



MARY SOUTHERLAND
The Stress-Buster and Women's Ministry Motivator



Stress-Busters

- Take deep, slow breaths instead of the shallow, fast breathing we sometimes experience when stressed. Consciously slowing down your breathing rate will help shut off your physiological stress alarm.
- Tensing and relaxing various muscle groups is a great stress buster. Start with your neck and shoulders, then your shoulder blades, your forehead and eyes, tensing these groups for a few seconds, and then relaxing them. You can also combine this with deep breathing by inhaling while you tense, then exhaling when you relax the muscles.
- Symptoms such as headache, stomach discomfort, tense muscles and restless sleep may be early indicators of too much stress. When you feel stress coming on, take a deep breath, pray and surrender the stressful circumstance(s) to God.
- In stressful times, speak more slowly than usual. Stressed people tend to speak quickly. By slowing down your speech, you'll buy time to think more clearly while appearing less anxious and more in control of the situation.
- Choose one simple thing you have been putting off (returning a phone call, making a doctor's appointment), and do it immediately. Just taking care of one responsibility hanging over your head is energizing, can improve your attitude and reduce stress.
- Sometimes, just a change of scenery brings fresh perspective to stress-filled situations. Take a drive. While driving, listen to calming music or sing some of your stress away by tuning into your favorite station and belting out a song.
- Stop gritting your teeth. Stress tends to settle in certain parts of our bodies, the jaw being one of them. When things get hectic, place your index fingertips on your jaw joints, just in front of your ears; clench your teeth and inhale deeply. Hold the breath for a moment, and as you exhale say, "Ah-h-h-h," then unclench your teeth. Repeat a few times.
- Briskly rub your hands together until they feel warm. Then cup them over your closed eyes for five seconds while you breathe deeply. The warmth and darkness are comforting.
- Stand or sit, stretch your arms out from your sides and shake your hands vigorously for about 10 seconds. When people are under stress, they tend to slump over as if carrying a burden. Doctors say that slumping restricts breathing and reduces blood and oxygen flow to the brain, adding to muscle tension and increasing feelings of panic and helplessness. Straightening your spine has just the opposite effect. It promotes circulation, increases oxygen levels in your blood and helps lessen muscle tension, all of which promote relaxation and reduce stress.
- When shopping for a particular item, call ahead to save unnecessary trips.

- Give in occasionally. You don't always have to be right. Be flexible. Be willing to compromise. If you do, others may meet you halfway. If you know you are right, stand your ground, but be calm and rational.
- Maintain a healthy diet. Even doing so 80% of the time will produce great benefits.
- Laugh...a lot!
- Do something every day for the "child" in you.
- Have a good cry. Tears resulting from sadness, anger, fear or joy vary chemically from those caused by chopping onions and are one of nature's methods of removing chemicals built up by stress in the body.
- Pray...about everything. If it is important to you, it is important to God.
- Record favorite scriptures on 3x5 cards and keep them on hand to read throughout the day.
- Separate worries from concerns. If a situation is a concern, find out what God wants you to do about it – then do it. If you can't do anything about a situation, let it go.
- Carry a pocket-size Bible with you to read in waiting rooms.
- Stock up on anything chocolate - ice cream, candy, cookies or even chocolate covered raisins will do. Tuck myself in bed, curl up under my covers in a fetal position and stay there as long as possible...preferably with the above chocolate cache.
Retreat to my collection of DVD's.
Entertain myself with a cheesy mystery novel.
Stay in my pajamas all day while watching the Home and Garden Network, the Travel Channel or the Food Channel.
Seek guidance from a trusted friend who will give me Godly counsel to break free of the stress bondage I am in. (Suzanne)
- Roller blade (Jodi)
- Clean house (Jamie)
- Learning the Martial Arts is not only a great stress reliever but great exercise as well. I have learned great self defense techniques, lost weight and now get quality time with my 14 year old son by taking a class with him. I can take out my frustrations on the bags and nobody gets hurt. (Patty)
- Go to bed at the same time every night.
- Learn to take one 10 minute power nap each day.
- Get organized - Plan, schedule, take notes, and keep good records. For example, use a calendar, computer software organizer, or write out a "to do" list. Organizing the details of your daily life reduces stress. Save your memory for more creative and pleasurable activities.

- Do your most unpleasant or most difficult task at the beginning of the day when you are fresh. You will avoid the stress of last minute preparation. Procrastination feeds stress!
 - If a task takes less than 10 minutes to do...do it now! Otherwise, all of those "little" jobs will accumulate, creating a "big" stressor.
 - Be realistic about what you can accomplish in a day. It's better to emphasize quality in your work, rather than sheer quantity. Careful planning prevents stress. Planning goals and objectives allows you to meet them more realistically. If you are new at goal-setting, ask someone who is experienced.
 - Scheduling stressful activities can reduce the number of stressors you must juggle at any one time. Don't set identical deadlines for major projects. Schedule some *margins* in each day that will allow you time for recharging and creative thinking. When the unexpected comes, you will be better prepared.
 - Take responsibility for making your life what you want it to be. It is less stressful to make decisions and take action than to feel powerless and react to other's decisions. Decide what you want and go for it. Always have a dream and goals for reaching that dream.
 - Make a practice of throwing away or giving away one thing each day. "Stuff" can be a great stress producer.
 - I love to sit and watch the clouds. This puts me in a totally different frame of mind and the stress I am experiencing goes away. (Peggy)
 - Take a hot bath, complete with candles and soft music. Adding Epsom salts will naturally relax your muscles and reduce stress.
 - Get a massage. I know that a professional massage can be costly. We have a physical therapy school in our area. After completing all of their courses, the students must have a certain number of hours of giving massages before they receive their official degree. You can sometimes get an hour long massage for as little as \$10. Well worth it!
 - Take up a new hobby.
 - Blog!
- Set your alarm to get up 15 minutes earlier than usual so you can begin your day calmly - instead of frantically.
- Take mini-vacations during the day. When you feel stressed out, take a 10 minute vacation. Sit back, close your eyes and breathe deeply. Picture your favorite vacation spot and visit it for a few moments.
- When I come home from work, I go straight to my room, close the door, lie down on my back and close my eyes to relax my body and give my mind time to transition from work to home.
- Sometimes I buy myself a small, inexpensive flower bouquet and set it on my desk. It brightens my day!
- I listen to a daily devotional in my car on the way home or into work. (Tim)

- About seven years ago, I took up belly dancing for exercise. (No, I am not kidding!) When I am really stressed, I pop in one of my CDs and I dance with my veil. Since recommitting my life to Christ, I imagine myself giving my all to him and dancing before Him in praise. It always helps to calm me down and refocus on what is important. (Ana)
- I have taken up knitting and crocheting. It keeps my hands and mind busy and I can't eat while I am doing it so no stress "pigging out!" I have the added benefit of making Christmas presents that I think people appreciate! (Linda)
- Being the spiritual giant that I am...my stress buster is four Oreos eaten very, very slowly. (Suzi)
- Follow the principal that if your job is physical in nature, relax by doing something with your mind such as reading, etc. However, if your job is mental in nature, relax by doing something physical.
- Bring a bag of fresh fruit and cut up vegetables to snack on during the workday.
- Learn to take health breaks instead of coffee breaks.
- Bring a pair of comfortable shoes to work so you can walk during your lunch break.
- Practice deep breathing exercises you can do even when sitting in traffic on the freeway or sitting at your desk at work.
- Keep a water bottle on you desk to drink throughout the day.
- During breaks, do shoulder shrugs and neck stretches. Take mini stretch breaks throughout the day.
- Be assertive with people about your time. While time is our most precious resource, most of us tend to give it away too easily and that's poor stress management. When someone asks you for time, think about what you will have to "subtract" from your current schedule. That will help you say "No" when you need to. "No" can be a great stress management tool.
- Always have "Plan B" ready.
- Take the last five minutes of your day to prioritize tomorrow's tasks.
- Get to the office 15 minutes early.
- Learn to delegate!
- Make four copies of the following principles. Post one on your refrigerator, tape one on your bathroom mirror, and keep one in your purse and one in your bible. Refer to it often:

In happy moments - praise God
 In difficult moments - seek God
 In quiet moments - worship God
 In painful moments - trust God
 In every moment - thank God

In every moment - never underestimate the power of prayer!

- Take a deep breath in to the count of nine. Hold your breath for nine seconds and slowly exhale through your mouth for nine seconds. Repeat three times.
- Watch for the next time you find yourself becoming irritated or angry at something that really is trivial or unimportant. Then practice letting go, making a conscious choice not to become angry or upset. Do not allow yourself to waste thought and energy. Effective anger management is a tried-and-true stress reducer.
- After a very stressful situation is over, I create something. Usually that comes in the form of a painting project, decorating project, or sewing project. Reading fiction also helps me unwind. (Sharon)
- Reject negative thoughts because negative thoughts breed stress. The promises of God “bust” anxieties and doubts, replacing them with peace-filled truths.
- Avoid watching distressing programs on television. Your mind and emotions translate them as stressors.
- Eliminate financial debt. Create a budget and stick to it.
- Set aside 30 minutes each night to prepare for the next day – set out clothes, make lunches, etc.
- A warm kitty snoozing on my lap while I read or watch TV; making lists and crossing things off; eliminating unnecessary activity from my life (Kim)
- Visit a pet store and play with a kitten or puppy.
- Blow bubbles or play with play dough.
- Buy packing bubble wrap and pop all of the bubbles.
- Buy a brand new box of crayons, a coloring book and color. Don't worry about staying in the lines.
- I work out three times a week and spend a good bit of time in stillness. (Esther)
- Turn off the phone for an hour.
- Recall and revisit favorite memories.
- Start a “Joy Journal” in which you record daily blessings. Read it at least once a week.
- Hang pleasant sounding chimes in your back yard. When stress threatens, take a 10 minute break to sit, eyes closed and listen to the chimes. Better yet, sit in a rocker on your back porch and enjoy the chimes.
- 5 days on, 2 days off – Eat well Sunday afternoon to Friday afternoon. Allow yourself to enjoy some treats on the weekend.

- Shoot for a pattern of eating 60-70 percent God-made foods. You will be on the upside of a healthy diet.
- Enjoy at least three different God-made colored foods at each meal – and not just white, beige, and brown; the deeper darker the colors, the better. Blueberries are best!

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- I work at keeping a clear purpose, a balanced schedule, finding support from Christian friends and having times of self-examination. My favorite stress-busters are John 10:10 and Colossians 2:10. (Dottie)
- To relieve minor stresses, I listen to classical music, because there are no words to focus on. Some music makes me want to sing while some music can actually be stressful! To relieve major stresses, I've learned (am learning) the simple, (yet often forsaken) art of saying "no". Sometimes, it's a "No, thank you" or "I'm sorry, but no" or "No, not now." I try to wrap my "no" in a certain way, depending on what/who I'm saying no to, but at the center of it is a definite "no". (Heather)
- Sit outside in the hot tub on a chilly night under the stars. (Tim)
- Fly a kite.
- Watch a funny movie.
- Learn to roller blade.
- Go to the park and feed the ducks. While you are there, hit the swings.
- Journal. There is something therapeutic about writing down all of my stress-filled thoughts and feelings. Then leave them all in God's hands ...and close the book.
- Wear comfortable and loose clothing when possible. Take off your shoes when you can.
- Avoid holding in feelings day after day, but instead, find a safe place to feel, express and embrace them.
- Do one thing at a time.
- Don't try to be perfect.
- Get to know yourself. Acknowledge your likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. Where would you like to go with your life? What are your values and ideals? How does your body tell you when you are stressed or tired? How do you behave when stressed?
- Ask yourself: Tomorrow, will this really matter? In a month, will this really matter? If the answer is "yes," take appropriate action. If the answer is "no," why are you worrying and getting stressed about it?
- Don't rely on your memory. Write down appointments and make a list of tasks that must be completed during the week. Then divide the list, assigning certain tasks to certain days.

- Keep a duplicate car and house key in your wallet and give a copy to your neighbor.
- An instant cure for most stress: 30 minutes of brisk walking or other aerobic exercise.
- Set up contingency plans—just in case, “If either of us is delayed,” “If we get separated in the Mall, here’s what we’ll do...”
- Learn to live one day at a time.
- Every day, do at least one thing you really enjoy.
- Don’t sweat the small stuff.
- Remember that the best things in life aren’t things.
- Change is stressful. Whenever there’s a major change in your life, look for opportunities the new situation creates for you.
- It really does help to talk to someone. Build a network of supportive family and friends. If you don’t feel comfortable talking to anyone close to you, talk to a counselor.
- Being a good listener is one of life’s important skills; it helps prevent misunderstanding and helps build friendships. Poor communication is a major cause of stress, so learn how to talk, write and listen effectively.
- Pay attention to the health of your relationships. Make good connections with family and friends. Be willing to accept and give help. A strong support group is essential to stress management.