

The Complete Idiot's Reference Card

Mild Steps for Keeping Stress in Check

- Drink water, at least eight glasses per day, to keep your body hydrated and improve its ability to cope.
- Sit still.
- Stretch, especially if you've been at your desk for hours.
- Walk, the all-time simplest and best exercise, around the block, or simply down the hall.
- Improve your posture. Your mother was right: sit up straight and you'll feel better.
- Contemplate pleasant thoughts; you know, a meadow, a brook, being with your lover!
- Buy a hand gripper and squeeze! This can be a highly effective way to release stress.
- Buy a joke book and sneak a peek, especially when you get put on hold.
- Build slack into your schedule. Everyone needs it, especially you.
- Help others. Nothing else works as fast when you want to forget about your own problems.

Getting the Sleep You Need

- Have you checked your mattress lately? A bad mattress engages your muscles all night, as if you've been working all night.
- Particularly in the summer, make sure that the room you sleep in is cool and refreshed.
- Make sure that you have a bed large enough to allow you and your partner the freedom of movement.
- Turn off the ringer on your phone, or if you have an answering machine attached, switch the appropriate lever to silent.
- Keep your room dark or wear a night blindfold.
- Buy a snore control device if a sleep partner keeps you awake, or to simply improve the quality of your own sleep.
- Don't work out too hard before retiring, it may keep you too keyed up.
- Avoid caffeine at least six hours before retiring and alcohol all together. Alcohol, in particular, is sleep disrupting.
- Go to sleep when you're tired, not because the clock happens to say a particular time.
- Let others around you know when you want quiet because you are going to sleep!

Making Your Commute Less Stressful

- Leave earlier or later than the crowd, to have a shorter commute time.
- Keep your car in top shape to avoid stress delays and breakdowns at inopportune moments.
- Make your seat as comfortable as possible.
- Visit the health club before work, which tends to make commuting less hectic.
- Do some "seat aerobics" such as tensing muscles and releasing them to both pass the time and dissipate tension.
- Install a tape or CD player and listen to soothing music.
- Turn on the air conditioner to stay cool and drown out highway noise.
- Use drive time for reflection.
- Carpool with people you like, so commuting will be something you look forward to.

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Making Your Job More Secure

- Tackle the task no one else wants.
- Go the extra mile and develop the reputation of someone who finishes jobs.
- Work harder when the cat's away—you'll be among the few who stand out.
- Give credit to your group, not just yourself.
- Make your boss look good.
- Become a mentor to a new or junior staff person.
- Figure out what's needed, not just what's expected in your organization or department.

Ten Ways You Know You've Been Working Too Hard

10. You've become good pals with the nightly cleaning crew.
9. You think "Ross Perot" is some new type of wine.
8. You and your PC have become "one."
7. You've filed for an extension to complete your taxes for the third year in a row.
6. You think Dead Man Walking refers to poltergeists.
5. You have equipment in your office that you've never used, and you can't recall what it does.
4. You've installed a cot in your office and keep forgetting to bring in a pillow, so you roll up your jacket.
3. The word "vacation" has no meaning to you.
2. You missed a gala awards dinner at a splashy hotel, in your honor, paid for by your company.
1. You got lost on the way home last night.

When Working Too Long Reaches the Danger Level

If you experience any of the following symptoms, immediately seek medical assistance. At the very least, the symptoms mean you're stressed, but you also could have other medical problems, as well.

- You experience chest pains.
- You've experienced dizziness, fainting, or blacking-out.
- You have difficulty digesting food or swallowing.
- Chemical dependence gets you through the day.
- You experience near misses while driving.
- You become more accident prone.

Making It Hard On Yourself

Avoid these practices, which generally only enhance stress:

1. Working in front of the clock
2. Having an unrealistic time frame
3. Working under constant pressure
4. Working without the right equipment
5. Retaining what doesn't fit
6. Engaging in low-yield activities
7. Taking in too much information at once

For Less Stress While Traveling or Vacationing

- Pack several days beforehand.
- Complete as much correspondence, phone calls, faxes, and e-mail that you can.
- Before leaving, clear your desk completely of all extraneous items.
- Get one of your office co-workers to cover for your phone calls and correspondence.
- Get rest before departing.