

Of Interest

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Bad News Burnout

By Liz Ashe

My husband watches the news in the a.m., evening and p.m. He also he reads the paper and looks for more news online. In fact CNN is his channel of choice. I once told him he was a news junkie and he remarked, "I like to keep informed on what is going on." I do too, but enough already.

Our eyes and ears are bombarded with bad news these days. How many times do we hear newscasters say, "The markets took a dive today, but that's not the end it will get worse?" Or read headline after headline about layoffs, mortgage foreclosures, big businesses closing, banks in trouble, people losing their entire savings etc.... Not to mention all the robberies, murders and drug busts.

I've made a conscious decision not to start my day with the news or any headline nor end it with any. I prefer the comics section or the crossword puzzle. My system just can't take the overload of so much bad news.

I wish I had a magic wand that could swish everyone's troubles away, my own included, but that isn't the case. Somewhere, either you or someone you know and/or care about is facing "bad news."

With all that is going on in the world today perhaps the best thing we can do for ourselves is to limit the amount of negativity that we put in our brains. The more negative thoughts we have the more stress we have. Research shows the affect stress has on the body. It affects our immune system, our productivity, our emotional wellbeing and our physical health. It is stressful to consistently hear bad news and it can make us worry, "could this happen to me?" The reality as we know is "yes," bad stuff can happen to anyone.

But there is a difference between worry and concern. It's important to be able to differentiate between a "worry" and a "concern." A concern is something you can do something about. A worry is something you can't do anything about; if you can't do anything about a problem why should you allow it to make your life miserable?

EXAMPLE: You're worried about not having enough money.

Ask yourself if there is anything you can do about it right now? Yes, you can look for ways to save money and cut corners and/or see a financial advisor. Your worry has now become a concern.

EXAMPLE: You're worried that something unexpectedly bad is going to happen to you or someone you care about.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

1. **Tighten and relax any muscle especially your face and jaw.** Hold for the count of ten then release slowly to the count of ten (count backward) and tell the muscle you are relaxing to relax. Or tighten all muscles at once; hold for 10 and then release.
2. **Deep breathe.** Take a full deep breath, hold for a count of 10 and exhale all at once through the mouth or take a deep breath and exhale slowly counting backwards from 10. Say to yourself, "I am letting myself relax." The body is most relaxed when exhaling. Your stomach should go out as you inhale and in as you exhale.
3. **Think warmth.** Blood flowing to extremities is directly linked to relaxation and thoughts of warmth. Try to visualize the feeling of being warm and say "I feel warm sunlight shining on the top of my head and the warmth is traveling down inside my body all the way down to my feet. The warmth is filling me up." Picture it filling each body part.
4. Inhale slowly to a count of 3, pause and say, "I am letting myself relax" or "I am calm and quiet." Exhale to a count of 5. Do this 5 times/day.
5. Listen to calming music, or stress reduction CDs/tapes. Read a book to take your mind off of things.
6. Take a hot shower or sit in a hot tub. Water soothes and takes negative energy from the body. Consider using products with stress reducing scents.

**If you are having difficulty with stress,
EAP can help.**

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- *It's a free benefit to you.*
- *It really works.*

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Ask yourself if there is anything you can do; obviously, aside from being careful and not taking any unnecessary risks there isn't- so why worry?

"It ain't no use putting up your umbrella till it rains."

Unknown

When you are worried about something, follow this regimen:

1. Ask yourself, "How likely is this to happen?"
2. If likely ask, "What is the worst thing that could happen?"
3. Then ask, "What will I do if it happens, how will I handle it?"
4. And finally, "Is there anything I can do now...just in case?"

When you make "just in case" or "what if" plans, you begin to turn your worry into a concern. Now you can use your energy to think of ways to deal with a situation if it happens or prevent something from happening.

Also, try to recognize burnout and overload and do something to minimize the stress on your mind and body.

Test For Stress Signals

Rate each of these 1-5 (1=almost never, 2=infrequently, 3=sometimes 4=frequently, 5=almost always)

I can recognize anxiety and keep it from interfering with my daily activities

I relax my mind and body without using drugs

I get enough satisfying sleep

I enjoy my life

I fall asleep in 20 minutes or less

I sleep soundly at night

I take enough time to eat

I'm in control and not feeling "hyper" with mind and body going too fast

I can make decisions without difficulty

I don't spend a lot of time worrying over things I can't control

Total your points and analyze your score

POINTS

INTERPRETATION

40 to 50	You're treating your body very well. Congratulations.
30 to 39	Your life-style habits are good.
20 to 29	You'd better ease up and listen more carefully to the signals from your body.
10 to 19	Your body is sending you several danger signals. Take action right now.

Life is not a dress rehearsal nor can we rewind it. While it's unrealistic to expect to be happy or stress-free all our lives, we can work daily at minimizing the negative messages to our brain. Recognizing stress signals sent from our body and emotional changes allows us to do something to relieve the stress. Your health depends on it!

TIPS TO RELIEVE STRESS

1. **Try to look at things from the lighter side. Laughter feels good and is great medicine.** "Laughter strengthens the heart muscle. Twenty seconds of laughter is the cardiovascular equivalent of 3 minutes of strenuous rowing." *DR. William Fry, Jr., Department of Psychiatry, Stanford Medical School*
"A belly laugh works just like a drug to ease a nervous stomach, it immediately lowers blood pressure, and frees up the mind for creative problem solving." *C.W. Metcalf, Lighten Up, Addison-Wesley, 1993*
2. **Change the channel on your thoughts.** Sing or recite something out loud, read a book.
3. **Smile even if you don't feel like it.** Even a fake smile releases endorphins (the body's natural pain killers) into the body. A study in 1983, at the University of CA School of Medicine showed that just changing your expression to a smile was a rapid and powerful way to change your emotional balance. *Source: Dr. James E. Loehr, Mentally Tough, E. Evens & Co. New York 1986*
4. **Play upbeat music.** "Sensations from music are processed in the same areas of our brain as pain. Focusing on upbeat music stimulates endorphins and distracts the mind." *Kathryn Hagan, Arthritis Today, Mar/April 1993*
5. **Get a hug from someone or a pet.** "Hugs are the best form of emotional and physical therapy. Hugs have a wealth of healing power. Research reveals that touching can help lower high blood pressure, regulate heartbeat, and strengthen the immune system." *Jo Lindberg, founder of the Hugs for Health Foundation*
6. **Exercise regularly; 30 minutes 3x a week.** Aerobic exercise is a great way to let off steam and work out stress. Dancing is a great way to dissipate stress energy.
7. **Talk it out. Contact your EAP Counselor to talk it out and get more ideas to deal with stress.**

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