

VISTAS Online is an innovative publication produced for the American Counseling Association by Dr. Garry R. Walz and Dr. Jeanne C. Bleuer of Counseling Outfitters, LLC. Its purpose is to provide a means of capturing the ideas, information and experiences generated by the annual ACA Conference and selected ACA Division Conferences. Papers on a program or practice that has been validated through research or experience may also be submitted. This digital collection of peer-reviewed articles is authored by counselors, for counselors. VISTAS Online contains the full text of over 500 proprietary counseling articles published from 2004 to present.

VISTAS articles and ACA Digests are located in the ACA Online Library. To access the ACA Online Library, go to <a href="http://www.counseling.org/">http://www.counseling.org/</a> and scroll down to the LIBRARY tab on the left of the homepage.

- Under the Start Your Search Now box, you may search by author, title and key words.
- The ACA Online Library is a member's only benefit. You can join today via the web: counseling.org and via the phone: 800-347-6647 x222.

Vistas TM is commissioned by and is property of the American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304. No part of Vistas TM may be reproduced without express permission of the American Counseling Association. All rights reserved.

Join ACA at: http://www.counseling.org/



Suggested APA style reference: Thomas, D. A. (2011). 100 ways to reduce stress: Making the balancing act more manageable. Retrieved from http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas11/Article\_27.pdf

## Article 27

# 100 Ways to Reduce Stress: Making the Balancing Act More Manageable

Paper based on a program presented at the 2008 Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, October, 2008, Houston, TX.

## Denis' A Thomas

Thomas, Denis' A., is an Assistant Professor at Lindsey Wilson College. She has spent the last several years studying and researching resilience and believes that managing stress well contributes to resilience.

## 100 Ways to Reduce Stress

Between 70 and 80% of all diseases and illnesses are stress related, and the leading causes of death are lifestyle diseases (Seaward, 2006). Yet we do not need statistics to tell us that we feel stressed, exhausted, and creatively depleted when we do not care for ourselves. Below is a list of 100 ways to reduce stress.

## **Environmental Strategies**

The first domain to examine for ways to reduce stress is the space around you. What can you see, smell, hear, touch and taste? What makes you drop your shoulders and say, "Ahhhh"? Look for ways to bring beauty to your environment. Here are a few things to get you started:

- 1. Enjoy being
- 2. Light a scented candle
- 3. Try aromatherapy
- 4. Bake bread or cookies
- 5. Adjust lighting
- 6. Plant flowers

- 7. Buy a bouquet for yourself
- 8. Create a collection of things you love
- 9. Put up a birdfeeder and watch it
- 10. Read in the sunshine
- 11. Sip a hot drink/ iced drink
- 12. Snuggle under a blanket with a book

## **Cognitive Strategies**

The second domain to address when reducing stress is how you think about and perceive information. Mental interpretations determine your emotional reaction, so dwelling on problems, thinking of the worst case scenarios, and berating yourself over mistakes will all increase your levels of stress. Alternatively, allowing yourself to make mistakes and move on, thinking of the best possible scenarios, and interpreting mistakes

as necessary growth opportunities will reduce your stress load. Here are some cognitive strategies to reduce stress:

- 13. Reframe the problem
  14. Choose positive thoughts
  15. Meditate on positive words
  16. Practice positive affirmations
  18. Have realistic expectations
  19. Visualize the outcome you desire
  20. Post affirmations on a mirror
  21. Work a puzzle/game
- 17. Take responsibility for your thoughts

# **Creative Strategies**

Creativity is a great way to channel stress into beauty. Use the arts to relax and process your challenges at the same time. Product is not as important as process. These are some creative strategies to alleviate stress:

22. Journal Write	29. Stroke a pet
23. Write a letter	30. Listen to/compose relaxing music
24. Paint	31. Play an instrument
25 Draw	32 Attend a concert

26. Spend an afternoon in photography27. Create pottery/work with clay33. Start a new hobby34. Garden

28. Knit/Crochet/Needlework

44. Give yourself a foot massage

## **Physical Strategies**

Often, you will feel stress in your body through tight muscles, nervous movement, and stiffness. To reduce stress, move your body through stretching, aerobic exercise, or rhythmic motion. Care for your body by making healthy nutritional decisions. Try the following to reduce stress physically:

35. Dance	45. Soak your feet in warm water
36. Bicycle	46. Enjoy a steamy bubble bath
37. Run	47. Take a yoga class
38. Take a nature walk/hike	48. Practice t'ai chi
39. Walk the dog	49. Do progressive muscular relaxation
40. Train for a walking/marathon	50. Frequently practice deep breathing
fundraiser	51. Check out an exercise video
41. Swim	52. Choose a healthy diet
42. Snorkel	53. Drink pure water
43. Get a massage	54. Take a multivitamin

## **Humorous Strategies**

A saying we have around our house is that in some situations you just have to laugh or cry, and we like to choose to laugh. Laughter diffuses tension. Have you ever

## Ideas and Research You Can Use: VISTAS 2011

said, "I needed a good laugh"? Do something humorous to chuckle away your serious stress:

55. Go see a movie comedy 58. Laugh out loud

56. Watch a funny sitcom 59. Tell a friend a new joke 57. Read a book of comics 60. Giggle with a girlfriend

# **Spiritual Strategies**

We are holistic beings, and the spiritual part of us can help soothe stress, too. Try these spiritual strategies as a preventative measure for stress:

61. Pray 64. Participate in a religious service

62. Meditate 65. Sing joyful songs/hymns

66 Seek to serve others 63. Practice gratefulness

# **Management Strategies**

Some stress is created or increased because of procrastination, disorganization, and inattention to details. By managing time, money, plans, and clutter, you can make a difference in how you feel in as little as 15 minutes. Some management strategies are:

67. Manage time 72. Clean a room

68. Prioritize tasks 73. Organize a closet/cabinet

74. Set goals 69. Delegate

70. Make and follow a budget 75. Make a life list

71. Problem solve one dilemma 76. Use mental imagery of success

# **Relational Strategies**

As long as we interact with people, we will have relational stress. This is even more important in relationships that are meaningful to us. But, just as relationships may create stress, they are also a source for reducing stress. Try these relational strategies to decrease stress:

77. Cook a special meal for a loved one 84. Email an old friend

78. Be kindly assertive 85. Join a social-support group

79. Vent to a friend 86. Join an exercise class/group

80. Meet someone for lunch/coffee 87. Forgive a hurt 81. Call a friend 88. Volunteer

82. Get a manicure 89. Do something just for fun

83. Get a haircut and enjoy the wash

# **Outdoor Strategies**

We began with environmental strategies, and we will end with outdoor strategies. Being outside can adjust our attitude by, quite literally, giving us a new perspective. No matter what the weather or temperature, you can implement outdoor strategies for a quick or leisurely stress reliever. Some outdoor strategies that might be helpful are:

90. Sit on a park bench and use the	95. Build a sandcastle
senses	96. Build a snowman
91. Stroll through a zoo or aquarium	97. Listen to the crackle of a campfire
92. Star gaze	98. Picnic near water
93. Spend a few hours boating/yachting	99. Go out to dinner
94. Take a scenic drive	100. Window shop

## **Conclusions**

Now you have 100 things that you can do to reduce stress, but they will not help if they are simply ideas on paper. Choose at least one and try it now. Make a plan (a management strategy) to incorporate one stress management strategy every day for the next week. Step outside for a brisk 10 minute walk and combine both a physical and an outdoor strategy.

Post the handout at the end of this article where you will see it often as a reminder to care for yourself. Finally, use these ideas to generate other ideas that work well for you.

## References

Seaward, B. L. (2006). *Managing stress: Principles and strategies for health and well-being* (5th ed.). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS\_Home.htm

# 100 Ways to Reduce Stress

### **Environmental Strategies**

- 1. Enjoy being
- 2. Light a scented candle
- 3. Try aromatherapy
- 4. Bake bread or cookies
- 5. Adjust lighting
- 6. Plant flowers
- 7. Buy a bouquet for yourself
- 8. Create a collection of things you love
- 9. Put up a birdfeeder and watch it
- 10. Read in the sunshine
- 11. Sip a hot drink/iced drink
- 12. Snuggle under a blanket with a book

#### Coanitive Strategies

- 13. Reframe the problem
- 14. Choose positive thoughts
- 15. Meditate on positive words
- 16. Practice positive affirmations
- 17. Take responsibility for your thoughts
- 18. Have realistic expectations
- 19. Visualize the outcome you desire
- 20. Post affirmations on a mirror
- 21. Work a puzzle/game

#### Creative Strategies

- 22. Journal Write
- 23. Write a letter
- 24. Paint
- 25. Draw
- 26. Spend an afternoon in photography
- 27. Create pottery/ work with clay
- 28. Knit/Crochet/Needlework
- 29. Stroke a pet
- 30. Listen to/compose relaxing music
- 31. Play an instrument
- 32. Attend a concert
- 33. Start a new hobby
- 34. Garden

#### Physical Strategies

- 35. Dance
- 36. Bicycle
- 37. Run
- 38. Take a nature walk/hike
- 39. Walk the dog
- 40. Train for a walking/marathon fundraiser
- 41 Swim
- 42. Snorkel
- 43. Get a massage
- 44. Give yourself a foot massage
- 45. Soak your feet in warm water
- 46. Enjoy a steamy bubble bath
- 47. Take a yoga class
- 48. Practice t'ai chi
- 49. Do progressive muscular relaxation
- 50. Frequently practice deep breathing
- 51. Check out an exercise video
- 52. Choose a healthy diet
- 53. Drink pure water
- 54. Take a multivitamin

## Humorous Strategies

- 55. Go see a movie comedy
- 56. Watch a funny sitcom
- 57. Read a book of comics
- 58. Laugh out loud
- 59. Tell a friend a new joke
- 60. Giggle with a girlfriend

#### Spiritual Strategies

- 61. Pray
- 62. Meditate
- 63. Practice gratefulness
- 64. Participate in a religious service
- 65. Sing joyful songs/hymns
- 66. Seek to serve others

# Management Strategies

- 67. Manage time
- 68. Prioritize tasks
- 69. Delegate
- 70. Make and follow a budget
- 71. Problem solve one dilemma
- 72. Clean a room
- 73. Organize a closet/ cabinet
- 74. Set goals
- 75. Make a life list
- 76. Use mental imagery of success

#### Relational Strategies

- 77. Cook a special meal for a loved one
- 78. Be kindly assertive
- 79. Vent to a friend
- 80. Meet someone for lunch/coffee
- 81. Call a friend
- 82. Get a manicure
- 83. Get a haircut and enjoy the wash
- 84. Email an old friend
- 85. Join a social-support group
- 86. Join an exercise class/group
- 87. Forgive a hurt
- 88. Volunteer
- 89. Do something just for fun

#### **Outdoor Strategies**

- 90. Sit on a park bench and use the sense
- 91. Stroll through a zoo or aquarium
- 92. Star gaze
- 93. Spend a few hours boating/yachting
- 94. Take a scenic drive
- 95. Build a sandcastle
- 96. Build a snowman
- 97. Listen to the crackle of a campfire
- 98. Picnic near water
- 99. Go out to dinner
- 100. Window shop