page 30 for this exercise handout.
2. Once this is finished, ask if participants would be willing to share some of their strategies.

REVISIT EXPECTATIONS

- Review the expectations list developed during the introduction.

- Have participants comment on the following:
 - a. Were each of the expectations met? Why or why not?
 - b. Provide participants with alternatives to follow up on expectations that were not met.

Appendix I

Supporting materials

Support materials include:

- “What is stress?”
- “What causes stress”
- “Stress manifestations”
- “How stressed are you?”
- “Steps to stress and life management”
 1. Adjust your attitude
 2. Make your job work for you
 3. Thrive on challenge
 4. Eat for performance
 5. Exercise
 6. Time management
 7. Financial management
 8. Get your feelings out

“What is stress?”

As defined by the American Medical Association, *stress* is any interference that disturbs a person’s mental and physical well-being.

We commonly define stress as a response to conditions and events, both routine and out of the ordinary.

Statistics:

- 70 - 80 percent of all visits to the doctor are for stress-related and stress-induced illnesses.
- People who live in a state of high anxiety are 4.5 times more likely to die of a heart attack or stroke.
- Stress contributes to 50 percent of all illnesses in the United States.
- The cost of job stress in the U.S. is estimated at \$200 billion annually, including costs of absenteeism, lost productivity, and insurance claims.
- Seven of 10 respondents to a national poll said they felt stress in a typical workday, while 43 percent of those interviewed said they suffer noticeable physical and emotional symptoms of burnout.

Stress can be Good! It serves to:

- Keep us alert
- Provide a source of motivation

We have to combat LONG-TERM or CHRONIC STRESS in our daily lives!

“What causes stress?”

Stressors: Anything which causes a stress reaction.

EXERCISE 1: BRAINSTORMING STRESSORS

These reactions are referred to as a **stress response**.

Stress Response:

- Is the physiological process that occurs when the body reacts to a stressor
- Is known as the “fight-or-flight” mechanism
- Happens instantaneously

Continued exposure to stress can lead to a variety of symptoms that can be:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Intellectual

“Stress manifestations”

Behavioral/Emotional

Anger and hostility
Teeth grinding
Apprehension
Indecisiveness
Complaining
Irritability
Critical of self and others
Lack of satisfaction
Crying
Mistrust
Defensive behavior

Mood swings
Denial
Nail biting
Depression
Panic
Diminished initiative
Restlessness
Excessive use of alcohol
Suicidal tendencies
Withdrawal

Intellectual

Forgetfulness
Lack of concentration
Lack of attention to details

Past orientation
Lack of awareness
Reduced creativity

Physical

Chronic fatigue
Indigestion, stomachaches
Constipation
Insomnia
Cool, clammy hands
Loss of appetite
Diarrhea
Nausea and/or vomiting
Disturbed motor skills
Overeating
Dry mouth
Rash

Frequent urination
Sneezing
Headaches
Spasms
Heart palpitations
Stooped posture
Hyperactivity
Tight muscles
Hyperventilation
Sweaty palms
Impaired sexual function

“How stressed are you?”

EXERCISE 2: STRESS BAROMETER

EXERCISE 3: STRESS SELF-TEST

What does it take to manage stress effectively?

The person who effectively resists stress embodies **four qualities**:

- Looks at problems positively, as challenges to be met
- Has personal goals that are well defined
- Engages in a sensible lifestyle that includes regular exercise and a method of relaxation
- Is socially involved with others

Regular stress-reduction techniques will:

- Boost your immunity
- Improve your outlook
- Allow you to exercise a sense of control amid chaos
- Make your life a lot more pleasurable!!

“The greatest discovery of my generation is that people can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.” — William James

“Steps to stress and life management”

Step 1. Adjust your attitude!

EXERCISE 4: LAUGHTER AS MEDICINE

- **Laugh!** Laughter may be one of the healthiest antidotes to stress. Watch a funny show or movie, read the comics, or share a joke with a friend.
- **Be a social animal.** Spend time with friends and family. Nothing is worse for us when we are stressed than to spend time in isolation.
- **Think positive.**
- **Be decisive and assertive.**
- **Slow down.** Moving, talking, and behaving in a relaxed manner can cut the stress response.

“The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter.” — Mark Twain

“No pessimist ever discovered that secret of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit.” — Helen Keller

Step 2. Make your job work for you

- **Try to be an active participant.** Passivity leads to stress and lack of personal control. Ask and answer questions, attend meetings and events, and be sure your voice is heard in the workplace.
- **Be supportive of co-workers.** Social support works wonders! Good relationships with your peers, staff, and supervisors will help you establish some sense of control.

- When your loss of control is precipitated by an **upsetting event**, try counting to 10 before you act. This helps you avoid conflict and regain control.
- **If you know you are in the wrong job**, accept that fact and consider improving your skills during leisure time so that you can change jobs or career paths. Don't consider it a dead end ... there is always an opportunity to learn something.
- **Remember that people are generally happiest (least stressed)** on the job when they:
 1. Have autonomy and the ability to use their skills.
 2. Find meaning in their work.
 3. Are able to successfully integrate their family and community life with work.

EXERCISE 5: GROUP PROCESSING - JOB STRESSORS AND STRATEGIES

Step 3. Thrive on challenge

- Acknowledge the fact that the world is constantly changing.
- Reframe problems. See problems as a puzzle or a game. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn.
- Distinguish between solvable problems and unresolvable predicaments. If it's a problem, get down to work. If it's a predicament that is out of your control, realize you have to create new ways to cope with the situation.
- Set short-term goals and prioritize them. Setting goals allows you to focus on the step-by-step process of facing challenges.

“Problems are only opportunities in work clothes.” — Henry Kaiser

Step 4. Eat for performance

Just as fad “diets” don't help us lose weight in the long run, short-term antidotes for stress won't work either!!! You need to make a lifestyle change ... not just menu change.

EXERCISE 6: FITNESS PROFILE

Step 5. Nutrition suggestions

- **Take time out for meals.** Making time for meals is key. Try and set a regular eating schedule. Missing meals saps your body of energy and increases the effects of stressful situations.
- **Eat the right proportions.**
- **Avoid sugars and fats.** Sugars intensify the stress reaction by releasing epinephrine and acting as sedatives. Fats actually steal energy from you.
- **Eat breakfast.** Make it low-fat and high in carbohydrates or protein (oatmeal, cereal, fruit, yogurt, bagels, etc.)
- **Graze, don't gorge.** Eat five or six smaller, lighter meals per day (three lighter meals plus two healthy snacks.)
- **Savor, don't scarf.** Eat slowly! It will lead to more pleasure and less overeating.
- **Eat protein for mental alertness.** Make lunch high in protein to stay energized throughout the afternoon (chicken, turkey, fish, beans, tofu).
- **Drink eight glasses of water a day.**
- **Emphasize fresh fruit and vegetables.**
- **Avoid caffeine after noon.**
- **Take vitamins.**
- **Avoid foods that set off stress pain:** Caffeine and foods that disagree with you.

Step 6. Exercise!

- **Start with aerobic exercise.** Walking, running, biking, and other aerobic exercise serve as a natural stress reducer. Get that heart rate up!
- **Make exercise a part of your routine.** Once you establish a regular pattern of working out, you'll be hooked! The long-term health effects are incredible. Try and do at least three to four workouts a week that include at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise.
- **Cross-train.** Do two or more types of aerobic exercise.
- **Use whatever time you have.** If you can only spare 15 minutes, make the best of it.
- **Exercise to revitalize.** If you're feeling too tired but you're not exhausted or ill, force yourself to workout. Start slowly, and then feel the revitalizing effect.
- **Make it fun!** Vary your activities, listen to music, play sports with friends, try yoga or go hiking.

EXERCISE 7: YOGA

“At times of great stress it is especially necessary to achieve a complete freeing of the muscles.” —Constantin Stanislavski

“The body is like a piano, and happiness is like music. It is needful to have the instrument in good order.” — Beecher

Step 7. Time Management

- **Define your limits, then say “no!”** Define how you take charge of your time and space and get in touch with your feelings. You don’t have to save the world today or do it all yourself.
- **Delegate.** Don’t be afraid to hand off tasks to co-workers.
- **Sharpen your time management skills.** Use the time you have beneficially to reach your goals. Get out that planner.
- **Live by lists.** Make lists of daily tasks and activities. Use it as your guide.
- **Don’t procrastinate.** Procrastination causes stress and the stressful by products of guilt, anger, and low self-esteem.
- **Take time away when you need it.**
- **Get enough sleep.** The average adult needs between seven and eight hours per night.

EXERCISE 8: TIME MANAGEMENT WORKSHEET

“Procrastination is the thief of time.”—John Dos Pasos

“By doing a little every day, I can gradually let the task completely overwhelm me.” — Ashleigh Brilliant

Step 7. Financial management

Studies show that the Number 1 cause of stress among adults is worry over personal finances! Research also shows that people trying to maintain lifestyles they can't afford are more likely to have health problems.

- **Write out your financial goals** and your approach to getting there.
- **Keep all bills and receipts in one place.** Set time aside each week to pay important bills. If you're behind, try 10 minutes a day until you catch up.
- **Keep a budget.** Allow yourself a set amount for food, bills, fun. Keep track of your spending and stick to it!
- **Make shopping lists.** Shop for things only when you need them. Do not shop when you are depressed.
- **Don't risk a bad credit rating.** If you are behind on payments, keep your bank and other creditors informed about your situation.

EXERCISE 9: SAMPLE BUDGET BASED ON EXPENSES AND A NATIONAL SERVICE ALLOWANCE

“The best way to escape a problem is to solve it.” — Alan Saporita

Step 8. Get it out!

- **Talk to friends and family about stressful situations.** Having someone to listen to you and serve as a “sounding board” is a great stress reliever. Share with others who may be experiencing similar difficulties.
- **Get rid of anger.** Repressed anger can lead to high stress levels and the threat of a blow-up. Share feelings through safe venting or discussion, and when an issue has been settled, let bygones be bygones.

- **Write in a journal.** Sometimes the best way to express feelings is to get them down on paper. This provides a personal, private way to explore situations and relieve stress.

EXERCISE 10: LISTENING PAIRS

“Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.” —Rudyard Kipling

“Listening is an attitude of the heart, a genuine desire to be with another which both attracts and heals.” —J. Isham

EXERCISE 11 – PERSONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Appendix II

Exercise Packet

Exercises packet includes:

- Stress self-test
- Fitness profile
- Yoga postures
- Personal stress management plan

Additional materials

Fun Stuff:

1. Why you want to stay stressed
2. How to stay stressed

EXERCISE 3

“Stress self-test”

In the past month, how often have you felt...?	Never	Almost never	Some- times	Fairly often	Very often
Upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Unable to control the important things in your life?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Unable to cope with all the things you had to do?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Angered because of things that were beyond your control?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
That difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Unconfident about your abilities to handle your personal problems?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
That things were <i>not</i> going your way?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Unable to control irritations in your life?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
That you were <i>not</i> on top of things?	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Total score: _____					

The higher your total score on the stress test, the greater your stress level. The average score for the general population is 14 for women, 12 for men.

Source: Cohen, Sheldon, Tom Kamarck, and Robin Mermelstein, “A Global Measure of Perceived Stress,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, vol. 24, 385-396, 1983.

EXERCISE 6

Fitness profile

In the past month, how often have you felt...?	Always	Often	Some	Seldom	Never
I eat something healthy for breakfast daily.	5	4	3	2	1
I eat four to five smaller meals daily.	5	4	3	2	1
I eat fruit and vegetables daily.	5	4	3	2	1
Less than 30 percent of my daily caloric intake is fat.	5	4	3	2	1
I take vitamin supplements daily.	5	4	3	2	1
I avoid fried foods.	5	4	3	2	1
I eat lean meat or no meat.	5	4	3	2	1
I drink six to eight glasses of water daily.	5	4	3	2	1
I monitor my sugar intake.	5	4	3	2	1
I limit my alcohol consumption, or I don't drink.	5	4	3	2	1
I exercise aerobically at least three times a week.	5	4	3	2	1
I exercise with weights or Nautilus-type machines twice per week.	5	4	3	2	1
I take breaks twice per day in addition to lunch.	5	4	3	2	1
I sleep seven or eight hours per night.	5	4	3	2	1
I actively cultivate relationships and interests outside of work.	5	4	3	2	1
I laugh 20 or more times per day.	5	4	3	2	1
I take adequate time off for vacations.	5	4	3	2	1
I practice a relaxation technique daily.	5	4	3	2	1
My energy level is high.	5	4	3	2	1
Total score: _____					

To score your fitness profile, add the numbers you have circled. The total is your score.

80 - 100 Excellent health habits! Total _____

70 - 79 Good health habits

60 - 69 Need special attention

59 & below Red Alert!!!

Adapted from *Catch Fire*, by Peter McLaughlin, The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1998.

EXERCISE 7: YOGA

Yoga postures

Be kind to yourself when you practice yoga. Go slowly, especially at the beginning, and listen to your body. It knows what it can and cannot do. If it says, stop, then stop! Don't push it. Yoga is not a competitive sport. If you push too hard, you probably won't enjoy it, and you may also hurt yourself. Whenever possible work with a teacher, and use books, videos and websites to supplement your classroom instruction. Most of all, stick with it. If you practice you will improve – and you will feel better. Remember: Deep, controlled breathing is key to your success.

Sit/Easy position

A starting position that helps focus awareness on breathing and the body; helps strengthen lower back and open the groin and hips.

Sit cross-legged with hands on knees. Focus on your breath. Keep your spine straight, and push the sit bones down into the floor. Allow the knees to gently lower. If the knees rise above your hips, sit on a cushion or block. This will help support your back and hips. Take 5-10 slow, deep breaths. On the next inhale, raise your arms slowly over your head. Exhale and bring your arms slowly down. Repeat five to seven times.

Dog and Cat

Increases flexibility of spine.

This is really two poses, one flowing into the other. Begin on your hands and knees. Keep your hands just in front of your shoulders, your legs about hip width apart. As you inhale, tilt the tailbone and pelvis up, then let the spine curve downward, dropping the stomach low, and then lift your head up. Stretch gently.

As you exhale, move into a cat by reversing the spinal bend, tilting the pelvis down, drawing the spine up and pulling the chest and stomach in. Repeat several times, flowing smoothly from dog into cat, and cat back into dog.

Mountain

Improves posture, balance, and self-awareness.

This is a deceptive pose in that it appears so simple that some may ask, “Why bother?” But just as there is more to breathing than meets the eye, there is more to standing as well.

Stand with feet together, hands at your sides, eyes looking forward. Raise your toes, fan them open, then place them back down on the floor. Feel your heel, the outside of your foot, toes and ball of your foot all in contact with the floor. Tilt your pubic bone slightly forward. Raise your chest up and out, but within reason – this isn’t the Army, and you’re not standing at attention. Raise your head up and lengthen the neck by lifting the base of your skull toward the ceiling. Stretch the pinky on each hand downward, then balance that movement by stretching your index fingers. Push into the floor with your feet and raise your legs, first the calves and then the thighs.

Breathe. Hold the posture, but try not to tense up. Breathe. As you inhale, imagine the breath coming up through the floor, rising through your legs and torso and up into your head. Reverse the process on the exhale and watch your breath as it passes down from your head, through your chest and stomach, legs, and feet.

Hold for five to 10 breaths, relax, and repeat. On your next inhale, raise your arms over your head and hold for several breaths. Slowly lower your arms on the exhale. As a warm up, try synchronizing the raising and lowering of your arms with your breath: Raise and inhale, lower and exhale. Repeat five times.

Forward bend

Stretches the legs and spine, rests the heart and neck, relaxes the mind and body.

Begin standing straight in mountain pose. Inhale and raise your arms overhead. Pull your shoulder blades back and stick out your chest.

You may keep your knees slightly bent. Exhale, bend at the hips (this movement is referred to as a hip hinge), and bring the arms forward and down in alignment with your upper torso until your

back is flat – like a tabletop. Breathe, and hold for five to 10 breaths. Inhale as you slowly bend up at the hip and bring your body back to the starting position.

Repeat this entire movement five to 10 times.

The triangle

Stretches the spine, opens the torso, and improves balance and concentration.

Start with your legs spread three to four feet apart and parallel. Turn your left foot 90 degrees to the left and your right foot about 45 degrees inward. Inhale and raise both arms so they're parallel with the floor.

Exhale, turn your head to the left, and look down your left arm toward your outstretched fingers. Check that your left knee is aligned with your left ankle. Take a deep breath and stretch outward to the left, tilting the left hip down and the right hip up. When you've stretched as far as you can, bend at the waist, letting your left hand reach down and come to rest against the inside of your calf, while your right hip points straight up. Turn and look up at your right hand.

Breathe deeply for several breaths. Inhale and return to the standing position with arms outstretched. Exhale and lower your arms. Put your hands on your hips and pivot on your heels, bringing your feet to face front. Repeat the posture on the other side.

The corpse

Relaxes and refreshes the body and mind, relieves stress and anxiety, and quiets the mind.

Possibly the most important posture, the corpse, also known as “the sponge,” is as deceptively simple as the Mountain pose. Usually performed at the end of a session, the goal is conscious relaxation. Many people find the “conscious” part the most difficult, because it is easy to drift off to sleep while conducting this pose. Begin by lying on your back, feet slightly apart, arms at your sides with palms facing up. Close your eyes and take several slow, deep breaths. Allow your body to sink into the ground. Try focusing on a specific part of the body and willing it to relax. For example, start with your feet, imagine the muscles and skin relaxing, letting go and slowly melting into the floor. (Don't forget to keep breathing!) From your feet, move on to your calves, thighs, and so on up to your face and head. Then simply breathe and relax. Stay in the pose for at least five to 10 minutes.

“Personal stress management plan”

The three things that are most stressful in my life right now include:

1.

2.

3.

Three strategies I can implement right now to de-stress my life:

1.

2.

3.

“Why you want to stay stressed”

STRESS HELPS YOU SEEM IMPORTANT.

Anyone as stressed as you must be working very hard and, therefore, is probably doing something very critical.

STRESS HELPS YOU TO MAINTAIN PERSONAL DISTANCE AND AVOID INTIMACY.

Anyone as busy as you are certainly can't be expected to form emotional attachments to anyone. And let's face it, you're not much fun to be with anyway.

STRESS HELPS YOU AVOID RESPONSIBILITY.

Obviously, you're too stressed to be given any more work. This gets you off the hook for all the mundane chores; let someone else take care of them.

STRESS GIVES YOU A CHEMICAL RUSH.

Stress might be considered a cheap thrill, and you can give yourself a “hit” anytime you choose. But be careful, you might get addicted to your own adrenaline.

STRESS HELPS YOU AVOID SUCCESS.

Why risk being “successful” when by simply staying stressed you can avoid all of that? Stress can keep your performance level low enough that success won't ever be a threat.

STRESS ALSO LETS YOU KEEP YOUR AUTHORITARIAN MANAGEMENT STYLE.

The authoritarian style of, “Just do what I say!” is generally permissible under crisis conditions. If you maintain a permanently stressed crisis atmosphere, you can justify an authoritarian style all the time.

“How to stay stressed”

NEVER EXERCISE.

Exercise wastes a lot of time that could be spent worrying.

EAT ANYTHING YOU WANT.

Hey, if cigarette smoke can't cleanse your system, a balanced diet isn't likely to.

GAIN WEIGHT.

Work hard at staying at least 25 pounds over your recommended weight.

TAKE PLENTY OF STIMULANTS.

The old standards of caffeine, nicotine, and cola will continue to do the job just fine.

AVOID “WOO-WOO” PRACTICES.

Ignore the evidence suggesting that meditation, yoga, deep breathing, and visualization help reduce stress.

GET RID OF YOUR SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM.

Let the few friends who are willing to tolerate you know that you concern yourself with friendships only if you have time, and you never have time. If a few people persist in trying to be your friends, avoid them.

PERSONALIZE ALL CRITICISMS.

Anyone who criticizes any aspect of our work, family, dog, house, or car is mounting a personal attack. Don't take time to listen, take offense, and then return the attack!