

Stress soothers

12 EASY WAYS TO RELAX

With everything you have to think about these days—making a lifetime commitment, planning an entire wedding, meeting all of your soon-to-be relatives—you may be feeling a little stressed out. How to relax? Try these coping strategies.

EXERCISE One great way to relax is through yoga, a form of exercise that focuses on stretching and breathing. “Since we tighten our muscles when we’re stressed, stretching is a great way to get rid of tension—both physically and emotionally,” explains Donna Davidge, a yoga trainer in N.Y.C. Proper breathing is also essential. “Most of us breathe too quickly and shallowly, which can make us more tense,” she adds. What’s better? Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Visualize your breath as it fills your lungs, flows down to your abdomen, then travels throughout your body. Practice this exercise throughout the day, until it becomes automatic.

SLEEP Studies show that stress reduces time spent in the deepest, most restorative stages of sleep. And, being sleepy adds to stress by making you feel irritable and depressed. How to stop tossing and turning? The Better Sleep Council offers this advice: • Keep your biological clock in sync by going to bed and rising at the same time each day. • Reduce caffeine—have your last cup of coffee six to eight hours before bedtime. • Clear your mind early in the evening by making lists; note things to do, as well as anxieties or worries and possible solutions. Develop a nightly bedtime ritual (e.g., stretches, reading); repeat it every night so it becomes a cue to wind down.

COMMUNICATE .. .

One way to destress is to meditate: Sit cross-legged (wrists on knees, index fingers meeting thumbs). Concentrate on the flow of your breath. Aim to meditate 15 minutes a day.



N.Y.C. and author of *The Female Stress Syndrome* (Newmarket Press, 1991). “To avoid misunderstandings, let him know what’s wrong, then tell him *how* he can make you feel better,” she advises. And don’t shoulder all the burdens yourself. Together, make a list of wedding problems and decide how you can both solve them. “Agree to let go of any issues that are out of your control,” she adds. It’s also essential to continue doing all the things you enjoy together—candlelit dinners, movies, time with friends, says Dr. Witkin. “Otherwise, you’ll forget why you’re marrying each other.”

TIME OUT Taking 20 minutes out of the day to destress is essential to both mental and physical health, says Dr. Witkin. One way to spend the time: Take a long, luxurious bath—warm water relaxes the mind as well as the muscles. To induce the deepest state of relaxation, Caswell-Massey bath experts offer these tips: Run a hot bath (105° F). Soak for at least 15 minutes (no longer than 30) to get the maximum benefits from the heat and avoid dehydration. When you get out of the tub, lather a scented body lotion on damp skin. Another way to indulge is to have a professional massage—it