Over time, chronic stress and anxiety can cause a hormonal chain of events that can lead to illnesses such as heart disease, depression and ulcers. Out-of-control stress can also impair your job performance and drain your energy. But you can take steps to deal with your physical response to stress.

“Performing a daily de-stress routine can effectively counteract stress and anxiety, so that the results of stress don’t build up and cause problems,” says Gerald W. Vest, professor emeritus of sociology at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces.

Mr. Vest offers the following suggestions for staying calm when your in-box is filling up, your children are screaming or your car’s breaking down.

Stress Rx
The following de-stressing exercises can be done at home or the office:

*Belly breathing.* For immediate stress relief, Mr. Vest recommends placing your left hand over your heart, your right hand on your belly and breathing deeply. “Just notice your breathing,” he advises. “By observing the rise and fall of your breath, you’ll naturally begin to relax.” At home, or at work if you have privacy, you can also do this technique lying down. Do it for several minutes any time you feel anxious or stressed.

*Arm yourself.* Pull up your right shirt sleeve and massage your right shoulder with your left hand. Then feather down your arm with gentle soothing motions. Repeat on the other arm. “The nervous system is connected to all the cells of the body. By soothing the skin of your shoulders and arm, you’ll immediately start to relax,” says Mr. Vest. And whenever you’re using touch, continue to focus on your breathing.

*Hand care.* To discharge tension that can accumulate in the hands, knead your left palm with your right hand. Repeat on the other hand. Also, spread your fingers and use the thumb and forefinger of your opposite hand to lightly press each joint and work out the tension between your fingers. Switch hands. Then make circles in your palm with your opposite hand. Switch hands.

*Saving face.* Massaging the face also reduces cumulative tension. For quick stress relief before a meeting or important presentation, Mr. Vest recommends lightly massaging your temples, smoothing your eyebrows and massaging your cheekbones and jaw. Also, spend a few seconds pinching and stretching your ear lobes, a typically tense area.

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Progressive breath relaxation. Use your breath to relax your muscles. "Starting with your feet, visualize each muscle and imagine that your breath is going to the muscle and relaxing it," says Mr. Vest. "Working your way up, spend a few seconds on each part of the body, going through it consciously."

Home remedies
Mr. Vest recommends the following stress-busting techniques, which can be done at home:

Unison breathing. Have someone stand behind you and rest his or her hands on your shoulders, then begin breathing in unison."Just hearing that person's breathing can be very calming," says Mr. Vest.

Foot care. Make circles with your knuckles on the bottom of your feet. Then spread your toes and press lightly on each joint.

Overall, Mr. Vest recommends spending at least 5 to 10 minutes a day on these types of self-care activities.

"A daily breathing and touch-maintenance routine is like health insurance," he says.

Krames Staywell

For more information:
http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/

Quit One Step at a Time
May 31st is World No Tobacco Day

Saying good-bye to cigarettes for good can be difficult. To succeed, you need to make changes to your daily life. But, like the many others who have quit, you too can triumph. Brighter days are ahead.

People smoke for different reasons, and they quit in different ways. Some people quit cold turkey. Others cut down slowly before they stop altogether. Some people stop smoking with the help of the nicotine patch or nicotine gum. Your doctor can help you decide what will work best for you, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

If you've tried to quit before, you already know something about what does or doesn't work for you. Don't be discouraged if you are still smoking. What you have learned can help you quit now. Many people try to quit smoking several times before they quit for good.

Stage 1: Before You Quit

- Make a list of the reasons you want to quit. Keep your list handy so that you can look at it whenever you feel like smoking.
- Know your smoking habits. Where do you usually smoke? What makes you want to smoke? What will you miss about smoking?
- Find alternatives. Figure out what you can do instead of smoking. For example, if smoking calms you, think of other things that help you relax, such as listening to music or taking a walk.
- Pick a day to quit when you will be less tempted to smoke. If you usually smoke at work, quit when you are at home.
- Talk with people who have quit. Ask them how long it took before they stopped craving cigarettes.

Stage 2: When You Quit

- Throw out all your cigarettes. Get rid of lighters, matches and ashtrays.
• Change your routine to help you avoid situations that made you smoke in the past.
• For example, if you usually have a cigarette at the dinner table after your meal, leave the table immediately after eating.
• Tell friends and family that you are quitting. Let them help you during tough times. Warn them that you may be in a bad mood.
• Stay away from places where people smoke.
• Avoid caffeine and alcohol. They can make you crave cigarettes.
• Focus on today. Thinking about not smoking for the rest of your life may overwhelm you.

Stage 3: After You Quit
• Brace yourself. Many people who quit have a hard time at first. You may be in a bad mood for the first few weeks. You may also feel hungry or tired as your body adjusts to life without cigarettes.
• Keep focusing on today. Every day you don’t smoke brings you one step closer to success.
• Keep track of your physical progress. You might notice that you don’t wake up coughing or that you can climb stairs without wheezing.
• Reward yourself. Use the money you save by not buying cigarettes for something special. If you used to smoke a pack a day, the money you save after one week could buy a CD or two movie tickets. If you feel the urge to smoke, turn to the three Ds: Delay (Wait at least three minutes for the urge to smoke a cigarette to pass); Dampen the urge to smoke (Tell yourself, “I don’t want to smoke.” Remind yourself why you decided to quit.); and Do something (Take your mind off the urge to smoke by keeping busy. Go for a walk. Call a friend. Listen to music.).

Your Family Disaster Plan
National Hurricane Awareness Week is May 22nd through 28th

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. What would you do if basic services--water, gas, electricity or telephones--were cut off? Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away.

Four Steps to Safety
1. Find Out What Could Happen to You
• Contact your local Red Cross chapter or emergency management office before a disaster occurs--be prepared to take notes. Ask your local Red Cross for copies of American Red Cross community disaster education materials.
• Ask what types of disasters are most likely to happen. Request information on how to prepare for each.
• Learn about your community’s warning signals: what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.
• Ask about animal care after a disaster. Animals are not allowed inside emergency shelters because of health regulations.
• Find out how to help elderly or disabled persons, if needed.

Continued on next page.
• Find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school or day care center, and other places where your family spends time.
• Educate yourself and your family. Make your own unique disaster plan.

2. Create a Disaster Plan
• Meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for disaster. Explain the dangers of fire, severe weather, and earthquakes to children. Plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team.
• Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen. Explain what to do in each case.
• Pick two places to meet:
  1. Right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire.
  2. Outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Everyone must know the address and phone number.
• Ask an out-of-state friend to be your “family contact.” After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know your contact's phone number.
• Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Plan how to take care of your pets.

3. Complete This Checklist
• In a disaster, ordinary items in the home can cause injury and damage. Anything that can move, fall, break, or cause a fire is a potential hazard.
• Repair defective electrical wiring and leaky gas connections.
• Fasten shelves securely.
• Place large, heavy objects on lower shelves.
• Hang pictures and mirrors away from beds.
• Brace overhead light fixtures.
• Secure water heater. Strap to wall studs.
• Repair cracks in ceilings or foundations.
• Store weed killers, pesticides, and flammable products away from heat sources.
• Place oily polishing rags or waste in covered metal cans.
• Clean and repair chimneys, flue pipes, vent connectors, and gas vents.
• Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, ambulance, etc.).
• Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.
• Show each family member how and when to turn off the utilities (water, gas, and electricity) at the main switches.
• Check if you have adequate insurance coverage.
• Get training from the fire department for each family member on how to use the fire extinguisher (ABC type), and show them where it's kept.
• Install smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms.
• Stock emergency supplies and assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit.
• Take a Red Cross first aid and CPR class.
• Determine the best escape routes from your home. Find two ways out of each room.
• Find the safe places in your home for each type of disaster.

4. Practice and Maintain Your Plan
• Quiz your kids every six months.
• Conduct fire and emergency evacuations.
• Replace stored water and stored food every six months.
• Test and recharge your fire extinguisher(s) according to manufacturer's instructions.
• Test your smoke detectors monthly and change the batteries at least once a year.

OneStorm

For more information and to create your own storm plan, please visit:
http://www.onestorm.org