

# Spurred on by stress

Stress is a part of life. We can't banish it entirely so we're better to embrace it, writes **Kate Craig**.

**Y**oga, meditation, massage ... it seems we are always on the lookout for a new method to beat stress. But have you ever considered a life without it?

Rather than seeing stress as the enemy we should view it as a friend, says psychologist Doreen Davy.

Traditionally considered a negative phenomenon, in many ways stress helps us achieve our goals ... and even if we wanted to, there's no way to banish it entirely from our lives.

'Stress is a part of life,' says Doreen. 'Even if you did try to eliminate stress completely you'd end up stressed with boredom!'

For many people positive stress helps us to meet our goals, spurring motivation and awareness and providing the stimulation to cope with challenging situations.

The art of stress management is to find a level of stimulation that is easy to live with – creating a balance of positive and negative stress that is motivating without being overwhelming. 'Eustress' is pleasant or curative stress, while negative stress is known as 'Distress'.

First it is important to note where you are on the stress continuum, says Doreen. 'Stress and stimulation are a whole continuum, for some people being overly stimulated will be stressful while for others it may be enjoyable.'

If you are finding your own level of stress too much to cope with, prioritising tasks can

be a great way to break stress down. 'Rather than viewing difficulties as major problems break them into manageable chunks,' says Doreen.

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Another good tip is to change the language you use in your own head. 'Rather than thinking of a situation as terrible consider it annoying or frustrating,' says Doreen. 'Don't tell yourself you can't cope with something – change your inner voice. Instead of telling yourself you should or must do something, say you can or could do it – and you have immediately given yourself a choice.'

Dental surgeries can be one of the most stressful work environments, according to Doreen. Receptionists may be faced with a full

patient list, customer-service issues, a ringing telephone and anxious patients.

'Work out with the rest of the team what is most important – for example the patient in front of you may be more important than the one on the end of the phone. Deal with them first, the phone second, paperwork third.'

If the surgery environment is calm this can go a long way towards relaxing nervous patients, resulting in better patient care and a work environment that benefits all team members.

Eliminating all negative stress is unrealistic, however, and this is where stress busters have their place. Exercise and enjoyable hobbies are great relaxants outside the workplace, and Doreen recommends meditation as particularly useful in a busy work environment.

'People in highly stressful jobs need to take a few minutes out from time to time,' she says. Take yourself away from the stressful environment, step outdoors or visit the staff room, and imagine yourself in a setting that is pleasant and relaxing.

'Spending three to five minutes doing a little meditation can work wonders to lower stress levels,' says Doreen.

All of these strategies should help us cope with everyday stress. But maybe the most important thing is to appreciate stress for what it is. Without positive stress life could easily become dull. So embrace it, change the way you think of it, and make a conscious decision to enjoy life.



on your feet:

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### Stress busters

Psychologist Doreen Davy says there are three keys to beating stress:

- 1) Pleasurable activities: take time out to do the things you enjoy
- 2) Exercise: a natural stress buster
- 3) Changing the way you think. Try to turn negative situations around and make a conscious choice to enjoy life.

### Stressful or stimulating?

When was the last time you went skiing or rode a rollercoaster? Both of these activities probably caused your body to exhibit the following physiological symptoms of stress: rapid breathing, heart racing, increased perspiration, nausea, tightness in the chest, a dry mouth and cold hands or feet. Despite this, it's likely you considered the experience enjoyable rather than disastrous.

The difference is you voluntarily entered the situation and felt in control. Making a conscious choice to enjoy life and viewing stressful situations as irritations rather than disasters will help you gain control and add to your motivation in your professional life too.