



Stress Busters for a Healthier Heart February 2013 Newsletter

www.Shepell.fgi—This content is meant for informational purposes. Consult with a professional for further guidance.

Breakfast, traffic jams, overloaded inboxes, meetings, doctor's appointments, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, sleep. Sound familiar? Life in the fast lane can be exhausting. It can also be unhealthy, causing high blood pressure, fatigue, headaches and depression. Even more troubling are the effects on your heart.

While short bursts of stress can give you a quick boost, over the long run it wears away at the heart, increasing the chances of heart disease, hypertension and clogged arteries. Below are some quick tips that can help keep stress in check and your heart light.

Spot the signs. Learning to listen to the stress signals of mind and body can save you problems down the road. Stress triggers the release of steroids and cortisol, which over time damage heart function. Physical stress symptoms caused by these same hormones can include insomnia; headaches; back, shoulder or neck pain; fatigue, heart palpitations and upset stomach.

Poor concentration, depression, mood swings and feelings of nervousness are all emotional signals that you're in stress overload. Combat minor symptoms with a relaxing routine, whether it's yoga, singing in the shower or a massage.

Get support.

Ask family or friends to help with errands or watch the kids while you get some housework done. If you care for an older relative, look into respite services. Have friends with children? Take turns babysitting so you can get out. Assign chores to each family member to take the burden off of you. If balancing work and home seems too overwhelming, seek help from a professional to help you discover ways to reduce and manage stress.

Know your limits.

Your co-worker has been asking you to stay late to help out and your sister keeps nagging you to baby-sit. Learning to say "no" is crucial when you have a full plate. Set boundaries by deciding in advance how much time you can commit to home, work and outside activities and stick to them. When you've already allotted all your time, you won't feel guilty turning down invitations that overextend your agenda.

Manage work.

Good scheduling is the best way to rein in time-eaters. Allocate a realistic amount of time for each project and concen-

trate on one task, rather than trying to do five things at once. Let go of perfectionist issues by enlisting the support of colleagues who are willing to help. Finally, find a daily ritual that helps you decompress before arriving home. Try a quick walk, a workout, listening to music or reading a book on the commute home.

Plan and organize.

Disorganization breeds anxiety. Map out a strategy that keeps you sailing smoothly. Make meals on the weekend and freeze them for later. Lay out clothes and pack lunches the night before. Can't remember the last time you watched a movie or took a walk with your partner? Set a weekly date for some time together. Stop worrying about the dishes and spend quality time with your kids each night. Staying connected with family and friends will help keep you focused on what's really important.

Switch work off and socialize.

E-mail, text messaging and mobile phones can save time, but also make it more difficult to escape work, creating psychological distress and decreasing the quality of home time. The emotional affects can contribute to irregular heart rhythms and reduced estrogen levels in women. Try turning off the technology when not at work and reconnect to the world face-to-face through hobbies, volunteer work, spiritual involvement or meeting with friends. Studies suggest strong social connections help you cope with stress, keep you emotionally and physically healthy, and may (in men, specifically) actually help protect the heart from cardiovascular disease.

Have fun.

Laughter is truly the best medicine. It releases endorphins—feel-good chemicals produced by the body that are 10 times more powerful than morphine. Laughter also helps to decrease stress hormones. So if you're feeling wound up, take a break. Get some laughs at a comedy show or schedule a fun 'play date' with your family or friends. Keep weekend plans to a minimum and leave time for a little spontaneity. With so many commitments, it's easy to forget the things we enjoy most: friends and family and fun.

Ensure that taking time out to relax and rejuvenate isn't a guilty pleasure. After all, when you're at your best, you're more engaged and valuable to those around you.



Think about your emotional well-being. Assess your emotional health regularly. Consider the particular demands or stresses you are facing and how they are affecting you. Give yourself permission to take a break from your worries and concerns. Recognize that dedicating even a short time every day to your mental fitness will reap significant benefits in terms of feeling rejuvenated and more confident.

Daydream – Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a dream location. Breathe slowly and deeply. Whether it's a beach, a mountaintop, a hushed forest or a favourite room from your past, let the comforting environment wrap you in a sensation of peace and tranquility.

"Collect" positive emotional moments – Make it a point to recall times when you have experienced pleasure, comfort, tenderness, confidence, or other positive emotions.

Learn ways to cope with negative thoughts – Negative thoughts can be insistent and loud. Learn to interrupt them. Don't try to block them (that never works), but don't let them take over. Try distracting yourself or comforting yourself, if you can't solve the problem right away.

Exercise – Regular physical activity improves psychological well-being and can reduce depression and anxiety. Joining an exercise group or a gym can also reduce loneliness, since it connects you with a new set of people sharing a common goal.

Enjoy hobbies – Taking up a hobby brings balance to your life by allowing you to do something you enjoy because you want to do it, free of the pressure of everyday tasks. It also keeps your brain active.

Set personal goals – Goals don't have to be ambitious. You might decide to finish that book you started three years ago; to take a walk around the block every day; to learn to knit or play bridge; to call your friends instead of waiting for the phone to ring. Whatever goal you set, reaching it will build confidence and a sense of satisfaction.

Keep a journal (or even talk to the wall!) – Expressing yourself after a stressful day can help you gain perspective, release tension and even boost your body's resistance to illness.

Share humour – Life often gets too serious, so when you hear or see something that makes you smile or laugh, share it with someone you know. A little humour can go a long way to keeping us mentally fit!

Volunteer – Volunteering is called the "win-win" activity because helping others makes us feel good about ourselves. At the same time, it widens our social network, provides us with new learning experiences and can bring balance to our lives.

Treat yourself well – Cook yourself a good meal. Have a bubble bath. See a movie. Call a friend or relative you haven't talked to in ages. Sit on a park bench and breathe in the fragrance of flowers and grass. Whatever it is, do it just for you.

Recipe Corner



Fat-Free Crème Brûlée

By [Fiona Haynes](#), About.com Guide



Crème Brûlée is a dessert to die for, but oh, the fat and calories. Here's a fat-free version that would make a wonderful Valentine's Day dessert. I use strained nonfat Greek yogurt, which is thick and creamy. You could stir in a 1 tsp of vanilla extract into the Greek yogurt beforehand if you want a slightly less tart flavor, but the fruity surprise at the bottom of the Crème Brûlée, and the brown sugar topping may offer sufficient sweetness in this heavenly dessert.

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 2 minutes

Total Time: 7 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 16-ounce tub of fat-free Greek yogurt*
- 1/2 cup strawberry or raspberry preserves
- 4 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 strawberries cut into slices

Preparation:

Preheat broiler.

Spoon 2 tablespoons of preserves into the bottom of 4 4-ounce ramekins, then fill ramekins with Greek yogurt. Sprinkle brown sugar on top. Place ramekins on a baking sheet under broiler until sugar caramelizes, watching carefully so it doesn't burn. Allow to cool slightly. Place strawberry slices on top and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Per Serving: Calories 172, Calories from Fat 2, Total Fat 0.2g (sat 0.1g), Cholesterol 2mg, Sodium 100mg, Carbohydrate 35.7g, Fiber 0.4g, Protein 6.7g

If you can't find Greek yogurt, use fat-free plain or vanilla yogurt, but make sure you strain it first.