

10 secrets to a stress-free life

by Kathleen Hall

Start small.

Don't overwhelm yourself with big changes. Alter one small thing—a morning habit, a food choice. Over time, these will add up to the intentional life you crave.

Connect.

Put love and friendship first in your life, scheduling dates with others as you would doctors' appointments. Connection may help improve heart health, prompt the release of the stress-relieving hormone oxytocin, and allow you to sidestep the health risks of isolation. While you're at it, get a pet—you might further reduce stress and ease depression.

Focus on now.

Rather than disperse your energy with multitasking, take one job, one person at a time. The more mindful you are, the quicker you can stop stress and turn yourself around.

Write it out.

Release stress by getting negative feelings out of your body. Pick up a pen and write down your thoughts.

Own the news.

Change the way you approach the bleak information you get from the media. Don't shy away from knowing the facts—apathy can prove as damaging to your spirit as stress or depression.

But use what you learn to become part of the solution. Send light, positive energy and prayers to those suffering, while finding tangible ways to get involved. You're in a position of power and control. Embrace the media—look at it and use it as your classroom.

Walk softly.

When we're stressed, we tend to hit the floor hard with every step. Imagine you're walking on a lotus flower—tenderly, gently. Unplug through your feet, and you'll calm down to a more tranquil mental place.

Try a mini-meditation.

Memorize a three-to-five-word phrase, a mantra, that will bring you back to center when things get rough, such as "I am strong" or "Spirit will guide me." Also, keep a peaceful image mentally on hand (a beach scene, a quiet forest) to call up in stressful moments.

Take stock.

Make a list of things that bring you joy—and another list of things that drain your energy. Do this 10 minutes daily for a week, and then review your lists and see how your own life matches up.

Love your commute.

See your travel time as a chance to cultivate patience and compassion. If you can use calming breaths to stay relaxed and unruffled in traffic, you can handle anything.

Practice gratitude.

It's hard to feel gratitude and stress at the same time. Devote five minutes a day to giving thanks for all the gifts in your life—starting with your breath, the source of everything.

