

# Reduction in stress yields better health

Victor Parachin/CNS

Stress is no stranger to Deborah. Working as a reference librarian, Deborah faces a constant juggling act each day as she answers questions from library patrons, organizes and manages library workshops and handles general administrative duties.

While stressful days are usually more associated with particular occupations — firefighting, law enforcement and hospital work — the truth is that stress seems to be at an almost epidemic level, touching all levels of society. Chronic stress and the accompanying exhaustion and health-related illnesses seem to be a way of life for many.

Yet, it is possible to turn the tide on this pervasive problem and not to live life feeling as if you are shell-shocked. A few lifestyle adjustments can go a long way toward reducing stress while boosting energy.

Here are 15 ways to destress your life:

- Don't pathologize life. Psychologist Charlotte Davis Kasl, author of "Finding Joy," notes that "life is often messy, uncertain and unpredictable," and that "peace of mind" comes from accepting life's ups and downs as normal and not attaching any great significance to either.

- Claim the promise of Scripture. When feeling the burdens and stresses of life, tap into the power of the Bible to reduce anxiety and increase serenity. Read, review and recite peace-inducing passages to yourself.

- Practice unattachment. Being unattached does not mean being dis-

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interested or emotionally removed. Rather it means suspending judgment and responding more neutrally to circumstances. A parent can practice unattachment by letting go of tightly focused expectations for their children. Likewise, spouses can practice unattachment by being more flexible and tolerant of personality differences between them.

- Don't contaminate the good times. Feeling guilty for taking time to relax doesn't do you nor those around you any good. Enjoy the moment. Relish that time. Remind yourself that this brief respite will make you more effective later.

- Avoid bringing work home on the weekend. Three out of four people who work in a large office work on the weekend, according to the Steelcase Workplace Index, a semi-annual survey of U.S. workplace trends. Plan to be a little more efficient on your Fridays so that you can leave work without a briefcase, even if this means going in a little bit earlier to finish up the week's tasks to free up the weekend.

- Deal with your past to have peace in the present. A great deal of the current stress is the result of the past baggage that we lug around. Deal with it, by confronting the issues head on, seeking forgiveness and making amends, forgiving others and reconciling with those from whom you are separated.

- Engage yourself in good, noble, creative activities. Stress can be minimized by moving forward and



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Don't contaminate good times with feelings of guilt over taking time to relax. Respite only makes people more effective later.

continuing to develop ourselves in spite of the hardships and heartaches we experience.

- Create quiet time. People need at least 15 minutes a day to themselves, according to Dr. Stephan Rechtschaffen, president of the Omega Institute of Holistic Studies in Rhinebeck, N.Y., and author of "Time Shifting." Use those precious minutes to pray, read Scripture and other inspirational writings or take a walk.

- Stretch stress away. Stretching can be a quick, destressing activity that can relieve uptight feelings throughout the day.

- Share concerns. Rather than keep your fears, hopes, anxieties and anticipations to yourself, open up to a trusted friend or family member. Talking things over usually helps put issues into a perspective that was missing.

- Write it out. Many find that getting a burden down on paper is highly effective in unburdening both body and mind.

- Plan time for yourself. If you are

in a constant state of motion and interaction with others, sooner or later you will feel incredible stress and won't be able to destress. Nancy Ford Norton, president of N2 Qualitative in Allendale, N.J., said that "whether it's listening to music, working in your garden or taking a hot bubble bath, do whatever gives you an inner sense of calm."

- Size down your activities. For example, rather than planning a huge party in order to satisfy the need for social interaction, consider a smaller, more casual meal.

- Avoid the quick fix. Remember quick fixes, like smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol or abusing other substances, overeating, may relieve tension in the short-term, but eventually are certain paths to failure.

- Just say "no." Don't get caught in the trap of constantly trying to please others and win approval from everyone. Some effective ways to say "no" include asking for time to think about whether you really want or need to be involved, to offer to do some but not all of what is asked, or to refuse what's asked due to being overextended.

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