BROCHURE ABOUT LIFESTYLE AND STRESS CONTROL

Our ideal

We all cherish the desire to lead a meaningful life filled with happiness and good health. But, in reality, it is often far from easy to achieve that in our everyday lives. Interacting with ourselves, the people around us and our work is often very inspiring, but can also be thought-provoking, often problematic and stressful.

Personal growth

We are increasingly realising that the way we live—our living habits—can have a huge impact on our stress level and hence also on our health, the quality of our social contacts, and ultimately our lives and our happiness.

Needless to say, a person’s reaction to stress depends on their personality, experience and knowledge of how the mind and body work in terms of finding a sense of calm and meaning. If we lack this knowledge or self-awareness, we often end up stressed which leaves little room for happiness and fulfilment. Once a person has reached this dead end, it can be difficult to turn things around again.

Stress reactions and living habits

Changing certain living habits not only helps us to relax more easily when the situation allows, but also enables us to be more creative in how we deal with the situations we find ourselves in.

We can prevent and eliminate stress by changing things like how we treat our body and mind, our approach to diet and exercise, our mindset, how we handle our emotions, our social contacts and our way of communicating—in other words, by shifting the balance between our rational and our intuitive sides. However, we need to find out for ourselves (or with someone else’s help) which methods work best for us to create a greater sense of calm and fulfilment in our lives.

Spirituality and the left and right halves of the brain

In order to lead a fulfilled life, we need to use both halves of our brain for precisely what they are good at. As a result of Western society’s focus on the left half of the brain (rationality), we sometimes underuse the capabilities of the right half of the brain (intuition, creativity). The left half of the brain likes to work with what is already there, with the risk that our thoughts keep going round in circles.

We can use the right half of the brain to discover our goal in life and think up creative solutions to life issues. The left half of the brain can then decide which steps we need to take to achieve them.

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR STRESS

See below for some practical tips about lifestyle and how to make your stress easier to control.

- Discover what works best for you
- Alternate tension with relaxation
- Live in the here and now
- Mind over matter
- Adapting your way of life
- Learn effective relaxation techniques
Since only you know what works for you, only you can take control of your own stress management. The following list contains a few tips that might help.

Irrespective of their age and gender, many people – especially in the Western world – have an excessively high level of stress in their lives. That’s why, according to Kansas State University, almost 85% of all visits to doctors and psychologists are linked to health problems stemming from long-term stress.

Most of us find it very challenging to develop a sufficiently healthy lifestyle in which we feel energetic, satisfied and happy.

First and foremost, a healthy lifestyle requires you to have knowledge and self-awareness about:

- Your current way of living and working (healthy diet, regular exercise, social contacts and enough rest).
- Your mental and emotional state (mindset, convictions, ambitions and level of happiness).
- Your spiritual needs (who you really want to be and what you really want to achieve in life) and your physical, mental and emotional resilience (what you can cope with).

Then it comes down to setting yourself goals, staying motivated and actually applying your knowledge in practice. Developing your own healthy lifestyle is very much like going on a journey of discovery in which your heart (figuratively speaking) and your mind are there to support you.

Your autonomous nervous system serves as the sensor. A well-functioning autonomous nervous system enables a person to differentiate between good and bad, even before the heart (figuratively speaking) can react and the brain can make its judgement.

In order for the autonomous nervous system to retain this natural ability, it needs sufficient moments of relaxation – times when it doesn’t need to be active so that it has a chance to recuperate.

Alternate tension with relaxation

- Learn relaxation techniques that work for you and practice them regularly.
- Make time to do things that you enjoy, since that boosts your energy.
  Try to do something fun every day, such as taking a walk in the countryside and appreciating the beauty of nature.
  Laughter is the best medicine: laughing has many positive effects on the body, including lifting your mood, improving your blood flow and giving your muscles a mini-workout.
  The most creative ideas come when you just let everything else go, such as during a long walk or after a good night’s sleep.

Live in the here and now

- Instead of worrying about what might happen tomorrow or fretting over what happened yesterday, you should remind yourself that today is what really matters!
- Take time to really pay attention to everything that is around you and become mindful of all the things that are in the here and now.
- Surround yourself with people who can give you energy and invest time and effort in social contact with your good friends and family.
Mind over matter
It is not whether you experience good luck or bad luck that matters, but rather the way that you look at each situation:

- Learn to focus on the things that are going well. Accentuate the positive. Your glass is half full!
- Be content with what you have. Make a list of all the things that you should be happy about.
- View any criticism or complaints as free advice on how you could improve.
- Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill. Ask yourself what the worst is that can happen in each situation. Would that really be so terrible?
- A situation that initially seems negative can develop into something positive. A threat can also be an opportunity for a new direction or a positive transformation.
- Learn from both your successes and your failures. As Thomas Edison said: “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”
- Don’t spend too much time analysing the problems but concentrate instead on the ideal situation for finding the solution.
- ‘Perfection’ doesn’t exist, so why do you think that it should?
- Change your ‘I needs’ into ‘I wants’.
- Reflect for a moment on what is really important in your life.
- Live in harmony with your existential choices.
- Do things that help you achieve self-contentment.
- Take time to think about: What sort of manager/father/mother/friend would I like to be? Later, when I’m looking back on my life, what would I have liked to have done, who would I have liked to have been?

Adapting your way of life
- Be careful with smoking, caffeine intake, alcohol, tranquilizers and sleeping tablets. They not only disguise your complaints, but can also dangerously affect your health in many different ways.
- Ensure that you get enough sleep.
- Eat healthily.
- Get fit. Exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes a day.
- Try and find the most efficient working habits.
- Try to introduce order and neatness: a ‘clean desk’ policy for yourself.
- Every so often, plan a clean-up day: throw out or give away things that you no longer need.
- Decide what your priorities are.
- Stop procrastinating: do it now!

Learn effective relaxation techniques
There are a wide range of different relaxation techniques. Explore which ones work best for you.

Effective breathing
Tense situations can have a big influence on your breathing. There is a good reason why there are so many common expressions relating to this: ‘I was gasping for breath’, ‘My breath just stuck in my throat’, I found it really oppressive’, ‘We listened, breathless’ and also: ‘a sigh of relief’ and ‘a breath of fresh air’. Poor breathing can become a bad habit that can in turn lead to a wide range of illnesses.
Optimum breathing patterns have a direct effect on the brain and consequently on the clarity of your thinking, your strategic decisions and the way you communicate. Optimal breathing patterns can lead to greater vitality and improved quality of life. Naturally, healthy eating habits, exercise and attitude are also important but good breathing is the most important basis for a healthy, relaxed life.

The way we breathe
In your torso, your chest and your abdominal cavity are separated by the diaphragm, the largest muscle in your body. When you breathe in, the diaphragm lowers and the chest expands, enlarging the chest cavity in both length and breadth. The lungs suck in air to fill this space. When you breathe out, the diaphragm returns to its starting position, forcing inhaled air out of the lungs.

As the diaphragm sinks, it quickly exercises the stomach cavity and through that, the stomach, sides and lower back. A lot of people talk about ‘breathing through the stomach’; actually what they really mean is breathing through the diaphragm.

Relaxing the muscles
By relaxing the muscle groups, you can in turn release a deeper relaxation experience. Once the muscles have loosened up, other improvements will quickly follow and open up the route to further relaxation.

Meditation techniques
Thoughtlessness
Stop your thinking process for a while. This may be difficult at first, but try to let any thoughts pass without paying attention to them and your mind will slowly relax. This can require a lot of practice and you may want to consider attending a meditation course.

Fixation
Fixation is a technique that involves you skipping the first steps (as above). You can instantly achieve a ‘thoughtless’ state of mind by fixating on one point.

Imagination
If you can banish your thoughts, then you can also focus your positive thinking on a specific topic. In this way you can evoke a subjective experience; for example a cold or dark feeling in your arms and legs can also become a warm or light feeling.
Visualization
This step is more about shaping your personality. Relaxing can enable you to create a space for projection. You can imagine an object, a person or a situation as if looking at them in a photograph. Visualization is a superb method for developing deeper relaxation.

Auto-suggestion or self-influence
When you are deeply relaxed, you enter into a sort of trance and are more strongly receptive to suggestion. You can learn more about yourself and convince yourself to think differently. By applying this relaxation technique, you can remove energy blockers so that energy can flow freely – a perfect basis for complete harmony.

Other approaches
Other kinds of relaxation and stress management that you could try include yoga, zazen, meditation, tai chi, walking in the countryside, listening to classical or other relaxing music, having a massage, visiting the sauna or spa, or even doing the washing up in silence, fully focused and thinking about nothing else.

Don’t expect immediate results
It’s important to accept that your lifestyle patterns and choices may have led to stress developing over a number of years. Although it won’t take as long to break these habits, it will take some time. You must think about and adapt your lifestyle and work to a new behaviour pattern, one step at a time.

Now it’s your turn. It’s unlikely that just one idea, one specific relaxation technique or activity will banish your stress like sun melting away the snow. Experiment for yourself to find out what works best for you to relieve your stress, and try to find the most effective way to integrate this into your daily life!