



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Hints for Stress Reduction

It is possible to reduce your stress, even in the midst of chaos. Practicing these techniques, at less stressful times, will make them more effective when you need them most. Some will become second nature, if you use them regularly. Others you may already be doing, without even realizing it.

Awareness

Take a 'stress reading' for yourself several times a day. When you become really stressed, it is helpful to notice what causes it and how you react to it. This kind of information is a starting place for stress management. *Is your stress:*

Low			Moderate				High		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Breathing

Take 3 or 4 deep, calming breaths several times during the day. The increased amount of oxygen tells your body that it is not under threat and can, therefore, relax. Your body cannot produce oxygen on its own, but need it to function. We need to take it in.

Physical Exercise

Any form of exercise is good. A brisk walk is excellent for your health and your stress level, Exercise helps your body release the adrenaline stored in your muscles.

Nutrition

Choose a balanced diet. Pay attention if you seem to want a particular kind of food; your body can tell you what it needs. Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, chocolate), sugar alcohol and food additives. These can stress your body more.

Be Gentle with Yourself

Take time for you: alone and with others who are supportive. Don't expect perfection.

Change Thought Patterns

When you become aware of fears and worries, it helps to stop the negative thoughts by substituting a more helpful or positive statement. For example, "I don't know what I'll do if he gets sick in the middle of the night" could be changed to "I do know what to do. I will call the emergency number listed at the front of this binder".

Deep Relaxation

Listening to relaxation tapes, meditating, doing muscle relaxation and visualization are all useful ways to reduce stress. Counsellors are available to teach you any of these techniques and to recommend other resources.

Quick Relaxation

This technique can have the same physical impact as a 15-minute relaxation. It is designed to keep your tension and stress level from building up and has a quieting effect.

- Step 1** Become aware of the stress in your body
- Step 2** Take a slow, deep breath
- Step 3** On the out-breath; allow your shoulders, jaw and face muscles to go limp
- Step 4** Give yourself a positive suggestion (e.g. I am becoming more and more relaxed)
- Step 5** Think of a special place, where you feel safe and comfortable
- Step 6** Repeat the breath several times: breathe in relaxation, breathe out tension
- Step 7** Smile inwardly. Notice the difference
- Step 8** Resume normal activity

This technique allows you to slow down. In the beginning, practice this Quick Relaxation 4 or 5 times each day. Eventually it will become second nature.