Talk About Living!

Suzanne Zoglio, PhD

Stress and Success

Does your mind race at a breakneck speed or your life ever seem to be careening out of control? Take heart; you're not alone. According to Harvard's Mind-Body Medical Institute, over 50% of Americans report high daily stress.

According to Jim Loehr, performance psychologist and co-author of the *Power of Full Engagement*, we need to do what high-performing athletes do-optimize performance by following exertion of energy (physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual) with recovery.

Research indicates that we naturally experience a rise and fall of energy about every 90-120 minutes. Ernest Rossi, author of *The Twenty-Minute Break*, explains that we are hard-wired into this wavelike effort/rest pattern by ultradian rhythms, similar to the better-known circadian rhythm which controls our wake/sleep cycles.

When we ignore this natural need for rest between periods of exertion, it's similar to staying up all night. Not only do you perform poorly, but you stress your body which makes you more prone to infection, cardiac disease, mental illness, and even premature death.

The good news is that some stress is positive (goals, working at what you love, learning, new adventures) and when followed by brief recovery, it actually builds your resilience. Take brief (1-20 minutes) recharging breaks after 90-120 minutes of exertion and you build your capacity to perform at even higher levels without ill effects.

In my seminars, I call this the rubber band theory of working and feeling your best. Stretch, relax, and then stretch again-perhaps a little further this time. Do that regularly and you retain your elasticity. But stretch, stretch, and stretch, and you eventually snap! To work and feel your best, manage your energy in waves instead of waiting for vacation.

In my experience, the only way to fit quick-lifts into your busy day is to schedule them. Set an alarm, and do them at the same time each day-say at ten, noon, two, and four. Start with 1-5 minutes. Here are a few quick-lift ideas that have worked for my clients.

If you've been sitting a while, get physical: walk up and down the stairs, do a few jumping jacks, shoulder rolls, or stretch to the ceiling, and then touch your toes.

If you've been physically exerting, rest: sit and take long deep breathes, prop your feet up and close your eyes, put your head down for a power nap (as DaVinci and Einstein), drink a tall glass of water, or do a few slow stretches.

If you've been using up emotional energy (dealing with a cranky child, an irate customer, a demanding boss), take a centering break: rate your stress from 1-10, study a picture of someone you love, repeat a calming phrase like, "I can handle this," or "It'll all work out." Say a little prayer, admire nature (trees, birds, sky, etc.), or connect with a friend. A good laugh goes a long way.

Imagine a day when you give your very best, bounce back from stress, and still have energy to enjoy your evening. Talk about living!

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