

# Test Your Coping

By Dana Points

# Style

There are as many ways of handling stress as there are stressed-out people. How well do you cope? Take this quiz, then check out our anti-tension tactics.

You've just come home from work and you're getting dinner ready when you drop a glass. Do you:

- a. sweep up the pieces but feel frustrated about the fact that you're always the one who makes dinner?
- b. clean up the mess and ask the kids to set the table?
- c. change into comfortable clothes for a "yoga break"?

**Answer:** Definitely not **a**. It's O.K. to clean up the mess, but if a minor accident makes you feel resentful, then you need to solve the bigger problem—in this case, the fact that you always make dinner. Solution **b** is better. Getting the kids' help should defuse your anger. Best of all, go with **c**. Tell yourself that the broken glass isn't a big deal and clean it up. Then, before or after dinner, try this exercise from New York City yoga trainer Donna Davidge: In a quiet room, lie on your back, legs outstretched, arms at your sides, palms of your hands facing up. Close your eyes and feel your spine "melt" into the floor; then, starting with your feet and working your way up, mentally "instruct" various body parts to relax. In five minutes, you'll feel refreshed—and ready to ask the whole family to pitch in with dinner from now on.

As you're about to begin a big project at work, you realize your supervisor's instructions are unclear. Do you:

- a. start working (you'll figure out what she meant)?
- b. write down your questions and talk to your boss?
- c. put the file aside and decide to work on it later?

**Answer:** If you picked **a**, you show initiative—but you could end up redoing the project down the line, and that's going to mean extra work and added stress. Answer **c** may actually increase anxiety because you'll still have the project hanging over your head, says Stephen Lepore, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the department of psychology at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Plus, by procrastinating you'll wind up stuck in a high-pressure time crunch down the line. What works best: **b**. This take-charge approach short-circuits problems and insures that you'll do the project right.

Sunday nights can be stressful, as you start to think about all you have to do in the coming week (and didn't do over the weekend). Should you:

- a. set aside half an hour right before bed and make a "to do" list to tackle on Monday morning?
- b. start a Sunday night ritual: treat yourself to a hot bath and get in bed with a good book?
- c. busy yourself with little chores to take your mind off the tasks that await you in the week ahead?

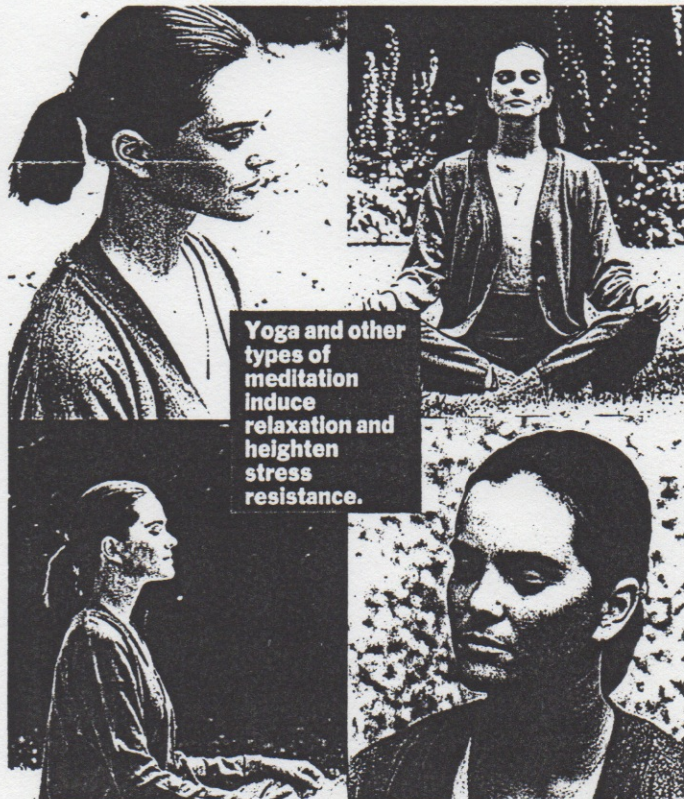
**Answer:** It's not a bad idea to try **a** and make a "to do" list, but not right before bed—you'll be too

keyed up to sleep. The problem with **c** is that mindless chores actually leave your mind free to wander to your worries, explains Eric Goldstein, Ph.D., director of stress management for the Doral Saturnia Spa in Miami. Instead, go with **b**. But before you settle down with a book, Dr. Goldstein recommends retreating to a quiet room with low lighting; unplug or turn down the phone, put on your favorite soft music and lie down. Close your eyes and focus on a single, pleasant word, such as "calm." You could also do this while soaking in the tub; to enhance relaxation, spray the air with perfume or use a fragrant bath oil. "Just don't stress yourself out trying to create the perfect environment," advises Dr. Goldstein.

The supermarket checkout line is endless, and the cash-register tape just ran out. Do you:

- a. read the labels on your groceries to distract yourself?
- b. abandon the groceries and decide to come back later?
- c. do a deep-breathing exercise?

**Answer:** You could try **a**, but if you're really frustrated, chances are this won't ease your stress. Answer **b** doesn't really work either; if you leave the store, you're wasting the time you invested in choosing your items. The best bet: **c**, use the time to relieve stress, advises Raymond B. Flannery, Jr., Ph.D., assistant clinical professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School in Boston.



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