



# Stress Busters

Simple Strategies in 3 minutes or less

By Wendy Woods M.B.A.

Watershed Training Solutions

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Stress Busting Tips .....	4
1. Take 10 deep slow breaths .....	4
2. Guided meditation .....	4
3. Hand acupressure .....	4
4. Ear Rubbing .....	5
5. Stress Journal .....	5
6. Stretch .....	5
7. Laugh .....	5
8. Take a walk .....	5
9. Fold forward deep breathing .....	6
10. Buddhist Centering Prayer .....	6
11. Grab a cup of tea .....	6
12. Counting deep breathing .....	6
13. Put it in perspective .....	6
14. Let your nose relax you .....	6
15. Visualize a relaxing moment .....	6
16. Write out your thoughts .....	6
17. Play the “What if” game .....	7
18. Take a music break .....	7
19. Take a mental vacation .....	7
20. Give a friend some advice .....	7
21. Prioritize .....	7
22. Belt out a song .....	7
23. Play a quick game .....	7
24. Put it in a box .....	8
25. Clear some clutter .....	8
26. Shake it .....	8
27. Get your vitamin C .....	8
28. Gaze at fish in the aquarium .....	8
29. Have an attitude of gratitude .....	8
30. Drink water .....	9
31. Sigh .....	9
32. Take 3 deep breaths .....	9
33. Try a hand mudra .....	9
34. Talk it out .....	9
35. Shrug your shoulders .....	9
Stress Busting Action Plan .....	10
About the Author .....	11
About Watershed Training Solutions .....	12

# Introduction

**S**tress is a natural part of our lives. No matter how much we hope and pray that it will go away, stress is here to stay. The key is to manage stress so that stress doesn't manage us. When we don't manage it effectively, our productivity, behaviour, mental and general health are impacted. Some of the conditions that are directly related to stress are heart disease, diabetes, chronic fatigue, depression and anxiety to name a few.

Why can stress be so detrimental? Our stress reaction, or what is known as the fight or flight response, is actually a life saving mechanism. It's meant to mobilize our bodies so we can either stay and fight or take flight and leave the situation. Once the stressor or threatening situation disappears, our bodies relax and go back to its normal state.

In the days when we were fighting saber tooth tigers and other natural enemies, this response was invaluable. Today we react to less threatening situations with the exact same reaction. Work deadlines, traffic jams and computer problems elicit the fight or flight response. Additionally we are constantly bombarded by these circumstances so our body never gets a chance to recover and reset itself. The symptoms that initially helped us are now detrimental.

In our fast paced societies many of us believe that stress is a "normal" part of our lives or only recognize the extent of our stress once we're sick. This isn't a useful strategy so the first step in managing stress is recognizing it. Once we recognize its negative long term effects, we can become accountable and develop an appropriate and simple plan.

The best way to get the most out of this book is as follows:

1. Read through all 35 stress busting strategies and see which ones appeal to you. Then put a check mark in the box beside the strategies that can be easily incorporated into your busy life.
2. Fill out the stress busting action plan at the end of the book.
3. Post your action in a place that will remind you and help you keep your stress busting commitment.



# Stress Busting Tips

- 1. **Take 10 deep slow breaths** - Why? Breathing is one of the easiest systems to control in order to relax (Dr John Mason, *Guide to Stress Reduction*). Close your door or put on a headset so your colleagues won't be disturbed. Close your eyes. Take 10 deep slow breaths where the exhalation is longer than each inhalation. As you breathe, make sure your abdomen fills up like a balloon when you inhale and sinks in when you exhale. Very quickly you will feel more relaxed and able to refocus.
- 2. **Guided meditation** - Try a guided meditation that you can easily access on your ipod, computer or smartphone. A guided meditation is so simple because all you need to do is listen and relax. You can find great guided CDs by Jon Kabat Zinn, Deepak Chopra or Jack Kornfield in almost any book store. To start with a quick 3 minute meditation, click on [http://www.watershedtraining.ca/Guided\\_Meditation.asp](http://www.watershedtraining.ca/Guided_Meditation.asp).
- 3. **Hand acupressure** - Stimulate the points below by pressing on them for about a minute on one side of the body and then repeat on the other side. Press hard enough to cause a comfortable pain.

## Acupoint 11

On the largest crease of the inner wrist, on a line with the little finger



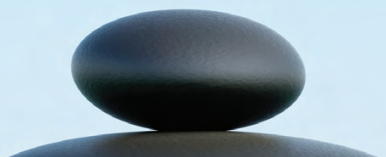
## Acupoint 15

On the middle finger, just above the nail, on the side closest to the thumb



## Acupoint 21

In the middle of the sole of the foot, just behind the ball



- 4. **Ear Rubbing** - The ears contain reflexology points so rubbing your ears is highly therapeutic and relaxing.

Sit somewhere quiet and comfortable. Keep your back straight. Use your thumbs and index finger to rub your ears from top to bottom. Imagine that you are trying to unroll your ears and repeat several times.

- 5. **Stress Journal** - Monitor your stressors and your reactions in a stress journal. This will enable you to see what events cause you stress, how you react to them and how you cope. Initially your coping response may not be as good as you would like it. By reviewing each situation and identifying other reactions, you can teach yourself better coping skills.

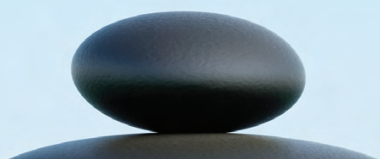
Time	Stressful Event	Reaction (symptoms - Thoughts - behaviours)	Coping Response
9:30	Late for meeting with supervisor	Stomach tight, fear about performance review	Talked with John and felt better
5:30	Meeting ran overtime and couldn't leave at normal time	Headache	Walked a few blocks to the subway

- 6. **Stretch** - Tension and stress build in your body throughout the day especially if you are sitting at a desk or working at a computer. Make a habit of getting up every hour to stretch your muscles, paying special attention to your wrists, arms and shoulders. Some of the benefits of stretching include increased energy, better circulation, reduced muscle tension, improved posture and relaxation. Stretching is easy and can be done almost anywhere.

- 7. **Laugh** - Break out the cartoons, funny shows, and hilarious quotes or try laughter yoga (Visit [www.laughter-yoga.ca](http://www.laughter-yoga.ca) for club listings). Also consider getting together with a colleague for a short break to kid around. According to Dr. William Fry of Stanford University, 20 seconds of laughter is equivalent to 3 minutes of hard rowing.

Laughter is the perfect stress buster because it reverses all the physical signs of stress (e.g. tense muscles, rapid shallow breathing, and presence of stress hormones). It also gives you a psychological break and distance from your stressors. Visit [www.laughter-yoga.ca](http://www.laughter-yoga.ca) and click on *Need a Laugh* to help get you started.

- 8. **Take a walk** - Go for a walk even if it's for only 5 minutes. It will get you away from your desk, give you an opportunity to view your stress/stressors from a different perspective and allow you to return to work with a fresh perspective. Besides the exercise will do you good.



- 9. Fold forward deep breathing** - Stand and take a deep breath. Exhale and let your body bend forward from the waist. Let your head hang down and let your arms go limp. Hold this position until you feel your shoulders and neck loosen and your back open up and relax. Do this 3 times and you'll feel much calmer and more centered.

This can also be done sitting. Let your head fall forward between your knees and allow your arms to touch the floor. Hold this position until you feel your shoulders and neck loosen and your back open up and relax. Do this 3 times (Cathleen O'Connor, Work-Life Balance Specialist). *NB: You should not feel any pain during this exercise. If you do, either reduce the amount of the fold or stop the exercise and pick another.*

- 10. Buddhist Centering Prayer** - Try this Buddhist centering prayer which can be said out loud or in your head (Susan Lannis, Organization Plus! Inc.):

- May I be filled with loving kindness
- May I be well
- May I be peaceful and at ease
- May I be happy

- 11. Grab a cup of tea** - Certain herbal teas are known for their calming and relaxing properties. Try a cup of chamomile, jasmine or licorice tea when you need a break from stress.

- 12. Counting deep breathing** - Trigger your body's natural relaxation response with another form of deep breathing suggested by Elaine Masters of DrivetimeYoga.com. Close your lips, breathing through your nose on a count of 7 slowly and then hold your breath for 4 -7 seconds. Follow with an exhalation on a count of 7.

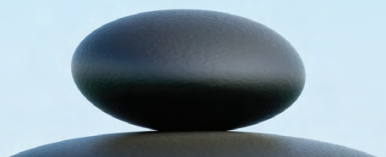
As mentioned earlier, the breath is the easiest system to control in order to get the relation response. Also focusing on the inner experience vs. the external situation enables you to disengage.

- 13. Put it in perspective** - Stress often results when your perspective on a situation gets out of whack. A good way to put things back into perspective is ask yourself: "Will this matter in 5 years?" Taking a longer time horizon can help you manage through the stress.

- 14. Let your nose relax you** - There are a number of essential oils that are known for their relaxation properties (e.g. lavender, basil, neroli, petitgrain or sandalwood). Put a few drops on a tissue and inhale. Soon you should start to feel more relaxed. *NB: Do not put essential oils directly on the skin.*

- 15. Visualize a relaxing moment** - Think back to a time when you were incredibly relaxed. It could have been a weekend at the cottage or an evening spent with friends. Close your eyes and imagine yourself back in that place. Remember who you were with, the temperature, what you were wearing and every last detail with all your senses (e.g. smell, sounds, touch, sight, taste). As you relive this experience, your body will shift into a more relaxed state.

- 16. Write out your thoughts** - Take a piece of paper and write down your thoughts, emotions and frustrations. Journaling is a great way to channel those feelings and express some of that stress in an appropriate way. It can also give you perspective on your situation and make it easier to come up with strategies and solutions.



- 17. Play the “What if” game** - Stress is often situational and different from person to person. Much of it has to do with how we view a situation. An easy stress reducer is the “What if” game.

Take a piece of paper and write at the top: What if \_\_\_\_\_ didn't bother me? Fill in the blank with whatever/whoever's behaviour is causing you stress then brainstorm how you would feel if you didn't get stressed in that situation. Engaging the mind in seeing alternative ways of reacting immediately boosts personal empowerment and resiliency and lowers stress (Cathleen O'Connor, Work-Life Balance Specialist).

- 18. Take a music break** - Take a music break and listen to a few songs that help you relax. Music preference is individual so choose the type of music that works for you. Be sure to keep these songs readily available in your car, on your computer and phone so you can access these calming melodies any time you want.

Research has shown that music with a strong beat can stimulate brainwaves to resonate in sync with the beat, with faster beats bringing sharper concentration and more alert thinking, and a slower tempo promoting a calm, meditative state.

- 19. Take a mental vacation** - Give yourself a 10 minute mental vacation by imagining yourself on a real vacation. It doesn't matter whether or not you've been there before simply guess what it would be like and dream away. Be sure to think of who you are with, where you are, what you are doing, and all the other fun details (e.g. weather, food etc.). Soon you'll be away from your stress and return to work relaxed and with new energy.

- 20. Give a friend some advice** - Think of what you would say to a good friend in terms of helping them manage their stress. Would you tell them that they have managed through many stressful situations in the past? Would you suggest they get to the gym, prioritize their workload or ask for some assistance in their work load? Chances are you would be much kinder in helping them manage their stress than you would be on yourself. Go ahead and take your own advice.

- 21. Prioritize** - Stress often results from feeling overwhelmed by everything that needs to get done. Take a few minutes to re-prioritize your 'to do' list identifying all the items that are truly 'high' priority and then those that are 'low' priority or don't have to be done today. If everything seems high priority, then see if you can negotiate some additional time or flexibility (e.g. give them part of the work now and the rest at a later point) from people whose projects you are working on or from your boss.

During extremely busy and stressful times you may need to re-prioritize your 'to do' list many times throughout the day.

- 22. Belt out a song** - Belting out a song, with CD backup or acappella, can be a great stress release. Loud vocalization releases tension from your body, and music can therapeutically take your mind off your troubles. Try singing in the shower to minimize any stress in starting off the day or in the car to reduce road rage.

- 23. Play a quick game** - A quick game of Solitaire, Crosswords or Suduko on paper or your computer can do wonders to reduce stress. It gets your mind off your stress so you can relax and return with a fresh perspective.



- 24. Put it in a box** - Imagine that you have a box with a lid in front of you. Picture the size, shape and color of your box. Now open it and place each worry/stress in that box individually. When you are done, close the box up tightly.

Make an appointment with yourself to open the box and deal with its contents. Set a time limit so you don't feel overwhelmed and the number of issues is manageable. Often a half an hour is enough to deal with one or possibly two issues.

- 25. Clear some clutter** - Stress can come from feeling overwhelmed. Take 10 minutes and clear off clutter on your desk or in your office. Set a timer to ensure you don't go over the allotted time. When the time is up, notice how that feeling of stress has diminished (Cathleen O'Connor, Work-Life Balance Specialist).

- 26. Shake it** - Take a few minutes and give different body parts a shake to relieve the stress and tension. You may want to start with your feet and move up the body to your head. When you get to your head and neck, try nodding instead of shaking as a way of reducing the stress. Don't forget to shake those hips which will also help lighten your mood.

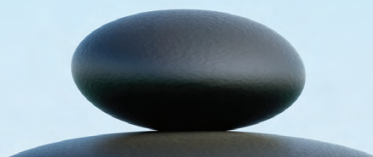
- 27. Get your vitamin C** - According to a German study Vitamin C helps manage stress. In fact, people who have high levels of Vitamin C do not show the mental and physical signs of stress when subjected to challenges and they bounce back faster than those with low levels of Vitamin C. The amount used in this study was 1,000 mg compared to the recommended daily dosage of 60 mg which many believe is outdated. N.B.: *Please consult your physician before you take any vitamins or supplements.*

- 28. Gaze at fish in the aquarium** - Watching fish in an aquarium has been proven to reduce blood pressure and calm individuals. If you've got an aquarium in your office, take a few minutes several times a day to stop and watch the fish. You'll find it does wonders for your stress level.

Don't have an aquarium in your office, no worries. Simply watch a video of fish in an aquarium; it provides the same stress relief as the real deal. Simply go online to find the perfect video for you.

- 29. Have an attitude of gratitude** - According to Robert Emmons, a University of California Davis psychology professor, gratitude in an effective way to reduce stress and manage everyday problems. Here are three ways to express your gratitude and reduce stress:

1. Keep a gratitude journal and write down everything you are thankful for
2. Begin and end each day by listing five things you are grateful for no matter how small (e.g. sunshine, a smile from a stranger etc.)
3. Express gratitude for someone who could use a pat on the back





- 30. Drink water** - Your brain is composed of 95% water. Only a 1 - 2% decline in body water will start shrinking your brain and cause short-term memory challenges, difficulty focusing and fatigue, commonly referred to as brain fog. As a result, it's harder and more stressful to function (Dr. Neill Neill, Psychologist)

How do you know when you have a 1-2 % body water decline? When you start to feel thirsty, you already have that 1-2% drop.

Your body naturally loses 2.5 - 3 liters of water a day through normal functioning. It's important to replace that water to keep stress at bay.

- 31. Sigh** - Sighing is the body's natural way of relieving stress. When you are stressed, you breathe from the chest which only increases tension and locks up the diaphragm, the main breathing muscle. Conversely when you sigh, you stop breathing from the chest and it resets your diaphragm. Your next breathe comes from the belly (Joan Borysenko, *Inner Peace for Busy People*, 2001)

Whether you sigh out loud or silently, it's a great way to ensure your breathing is on track and your stress level is in check.

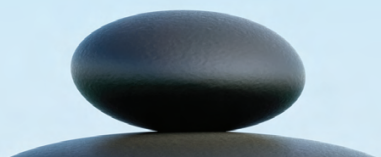
- 32. Take 3 deep breaths** - Taking 3 deep breaths throughout your day requires little time and can be done any where. Try it every time you sit down at your desk, attend a meeting, or pull a document off the printer. Simply take these 3 simple breaths to connect to your breathing. Ensure you are breathing from your stomach to pull yourself out of the vicious stress cycle.

- 33. Try a hand mudra** - A mudra is a symbolic or ritual gesture typically found in Hinduism and Buddhism. While some mudras involve the entire body, most are performed with the hands and fingers.

According to Kelley Black, Founder of Balancing the Executive Life™ and a top stress management consultant, the middle pillar mudra cuts negative thinking and increases confidence and clarity. Put your hands in front of your solar plexus, palms facing each other, approx. 6 inches between your hands. Inhale, hold your breath and silently repeat "I am" 8 times. Exhale as slowly as you can. Hold your breath out and silently repeat "I am" 8 times. Repeat the cycle 3-11 times.

- 34. Talk it out** - Tap into support from family, friends and other trusted people in your life. Also ask your employer if you have access to an employee assistance program (EAP). Discussing your feelings can help you gain a new perspective, solutions and ideas thereby reducing your stress (Gordian Health Solutions Health Coaches, Written 2009).

- 35. Shrug your shoulders** - Sit straight with your shoulders relaxed. Inhale and squeeze your shoulders up toward your ears. Hold tightly for several seconds and relax as you exhale. Repeat several times.



# Stress Busting Action Plan

## Step 1

Select one breathing activity that you checked off. Breathing is one of the easiest systems to control and can be done anywhere so it's an important part of any stress management strategy. Include the following information in your action plan:

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Start date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Frequency per day: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time of day: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Step 2

Select one other strategy that you checked off and think you can realistically incorporate into your life. The reason for selecting only one is that it is better to work at one successfully than have three strategies and use none of them. Make sure to incorporate the following information into your plan:

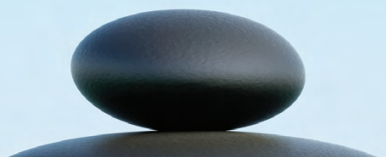
Activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Start date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Frequency per day: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time of day: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Step 3

Take a copy of this action plan and place it somewhere at work. Be sure you choose a visible location so you will be reminded of your commitment often.

## Step 4

If you find that your action plan isn't working, then go back to your list and select another strategy which will work better.

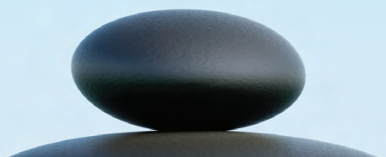


# About the Author

**P**rior to starting Watershed Training Solutions, Wendy spent most of her career in mutual fund marketing and training working for such outstanding organizations as Dynamic Mutual Funds, Richardson Greenshields and RBC Dominion Securities. In 2000, she helped launch [www.advisor.ca](http://www.advisor.ca) a website for financial advisors, in under 2 months.

In 2003 Wendy Woods founded Watershed Training Solutions, a dynamic training company. Her workshops include stress management, productive teamwork and Emotional Intelligence as well as many other critical workplace skills. Wendy's enthusiastic and engaging training style energizes and motivates her participants. Her years of hands-on business and adult education experience, a, complimented by an M.B.A. and Certificate in Adult Education, provide her clients with productive and bottom-line results.

Wendy has spoken throughout North America receiving rave reviews. Her clients include such world class organizations as Ernst & Young, Johnson & Johnson and TD Bank Financial Group. Wendy's expertise has been featured in such media as *CTV News*, *Breakfast Television*, *Rogers Daytime*, *Classical 96.3*, *Entertainment Tonight Canada* and *Canadian Business Online*.



# About Watershed Training Solutions

Watershed Training Solutions' goal is *Making the Workplace Flow* for employees, teams and organizations. Our focus is on employee engagement and talent management which we support with assessments, keynotes, training and coaching. Our sessions cover a wide range of topics which include:

- Emotional Intelligence
- Networking
- Stress Management
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Managing Conflict
- Influence

We also have a F.L.O.W. certificate program for leaders.

To find out how Watershed Training Solutions can help your organization, contact us at [info@watershedtraining.ca](mailto:info@watershedtraining.ca) or 1-416-926-9450. Also please check out our website at [www.watershedtraining.ca](http://www.watershedtraining.ca).

