

Reduce your stress quickly

By SABINE MEUTER

STRESS is a normal response to the pressures of everyday life.

But if you feel it often, it's a sign that your lifestyle isn't healthy, because lengthy exposure to stress gnaws at both your psychological and physical well-being.

How best to unwind when you're feeling all wound up?

"Simply recognising that you're stressed is a good way to start," says stress management educator Christiane Wettig.

The next step is to stop and ask yourself what would do you good right now.

You'll often realise you've got a lot of pent-up negative energy when you're under acute stress.

"Then the answer is to release the energy," remarks Holger Kracke, chairperson of the German Association for Burnout Prophylaxis and Prevention (DBVB).

What works best differs from person to person.

"Some people scream, others go jogging or climb stairs," he says.

There are many other ways to blow off steam, and here are three:

Tip 1: Give your neck and shoulders some attention

"You can achieve a lot just by stretching," says Wettig, and you can often do stretching exercises at your workplace easily.

For example: Stand up and stretch your arms above you.

Then bring them down and let them swing loosely at your sides while you take a few steps.

Here's another stretching exercise: Bend your head forward, dropping your chin towards your chest.

Clasp your hands behind your head and gently press it forward

Stretching can help you to unwind when feeling stressed, and can usually be easily done at your workplace. — dpa



until you can feel your neck stretch slightly.

Hold this position for about 30 seconds before releasing it and relaxing for 20 seconds.

Repeat the exercise as often as it does you good.

Exercises like these promote body awareness and mindfulness.

And your neck and shoulders will thank you for the attention.

Tip 2: Breathe deeply and picture the flow

"Breathing exercises are another way to release energy," Kracke says.

Here's one: Inhale deeply for about five seconds while imagining the oxygen flow into your heart.

Then exhale for about five seconds while imagining it flow out again.

Keep breathing in this rhythm and think about something that makes you feel good – a pleasant fragrance, for instance.

Tip 3: Activate your senses

Another good way to unwind is

to simply look out the window to see what's going on outside.

"It sounds trivial, but it can be unbelievably effective in reducing stress," Wettig says.

It's also relaxing to warm your hands by rubbing them together, then place them over your eyes.

Or you can massage your tense neck muscles and feel them loosening up.

If you live near a river, you can walk to the riverbank, concentrate on the movement of the water and tell yourself, "Like the water, my stress is flowing away," suggests Wettig.

Alternatively, you can watch clouds in the sky pass by overhead.

"An anti-stress squeeze ball can be helpful as well," Kracke says.

Squeezing the small ball can be relaxing, and you can even do it under your desk, out of other people's sight.

Incidentally, strategies to relieve acute stress work best when you're already familiar with them, so you can start practising them now for the future. — dpa