



## **Ten Ways to Reduce Stress and Restore Calm**

**Dr. Alisa Cooper, D.C., C.C.N.**

“Life is a rollercoaster that we all ride.” That is so true! We all experience ups and downs to varying degrees, but it turns out that it’s not so much the actual *events* that create stress but rather our perceptions of those events. And with perceptions set firmly in place, our reactions flow pretty much automatically. For example, if you perceive the roller coaster ride to be exhilarating, your reaction might be to throw your hands into the air and squeal with delight. If, on the other hand, you perceive the experience to be terrifying, you will likely scream bloody murder, throw up, and curse your friends when the ride is finally over. Same event: different perceptions, different reactions. The rollercoaster ride is just a ride; we can’t say it is inherently good or bad, positive or negative.

Maybe it is the same with things we have been calling “stressful” in our own lives. Have you given any thought to how you deal with stress or examined your own perceptions and reactions? Do you question your autopilot reactions? Are you open to the possibility that you can choose to operate in new, more productive ways that would alleviate a good deal of your stress?

The first few items on this list will help change your perspective and give you a guideline for moving into action. Once you are in action, stress immediately begins to ease. So much of our time is spent worrying, and not enough of it is spent actually doing anything productive! Likewise, we also tend to take on too much all at once, and there are suggestions for dealing with feelings of overwhelm. The list ends with a couple of tips for alleviating anxiety when, despite our best efforts, stress gets the better of us.

**1. You *can* commit to a task you don't like.** Okay, so you have a task to do but you don't really want to do it at all, and it's totally stressing you out! The truth is you don't have to *want* to do it, nor do you have to love doing it by any means. You just have to prefer doing it over suffering the consequences of not doing it! With that in mind, you can simply *choose* to commit to it. But if you do make that commitment, make sure you do so whole heartedly. If you approach a task with a half-assed attitude, no doubt it will be annoying, tedious, burdensome and stressful. But if you commit to it *whole heartedly*, you can't help but come from a better place, that is, your heart! Harnessing your heart energy allows you to vibrate at a higher frequency as a human being. Suddenly that task doesn't seem so awful after all, and your stress level comes down a few notches.

**2. Get into action.** Now that you have committed to the task at hand, you must take concrete action steps. Unfortunately, we often allow feelings of overwhelm to paralyze us from moving forward. This does nothing but create more anxiety, especially when we realize we are still not getting done what needs to be done. More anxiety leads to more overwhelm, leading to more paralysis and more not getting things done, and a vicious cycle is set up that can spiral us into panic mode. The most important thing at this stage is just **getting started!** You must **get started** every single day, if only for a short period of time. It is amazing what you can accomplish in even a half hour's time! Suddenly you sense that you are in action and back in control.

**3. Focus on the doing rather than the finishing.** Even though our goal is to ultimately finish a task or project, focusing on finishing can be a bit unnerving. After all, finishing is something that happens in the vague and distant future, and all we truly have is the present. In his amazing book *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle teaches us the importance of living in the present moment. And George Harrison pointed this out when he sang, "Yesterday, today was tomorrow, and tomorrow, today will be yesterday." So, all we really have is NOW! Instead of asking, "Will I ever get this finished? *How* will I get it finished? *When* will I get finished?" Ask instead, "**What can I do right now?**" As Dr. Dominick Fiore, PhD says in his book *Awakening Your Strongest Self*, "Keep getting started and finishing will take care of itself."

**4. Reframe your thoughts.** We often approach our tasks and projects with the attitude that they are too huge, too difficult, too time consuming and too overwhelming. Many of us approach our lives with that very same attitude. How many times have you said those words to yourself regarding lifestyle changes like improving your diet, starting an exercise program or even overcoming your addictions? We say more "I can't's" than "I cans". Funny, (as in ironic, not humorous) how we brainwash ourselves! Certainly we can take a different approach and replace those self-limiting words with others that will empower rather than overwhelm us. Instead of lamenting that you *can't*, how about repeating some positive affirmations like, "I can take one small step today." Or, "I can

chip a small chunk away in the next half hour,” or “Little by little the job gets done.” Amazing what a change of perspective can do to reduce your stress level!

**5. Get rid of the word should.** According to Louise Hay, author of the ground breaking book *You Can Heal Your Life*, the word *should* needs to be removed from the dictionary! *Should* makes us feel obligated and enslaved, leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy, ultimately leading to more stress in our lives. How wonderful and liberating it is to replace the words, “I should get sober, slimmer, more educated, make more time for family and friends,” with, “I *could* get help for my addiction, work with a nutritionist, take online classes, call people just to see how they are.” Or perhaps better yet, “I **choose** to get sober, lose weight, go back to school and let people know I value them.” The point is that *should* enslaves us and creates stress, *could* keeps us in the realm of what is possible for us and *choosing*, as in, “I choose to do this!” is the most empowering of all. It is hard to feel stressed when we feel liberated and empowered!

**6. Stop being such a perfectionist.** Research shows there are nine core personality types that all of humankind falls into. These are called *Enneagrams*. (Go to [www.freeEnneagramtest.com](http://www.freeEnneagramtest.com) to determine your type). One of the Enneagram types is The Perfectionist, and many of us have that type, or subtype. Perfectionism has its upsides, but it often ends up being another form of procrastination; a defense mechanism against failure. If you think you have to *be* perfect, or *do* everything perfectly, you secretly harbor a fear of not being good enough. Maria Simone, Passion to Prosperity business guru, says, “It doesn’t have to be perfect, it just has to be good enough.” Wow, what a revelation! You can be good enough! Once you realize that you can strive for **excellence**, meaning always doing your best, and let go of having to be perfect in everyone else’s eyes, you might just actually relax and get something done.

**7. Learn to say the word no.** Remember the Enneagrams? Another one of the nine types is The Helper, and millions of us have The Helper as our core personality, while countless others have it as our subtype. Your ‘helper’ Enneagram was embedded in your DNA long before you ever heard the words *multi-task*, *volunteer*, *committee*, and *obligation*. As a result, you often have trouble saying *no*. In an effort to lend a helping hand to those you love, those you like, and those you barely even know, you end up biting off more than you can chew. Then the stress sets in! In that case, it won’t matter how good you are at time management, how positive your self-talk is, or how your brain is wired. Too much is just too much! Instead of saying, “Yes, sure, why not and no problem,” try something like, “No, I’ll need time to think about that.” Or, “**Actually, no, thanks for asking but I’ve decided to spend my time working on projects where I feel I can make the most difference.**” That line is great! Read it again! Memorize it! It works like a charm; you just have to be okay with how unnatural the words will sound when they first roll off your tongue. The more you practice saying no, the more natural it

will become, and the lower your stress level will be. (Note: This does not mean shirk your responsibilities; this tip is for those who truly take on way too much).

**8. Release your stress through exercise.** When your stress has gotten the better of you, there is no better way to recover inner calm and serenity than by engaging in some targeted, low-stress aerobic exercise. Stress causes an elevation in *cortisol* levels, which is fine as long as it is short-lived and the body returns to normal soon afterwards. On the good side, cortisol lowers your sensitivity to pain, heightens your awareness, and lends a burst of increased immunity. The downside is that high levels of cortisol hanging around the body for too long can impair cognitive function, disturb blood sugar balance, increase your blood pressure and destroy muscle tissue. Exercise is highly effective at dissipating excess cortisol and returning the body to homeostasis (balance). It will release *endorphins* that help improve mood and reduce the symptoms of anxiety and depression. When engaging in exercise to reduce stress, try to avoid doing something competitive and strenuous, and opt instead for something that allows you to break a sweat while having fun.

**9. Meditate your way to relaxation.** Take time to sit in quiet meditation, free from distraction and sensory overload. Get in touch with your breath; feel it fill your body, and let it release with a big, audible sigh. Focus on slowing the breath and evening out any choppiness you may detect in it. Allow your metabolism to temporarily slow down and your nervous system to take a reprieve from hyper-vigilance. Before long, your brain waves will slow and your body and mind will reap the rewards of your meditation practice. Done on a regular basis, not only will meditation allow you to recover from the slings and arrows of stress, it will also help you cope more effectively with potentially-stressful situations as they arise. Things that were once stressful will soon fail to ruffle your feathers. Through your efforts, you can change your perceptions and reactions and live a more peaceful, calm existence.

**10. Prove you are worthy.** Many of us deal with issues of low self esteem and low self worth that stem back to our childhoods. This may be the root cause of some of our dysfunction and a good deal of our daily stress. Now you could stand in front of the mirror and repeat "I am worthy" over and over again, and that will help to some extent, but you've got to **prove it to yourself for it to be really effective**. And nothing says *I love you* quite like taking impeccably good care of yourself. So, nourish your body with healthy, life-giving foods, carve out a little time for yourself each day, meditate regularly, spend some time in nature and with positive people, and move your body in enjoyable ways. It won't take long before you are feeling renewed and re-energized.

Dr. Alisa Cooper is a chiropractor, CCN (certified clinical nutritionist) and EFT practitioner in private practice in Scottsdale, Arizona. She is a popular speaker, writer and health advocate. Dr. Cooper can be contacted for appointments, speaking engagements and interviews at [drcooper@liveandbewell.com](mailto:drcooper@liveandbewell.com) by phone at 480-699-9735, or visit her website [www.LiveAndBeWell.com](http://www.LiveAndBeWell.com)