

Stress

- How to change a negative stress pattern into better thoughts, feelings and good health!

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What is stress?

Stress is the body's reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment.

It can occur from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, nervous or anxious.

It is a condition or feeling - experienced when you feel that your demands exceed the resources you are able to mobilize.

Spot the early signs

Often we have the tendency to oversee the signs when they are small – and while we have the possibility to catch them in advance. We have the tendency to turn on our autopilot and to ignore the signs that we ought to take seriously. We drive on without changing direction or even consider if we could handle the situations, the projects or relations in another way. Often the signals have become very clear even before we become aware of them. At that time the stress reaction has already taken over. Some people have difficulty in sleeping, others have recurrent headaches – or they feel generally tired or inadequate no matter what they do.

Stress can hit us all

Stress is no longer only for the few. Stress can hit us all and it often does, when we least expect it. It has become sort of an epidemic that has hooked onto our busy lifestyle, and it is something that we rarely consider before it has gone terribly wrong. Only when the symptoms are clear and perhaps violent, we start to consider how to reduce or avoid stress.

Positive stress handling usually demands a lot of changes in our way of life as well as in our way of handling our study, work, friends or family. Maybe we have to learn how to make different priorities, have more focus on ourselves and even change old habits. Whatever we decide, there are no easy solutions, but the gains are

big when you have turned the next corner. Most people will find that they have reached a new and better balance – e.g. between their study life, working life and private life. At the same time they have found some tools that are also efficient in handling stress reactions in the future.

Positive and negative stress

Speaking of stress it is important to know the physical and psychological reactions. This helps us to decide when we are just "ordinarily stressed", and when it is becoming a problem.

Within stress research there is a distinction between two different kinds of stress:

- An optimal stress level which characterizes the kick of adrenalin that we often get when we feel challenged and are ready to fight the obstacles.
- A negative stress level is characterized by long duration, where the body is exposed too far by too much stress hormones and in far too long time. The amount of hormones becomes destructive for the body and brain. Such periods are often accompanied by feelings of helplessness, nervousness and attention deficit. This makes us feel depressed or inhibits our way of handling our challenges and problems. If we are exposed to negative stress over a longer period of time, it can damage our immune system and enhance the risk of having an ulcer, cardio vascular deceases, high blood pressure, psychic problems like anxiety and depression and/or other stress disorders.

Bodily Reactions

In all stress situations what happens is that the body goes into an ordinary alarm system and tries to react in the best way in the concrete situation. The brain activates the following bodily reactions, when we fall into a threatening or demanding situation:

- The mouth gets dry.
- Breathing frequency enhances.
- Blood pressure rises.
- Blood flow increases in the brain and muscles and is lowered in the digestive system.
- The pupils extend.
- The stress hormone is released, i.e. adrenaline-noradrenaline and cortisol.
- The muscles get tightened – especially neck and shoulders.
- The liver sends out glucose as energy to the muscles.
- The ability of the blood to coagulate increases so that possible bleedings becomes less dangerous.

Take care of yourself

In an acute and dangerous situation bodily reactions can be positive because we get extra strength to cope with the actual problem. But if we are exposed to stress over a longer period of time, we tend to activate those reactions much too often. The strain now becomes constant and neither body nor head get the opportunity to relax and heal. If that is the case, the reactions no longer function as a protection against something threatening or dangerous – the

reactions become in themselves threatening and dangerous towards your psychological and physical well-being.

From the science of stress we know, that long periods of stress enhances the probability of having both mental and bodily changes such as depression, psychosomatic imbalance and also actual somatic illness. That is why we have to register possible stress symptoms. We have to be better at slowing down before the stress symptoms take over.

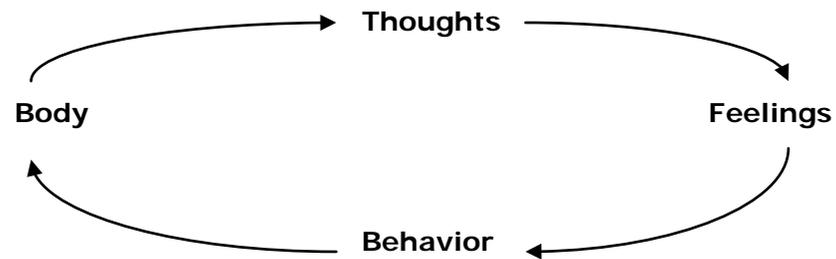
Stress has Many Faces

We cannot avoid stress 100 % - and we shall not, as stress can also be valuable and necessary too, e.g. in acute situations where we must cope quickly and efficiently. But it is important to distinguish between positive and negative stress so we can identify those symptoms that are hindering our well-being.

It differs from person to person how one reacts to stress and which symptoms to be aware of. Be aware that stress can manifest itself in four different ways: Body, thoughts, feelings and behavior. And that stress rarely manifests itself in only one area, e.g. bodily reactions. One area typically influences on one or more of the other areas, and stress can sometimes show itself in all four areas; a so called vicious circle.

Stress arises when there is an imbalance between the four areas: Body, thoughts, feelings and behavior. This imbalance can make us feel that everything flows together and that we suddenly cannot separate important from unimportant. Many people will experience that they loose their "drive" and slowly loose track of things – perhaps without feeling it in the beginning. If the imbalance really gets hold of you, our capacity to perform will be reduced and the negative thoughts can even make us lose faith in ourselves.

Stress-circle



Typical Symptoms of Stress

Body

Fatigue
Sleeplessness
Heartbeat
Sweating
Nausea
Stomach problems
Dizziness
Quick breathing
Tension headaches
Dry mouth
Cold hands/feet
Skin problems

Thoughts

I cannot remember
I will pass out
I will surely fail
I cannot handle it
I cannot do anything
I have no control what so ever
I cannot cope so why try
I just have to get this day over and done with
Everybody thinks that I am stupid
Everybody thinks that I am embarrassing
The flap goes down

Feelings

Panic
Anxiety
Depression
Sadness
Low self-esteem
Powerlessness
Irritability
Apathy, lack of desire
Lack of ability to concentrate
Loss of control
Lack of overview
Lack of energy

Behavior

Shut myself in my home

Avoid contact with friends and family

Work without a plan

Postpone deadlines

Difficulty in sleeping

Forget things

Restlessness

Eat too little/too much

Smoke too much

Drink too much alcohol/coffee

Too sensitive, cry easily or become angry too easily

Lack of coordination

Break the Negative Stress Circle

To avoid or reduce stress there are different ways to go. Try to look at the four areas in the stress circle, and focus on the area, where you really would appreciate a change. A negative stress circle can be broken and a new and positive initiated, when you try to change behavior, thought pattern or take better care of your body. The reason is that the four areas influence each other positively. Try to make some changes in the area, which is most attractive for you. In this way, you will be active in initiating a positive circle.

Zoom in on your stress

If you know that it is your study, your private life, or other relations which stress you in this exact moment, you can start to change your way of dealing with those areas. At the same time you may consider if there are someone in your family or group of friends who

can support you in the changes, that you are about to make. If you have bodily reactions e.g. problems sleeping, it is a good idea to focus on relaxation and fitness or to reduce your amount of alcohol, cigarettes, sugar and coffee. It can give a better balance between head and body, and most people will experience a natural sleepiness which makes it easier to fall asleep.

Make a list of all the things you would like to have done, if your stress reaction causes that you lose track of things and postpone important appointments. After this, make a priority or break up the tasks in steps and take one step at a time. You will feel an enormous relief when you write everything down, because you then stop to use resources thinking about all the things, that you have to do.

Look for a pattern

If you are not completely aware of what stresses you, it is a good idea to take notes every time you find yourself in a situation you do not like. Buy a small notebook. It makes it easier to take down notes – whether you are at home or else where. After some weeks, you may be able to see a pattern in your notes, or you can point out some situations which have influence on your mood and well-being. Having created this overview, you can look at the stress circle and the four areas again, and now it might be much easier to choose where it is most important for you to make a change. Whatever your stress pattern looks like, you are the one who can make a change for the better. From the science of stress we know, that there are some things that enhance stress and some things that reduce stress.

Enhances stress in the body

- Alcohol
- Coffee
- Cigarettes
- Eating too much/ too little
- Sedatives
- Negative thoughts
- High level of activity without pauses
- Avoid/postpone difficult situations
- Isolation and avoiding social situations

Reduces stress in the body

- Relaxation
- Breathing exercises
- Listening to music
- Fitness
- Regularly eating and healthy food
- A warm bath/shower
- Distinguish between working time and leisure time, making breaks
- Taking one thing at a time, make a priority of your tasks
- Be open, talk to a good friend

Consider what works for you – and be inspired by the list

Active Stress Handling

When we have been exposed to stress for a longer period of time, it will be easier for us to recognize the different stress reactions. We may feel locked up, maybe even paralyzed – in a situation from which we find it hard to get out. Therefore we tend to search for some tools which can help us break down some of our habits and bring us out of the state we are in.

Take new paths

For some people it may be the small tips that make the big difference, while others will find that they need major changes before they can break the stress circle they are caught in. Take a look at the second part of this pamphlet. Here you will find some exercises that can lead to more energy in your life. But try out only a few exercises at a time. Then you will be able to decide, what works for you and what does not.

Be aware, that there are no exercises that are better than others, and that the solution for you may not be the solution for others. While the effort for you may be little, it may be big for others. As to stress, there is no key. The right solution will always be individual. It is therefore important that you handle your own stress situation in a way which feels right for you.

Be your own team mate

In all stress handling methods it is an advantage to be an active participant. Be open to relate to situations and relations in a new way and be ready to work with the thought that you actually have a choice. Now you can decide how you will react on stress. This way of thinking makes it much easier for us to lead us in a positive direction.

When we use ourselves actively by handling our own stress we will at the same time discover that we find ourselves less helpless and

less powerless because we use our stress constructively to initiate the necessary changes.

Make Your Own Stress Strategy

When you feel stressed it may be a good idea to find some breathing space where you can relax and take a time out in order to get new energy. But be aware that it differs from one person to the other whether it is the right thing. May it be music, sport, TV, friends, walking or learning to say no.

Use your experiences with success

It is decisive that you use your own experiences and try out which methods have already helped. By using our former successes, we can re-use our own methods to handle stressful situations in the future. In other words we can create our own stress strategy by re-using the successes from the past as tools for the future:

- Think back at former situations when you have been stressed, been under pressure or have felt a bit of the feelings, thoughts or stress reactions that you have today.
- Try to visualize the situation and note what you did to get rid of this feeling/situation and what you did to approach a new and more attractive feeling/situation. When you have described every move then ask yourself what you actually did? What you said to you self (inner dialogue)? How you felt physically? And where your focus was – what you believed in that moment?
- Evaluate what worked for you and helped you move further on, and what did not work and kept you in the undesirable situation.

- Make a positive and a negative list so that you get a general view of your former behavior – the one that gave success, and the one that paralyzed you.
- Zoom in on your positive list and evaluate which of your former successful behavior you can use again when handling a new situation. There is a great probability that the behavior or thought patterns that have worked for you earlier on, will also have a positive influence on your actual situation.
- You have now made your own stress strategy and it is time to try it out.
- Use your negative list as a memo pad that reminds you of the behavior that did not work – and probably will not work today. It is a good idea every other day to check the negative list and then ask yourself if you are about to handle the situation in a way that will paralyze you. In this way, you will remind yourself, that you have a choice – and that you do what you can to handle the situation in a better way.

Exercises

Breathing

Breathing has an influence on our stress level in our body. This exercise is important because you will learn to breathe slowly and profound, which gives you a great advantages – now as well as later on. Good breathing reduces the stress in the body and enhances the oxygen intake and gives you more energy and less feeling of fatigue. This means that you can concentrate better and cope with stressful situations. Your ability to keep a general view of things will be strengthened and it is easier to take one task at a time.

When you have once learned to use your breathing, you will be able to profit from this technique in a range of situations – and it is easy to learn:

- Sit down comfortably with good support in your lower back.
- Breathe slowly and profound through your nose. Draw in as much air as you can and let the air fill you up until your belly tightens. Now hold your breath and breathe out by the mouth with pursed lips. The rhythm has to be slow and calm. While drawing in your breath, your inner dialog may sound: Ree-lax – then you hold your breath while counting to three, and when you let go of air you say again: Ree-lax.
- Repeat the exercise a couple of times (you may do it every day) when you have time – e.g. when you sit in front of your computer or TV, in the bus and naturally, when you feel stressed.

Relaxation

Why is it important to relax? Because you cannot be stressed while you are relaxed. Relaxation gives your body a break and new energy, which will make you less tired and tense. When focusing on relaxation you learn to distinguish between tense and relaxed muscles. This will give you a feeling of when and where you tighten up when you are stressed. Most people have tensions in the head, in the neck and in the stomach when they are stressed.

When you are stressed and lose track of things it can be difficult to concentrate on your study and all the other chores that every day life is full of. Both body and brain function at their best and use less energy when you are relaxed.

It is a good thing to make relaxation exercises every day or as often as you can. Some people prefer to make relaxation exercises when they lie in the bed about to sleep, because they feel that the exercise is a good transit to a good and profound sleep. Others use relaxation as a break in the daily activities as it is an effective way of getting new energy.

The time for relaxation is a question of temper, so it is a good idea to try it out different hours during the day:

- Sit down or lay down in a comfortable position with your feet slightly spread eagled and your arms alongside. Close your eyes and take a long and deep inhaling, fill your belly with as much air as possible. Now exhale slowly and repeat your inhaling. Feel how you become more and more relaxed for every time you exhale.

- Keep a calm breathing and now tighten all your muscles in your whole body. Keep the tension in 5-10 sec. and then fully relax and return to the long, deep breathing.
- When you feel the calmness in your body again, prepare yourself to tighten all the muscles in your body.
- You finish off by calmly and slowly moving your fingers and toes, by opening your eyes and stretching yourself slowly – imagine that you make yourself as long as possible. Repeat the exercise a couple of times.

If you are lying down you can extend the exercise:

- Imagine that you are lying in sand and are totally relaxed. Think about your toes sinking down into the sand and fall out to the side, think about your calves, your thighs etc. all the way to your head and out in your fingers. All parts of the body must be totally relaxed and remember the neck and face and to let go of the tension in the jaw and tongue – let go of the tongue if it is pressed up against the palate.
- Lie still a couple of minutes and relax. Think about something nice without falling asleep. Stretch out slowly at last.

You may buy or borrow a relaxation CD. Some CD's are with speech which guides you through the relaxation exercise, others only offer relaxing music. Be aware that yoga, meditation and mindfulness are effective techniques that can reduce your stress. Courses are found many places – and they are to be found at a fair price.

Fitness

When you move, you burn your stress hormones and enhance the endorphins in the body – endorphin is the body's own morphine which feels relaxing and analgesic. The muscles become more relaxed and more oxygen is transported through the body. This means that you get more energy, which naturally reduces possible sadness and low spirits. As added bonus a good fitness enhances your resistance against sickness. Some may discover that fitness gives you a far better sleep. Do not exercise late at night because you will then have difficulty in sleeping.

There are different opinions about how much exercise we must do to keep us healthy. Some experts say ½ time a day, others say 20 minutes 3 times a week. Try to find your level that makes the best balance for you and your situation.

In general it is a good idea to exercise a little every day – e.g. to take a walk with your friend in stead of sitting at a café, to use your bicycle to school/university, you may take a detour, to swim, to run, dance, skip, go to the fitness center or what ever is nice for you. But do not exaggerate! If you overdo it, you will produce too much adrenaline and the consequences are that you get exhausted and feel restless in your body. If you are used to do exercise, you can easily go on in the same space even though you feel stress.

Laughter

Laughter exercises the inner organs and reduces stress. When you laugh, you breathe heavier, which gives oxygen to the body. That means that our energy level rises and our overview enhances. Laughter is, just like exercise, a way to slow down stress-hormones and enhance the endorphines in our body.

Research shows that we strengthen our immune defense when we laugh and that we go against the negative influence of the stress immune defense. And many people experience that laughter enhances the feeling of well-being makes digestion better and reduces blood pressure.

No matter how our laughter is started, naturally or by an exercise, we gain the same: Energy level rises and in both cases our body gets a well earned break. Therefore do not hesitate to find some of the laughter clubs that have emerged within recent years. Here you can get inspiration to laughter exercises and see where they have exciting arrangements, which is often for free.

In short: Laughter reduces stress. It is not possible to laugh and be tense at the same time. It is therefore important that you participate in social arrangements even though it feels hard to manage – it is a way to reload your batteries.

If you find it difficult to be socially active, then go to arrangements where you feel accepted, and where there is room for you, even though you are low of energy. Be in the moment and accept some of the good arrangements with family and friends –even though you feel more inclined to stay at home. Remember that laughter is a quick and comfortable short cut to less stress.

Food

There are some kind of food and drink that can create imbalances in your body and make you uneasy and enhance your stress. You can influence your state positively, if you avoid coffee, alcohol and sugar and too many cigarettes. Your body needs healthy and varied food at regular intervals.

If your way of eating and your eating habits are out of control, turn to the internet, friends, doctor or dietician.

Thought pattern

Our thought pattern can up to a certain point explain why some people get stress while others do not, even though they are subjected to the same loads. Our thoughts are our inner dialog and they decide how we experience a situation and which expectations we have. Therefore it is very important to observe our thoughts. Negative thoughts can easily result in stress and make us feel sad and anxious.

Examples of negative thoughts are: " I will never manage that exercise and therefore others will not accept me" or "If I do not read all the time, I will fail my next exam and get stigmatized as stupid the rest of my education/training. Thoughts like that will typically pop up when we feel pressed and loose track of things. The thoughts alone can create stress, but they can also paralyze us in a negative thought pattern, where we create worst case scenarios. But patterns are fortunately made to be broken – and you can help set the pace for the thoughts that can make the difference for you.

Try then to influence your ideas by re-formulating the negative thoughts, which hold you in an unwanted situation or feeling. When you have insight in your own thought pattern – may it be positive or negative – you will also be able to distinguish between destructive and constructive thoughts. And here the seeds are sown for changing your inner dialog from negative to positive – and your expectations from unrealistic to realistic.

Negative and self destructive thoughts are known by:

- Typically expresses unrealistic expectations.
- The intent is negative, especially self critical thoughts.
- They often contain absolutes like never/always.
- They predict disasters.
- They contain exaggerations and generalizations.
- They circle round predictions.
- They lead to hasty conclusions.

Positive and Constructive thoughts are known by:

- Expressing realistic expectations.
- Both content and intentions are positive.
- Being encouraging and motivational.
- Being concrete.

Try to write down some of your negative thoughts and then rewrite them to positive constructive expressions. If you e.g. think that: "It is impossible for me to manage the exam" – the thought can be rewritten as: "The exam is a challenge for me, but I am well prepared and I do my best". When you reformulate your thoughts, you can e.g. start the sentence by:

- I will work for....
- I prefer....
- I wish.....
- I do it as well as I can....

Start your day well

Try to close your eyes and imagine you lie awake on an ordinary day. What do you think? Do you start the day with a bad conscience and notions of not having time enough for all the things, you want to do? Or?

If your thoughts are negative, then think in positive alternatives and reformulate the thoughts for yourself. Maybe you could write down your negative thoughts, if it makes it easier for you to formulate new positive sentences. Remember to be realistic and patient – it takes time to break an old thought pattern.

Visualizing

The purpose of a visualizing exercise is to create ideas and inner pictures based on alternative and positive thoughts. The exercise will make the body relax more and most people will experience more energy to cope with the situations that fills everyday life here and now.

Imagine a situation that you want to cope with in a different way. Imagine the situation as lively as possible, and imagine that everything goes as you wish for. Consider how it feels – and stick to that feeling. When you feel you own the new positive feeling, it becomes a new experience, and you can now use the feeling in a constructive way, when trying to cope with the concrete situation that you visualized. By visualizing, you can prevent and diminish stress reactions in situations to come, since you have now "lived through" the stressed situations in your own mental room and have had a positive experience with it.

Visualizing works best when you are relaxed– e.g. after a relaxing exercise, just before sleeping or just when you wake up in the morning. By training the visualization regularly, you will gradually experience that thoughts and situations can change in a positive direction. The images and pictures from your visualizing exercises will gradually become reel experiences you can use – just like real experienced life events.

When working with visualization it is important that you imagine that the situations goes well, e.g. an exam. Only by a positive focus you can create new, constructive experiences and “practice” having a positive and different handling of situations in the future.

Visualization that creates a positive focus

- You sit or lie comfortably with your eyes closed and with a deep and calm breathing.
- Imagine a situation that goes well – e.g. exam.
- Imagine how you start your day: You are fresh when you get out of bed. Which clothes do you choose to wear? Where does the situation take place? How do you get there? Who is present etc.? Then describe for yourself how relaxed and how well you feel.
- Now imagine the situation, where you are relaxed and do your utmost – create some pictures of it.
- Imagine how the situation ends and how you feel when you leave.
- Move your feet and hands and stretch out slowly before opening your eyes.

Visualization that gives more energy

- You sit or lie comfortably with closed eyes and with a deep and calm breathing.
- Imagine a nice place – out in the nature or indoor.
- Imagine the place: Colours, sounds, smells etc. What do you feel?
- Imagine how you feel. What do you wear? Which feelings are in your body? Look around and describe the surroundings for you self.
- Imagine that you have your exercises and problems in front of you.

- Imagine that they are solved one by one and that they disappear. Enjoy it!

Visualization that gives more power

- You sit or lie comfortably with closed eyes with a deep and calm breathing.
- Imagine the parts of your life and the characteristics that you like. Zoom in on some resources a dear person has – and imagine that you get the same resources, how they stream towards you, and how it feels.

Visualization that creates action

- You sit or lie comfortably with eyes closed and deep and calm breathing.
- Imagine a goal that you would like to reach – a change that you really wish for.
- Enjoy that you more or less have achieved your goal. Do not worry about how you will reach your goal, but just imagine how it is for you. How does it feel? Are there other changes in the aftermath?

You can get good CD ´s with visualizations at the book stores or at the library.

Sleep and Rhythm

Some people will experience problems with falling asleep when they are stressed. Others will wake up with the feeling of having worked the whole night. Lack of sleep or the feeling of not being rested is one of the most typical stress reactions – and often one of the most noticeable. Most people will experience that one of the big challenges is to control their sleep so the body can recover.

Your inner watch plays an important role in relation to good sleep and sleeping rhythm. It is controlling when and how you sleep, since it is influenced by light, darkness and dining time. Try to work on having fixed bed times and meals, if you have problems falling asleep.

Good sleeping tips

- Get into a routine of calming down before you go to bed.
- Avoid stimulants as coffee, tea and nicotine late in the evening.
- Try a relaxing bath before going to bed – e.g. with fragrant oils and quiet music in the background.
- Make a relaxation exercise just before going to bed.
- Avoid alcohol late at night – it will in the first place make you sleepy, but it often has the affect that your sleep gets uneasy, and you wake up with many intervals.
- Do not do sport in the evening, since it stimulates the cardiovascular and nervous system in many hours after the exercise.
- If you are concerned about the exam or something else then give yourself 10 minutes to be concerned every evening. Write down everything you worry about. Note precisely when you will take care of the problem. If you start worrying when you go to sleep then say to yourself that it is now written down and you know when you have planned to take care of it.

Prioritizing

Stress can occur if you have too many unsolved things and you have lost track of what is more important – and what is less important. When you loose track of things you feel powerless, tired and without trust in your own abilities. Your thoughts typically become destructive and they can sometimes make you paralyzed.

This exercise is about getting a grip on what kind of tasks you have. Now sort them out: This will give you an overview in order to be able to cope better.

Recapture your general view

Sit down and take a few deep breathings. When relaxed, try to write down a list of what you have to fix – big and small things in a random order. Afterwards you sort out your list and prioritize what is most important.

1. **Category** The things which must be done today
2. **Category** What can wait until tomorrow
3. **Category** What can wait until next month
4. **Category** What can be put in order when there is time
5. **Category** What you can do when you retire

When noting all the tasks that your head is full of, you will gain two things. First of all you will not have to use energy to remember them – they are on the list. Secondly you get a clear picture of the different types of tasks that you need to fix. It also gives you a general view of the tasks that give you stress. Consider to ask somebody else to do some of the things for you or with you, and consider if you must say no to some of the tasks.

Next step is to start doing the tasks one by one. Make a realistic list every day – and do not make more than one thing at a time.

Concentration

If the focus of your thoughts are; a bad conscience, yesterdays regrets and concerns about tomorrow, it is difficult to concentrate on what you have to do today. To be able to keep focus, it is decisive to form a general view of the tasks that you are concerned about – right at this moment. What is it that disturbs your concentration? Now write down the tasks and make a priority of them. You may follow the idea shown below the headline “Prioritizing”.

Below you will find some exercises to strengthen your concentration. Try out a few exercises and make an evaluation of what works with you.

- Consider breathing and relaxation exercises, it gives oxygen to your blood and your brain and freshen you up.
- Try out fitness or visualization which relax your muscles and enhance your resilience. It gives a better sleep and energy to cope with your day more constructively.
- Take a break from reading and separate work time from spare time and remember that you keep up your concentration by working 45 minutes then have a break for 15 minutes.
- Remove external interruptions. Turn off the phone, unplug the internet and TV.
- Accept that your mind is sometimes dispersed, but remember that you can do something actively to calm your mind again: Sit down in a chair and let your eyes glide slowly around the room. Choose one or two things to focus on e.g. round things or red things. Stay concentrated until you feel the ease at mind.

- Keep your focus: Hang a note on the refrigerator which tells you what to do in the daytime. You may check the list after each break.

Match your Expectations

It is important to match your expectations or ambitions in order to make a realistic plan. You will then have a much better chance to keep the appointments, you make with your self. This will give you a feeling of self-respect, and your self-esteem will increase tremendously. You may then avoid getting into a vicious circle where you let things slide because you lose track of things.

When you have realistic expectations about your ability to work, about schedules, deadlines and so forth, you will have the best possibilities to create good working routines. When under stress, it can be effective and nice to put your tasks into a system – to create order in your chaos. A piece of good advice is to start the day by forming a general view of the things you want to do. Then you may evaluate what is realistic to do, and what is not. And at the end of the day evaluate what you have achieved and what you still need to do. Consider if some of the tasks can be done by others, if someone can help you or if you can do the tasks more superficial than you usually do. Can you wait a while with some of the tasks?

Seven important rules – when you start to match your expectations and build up good working routines:

- Be realistic about your own ability to work.
- Do just one thing at a time.
- Focus on your good feelings and learn to say yes and no.
- Tell your surroundings what you expect and what you need.
- Start the day by forming a general view and end the day by making an evaluation.

- Use your friends, your family, network or study group as sparring partners.
- Distinguish between working time and leisure – remember 45/15.

Seven Effective Short Cuts

- Make a schedule from Monday to Friday and mark what is working time and what is leisure. Register every hour what you exactly have to do, e.g. from 9-10. Remember to be as realistic as possible and make time for breaks, time to eat, to do fitness and to relax. Hang up the schedule in a central place where you see it – e.g. on the refrigerator or on your desk.
- Make a priority of all your tasks – e.g. project deadlines, things you have to buy etc, but only do one thing at a time.
- Keep an eye on yourself and your stress reactions - big or small. All reactions are important, even though other people may think differently. Make a rule to stop and register your feeling twice a day.
- Expect some frustrations, mistakes and regrets – otherwise you will have unrealistic pictures of the future.
- Expect problems in the process – in every group work there are some - it is a natural part of the working form.
- Do relaxation and breathing exercises every day – it is a short cut to more energy.
- Look at changes as a possibility for growth and give yourself the time needed. Be patient - you will find it worth while.

Find us

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We have also published a pamphlet in English about [Examinations](#) on our website