



Wellbeing

Insights

Living a Better, More Vibrant Life



In This Issue

April | Stress Awareness Month Humor Month

Making Friends with Stress.....	1
On the Menu: Asparagus	3
10 Reasons Laughter Is the Best Medicine.....	4
Bringing Humor to Life.....	4
Mindful Minute.....	5
App in a Snap: Headspace	5
Financial Focus: Easing Financial Stress	6

Making Friends with Stress

The number one message that we receive about stress: It is bad! Stress is the enemy. However, there are different types of stress, and while some are undisputedly the enemy, others can be quite useful. First, the enemy: chronic psychological stress. Examples include constant worrying over money or daily anxiety and rage during rush hour traffic. When these types of situations trigger our stress response on a regular basis, the consequences are quite serious. (For a technique on this sort of stress management, see this month's Mindful Minute article.)

However, we also experience plenty of “justifiable” acute stress, as well. For example, you have to present at an important meeting, an unexpected project pops up that requires a fast turnaround, etc. We’ve been taught that even in these highly stressful situations, stress is bad and we should try to calm ourselves down and suppress our response in order to handle it properly.

But what if the most effective stress management technique in these situations is actually to embrace stress? What if the most deadly

ingredient in our stress response is actually our *belief* that it is bad for us? There is now solid evidence that this is precisely the case. The good news – this means we can stop stressing about stress and make it our ally! The harmful effects of acute stress are not inevitable. How we think about stress and how we act upon it can actually have a profound impact on our body's response.

Secret #1: Embrace your stress response as beneficial.

Imagine you were just confronted with a stressful situation. Your

Making Friends with Stress

Continued from page 1

heart begins to race, your palms are getting sweaty and you are highly alert. How do you interpret this reaction? Is it anxiety or a sign that you are not coping well with the pressure? What if instead you viewed this reaction as helpful? Your body is energizing and preparing you to rise to the occasion and meet this challenge. Truly, that is what your body is doing, and embracing it may be the single best stress management tool you have.


Research suggests that not only will believing your stress response is helpful increase your confidence and performance in the moment, it also completely neutralizes the 43% increased risk of death associated with highly stressed people who believe that stress is bad for them. Talk about the power of positive thinking!

But this change in perspective doesn't only affect your conscious mind; it affects your physiological response to stress, as well. When we take a look at what's going on in the brains and bodies of people in stressful situations, those who believe the stress response is helpful actually maintained relaxed blood vessels and showed a physiological response almost identical to people experiencing moments of joy or courage.

Secret #2: Use your stress hormones to your advantage.

Let's start with understanding the hormonal response of stress. The best known stress hormones are cortisol and adrenaline. They are responsible for reactions such as increasing your blood pressure and alertness while slowing down digestion, growth and reproductive systems. However, oxytocin is also released during your stress response. Nicknamed the "cuddle hormone," oxytocin is released when you feel connected to or are seeking connection to others, for example, when you hug someone. It also helps to heal stress-induced damage. In other words, as your body experiences stress, it also provides a lifeline for stress resilience – human connection. It's often hard to think outside ourselves during challenging times, but these are precisely the circumstances when our connection to others can offer the most benefit. In fact, our stress response is encouraging it by pumping out "the cuddle hormone," along with adrenaline, which motivates you to seek support.

Just as a *belief* that stress is helpful against the negative effects of stress, so too are meaningful relationships. These benefits are related not only to receiving support but also to giving it. In studies, those who cared for others when they were stressed protected themselves completely from the increased risk of death seen in those who were highly stressed but had little social support.



“Worrying does not empty tomorrow of its troubles. It empties today of its strength.”

– CORRIE TEN BOOM



On the Menu

Asparagus

This nutritionally balanced vegetable is a great source of folic acid, vitamins A, C, E and K, folate, fiber and iron. Its antioxidant content is noteworthy as well, boasting similar detoxifying compounds to avocado, kale and Brussels sprouts. As an added bonus, asparagus can be found on the “Clean 15” list, meaning it has some of the lowest levels of pesticides of any produce and therefore you may not need to buy organic. Asparagus is one of only two perennial vegetables, the other being rhubarb. Successfully gardening asparagus can be a little bit tricky, but once you produce nice stalks, you can expect it to come back year after year.

Asparagus has gained popularity over the past 15 years, being enjoyed both raw and cooked. However, eating asparagus is infamous for one quirky side effect – smelly urine. It can alter the smell of your urine within 15 minutes of consumption. Not to worry, this is simply a side effect of digesting the vegetable’s sulfurous amino acids and is completely harmless. And if you have no idea what we’re talking about, you are a part of the lucky one third of the population who can’t detect the smell due to a genetic variation. Consider yourself lucky and perfectly normal. Neither the change in urine odor nor the ability to smell it (or not) is anything to be concerned about, so go ahead and enjoy this nutritious treat as often as you like.

Keep It Fresh

There is a highly effective but not widely known trick to keeping asparagus fresh. Using this method, you can keep asparagus fresh in the fridge for about a week.

1. Trim 1 to 1-½ inches from the ends of the asparagus stalks.
2. Stand the asparagus up in a glass or jar with about an inch or two of water, very similar to how you store fresh flowers.
3. Loosely cover the heads of the asparagus with a plastic bag and store in the refrigerator.

Lemon Garlic Sautéed Asparagus

Ingredients:

- 2 tsp. olive oil
- 1 lb. trimmed asparagus
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1/8 tsp. kosher salt

Directions:

1. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat.
2. Add olive oil to pan; swirl to coat.
3. Add asparagus; sauté 3 minutes or until crisp-tender.
4. Add minced garlic; cook 1 minute, stirring occasionally.
5. Remove from heat.
6. Add lemon juice, pepper and salt; toss to coat.

Serves 4

Nutrition Info	
Per Serving	
Calories	44
Carbohydrates	4.8g
Fiber	2.4g
Protein	2.6g
Sodium	76mg



10 Reasons Laughter Really Is the Best Medicine

1 Decreases stress

Laughter acts as a safety valve that shuts off the flow of harmful stress hormones such as cortisol and epinephrine, offering an effective way to cool off after a stressful event.

2 Helps you cope

Although often viewed as inappropriate or guilt-inducing, allowing yourself to laugh during troubling times actually can be a great way to protect your mind and body from the negative effects of holding in emotions such as fear, anger or sadness.

3 Improves blood pressure and flow

Laughter has been shown to lower or balance blood pressure and flow, making it a powerful ally in the fight against heart disease.

4 Provides a burst of exercise

The physical act of laughter has similar effects to a small bout of aerobic exercise. It can help clear your mind and enhance oxygen intake.

5 Impacts blood sugar levels

Laughing can help minimize blood sugar spikes and accelerate glucose utilization in active muscles.

6 Manages pain

The endorphins released during laughter increase our tolerance for pain. In fact, laughter may be the best natural pain killer around; it's effective, free and readily available.

7 Boosts social skills

Laughter is the fastest remedy for an awkward moment; it cuts right through the tension. It helps humans connect, bond and communicate, creating a sense of comfort and trust.

8 Reduces aggression

Laughter offers a sense of relaxation and releases endorphins to help counteract feelings of aggression. It allows you to cool off and gain perspective when you are angry.

9 Energizes organs

Laughter provides a wake-up call to your heart, lungs and brain, stimulating your whole body into action.

10 Boosts the immune system

The effects we've already mentioned – decreasing stress hormones, improving circulation and oxygen intake and releasing negative emotions – can all boost your immunological response and help keep you healthy.

Bringing Humor to Life

Here are a few fun ways to boost laughter and humor in your life to combat daily stress:

Make it obvious. Pick a quote, comic strip or picture that made you laugh and display it in your office or at home this month. Keeping a humorous visual around is a simple way to add some internal chuckles to your day. Change it up as often as you like to keep it interesting.

Smile! If you find yourself becoming irritated, sad or angry, force yourself to smile for 30 seconds or so. (You could even go full mad scientist and make yourself laugh out loud for a moment.) Research shows that the physical act of smiling, especially when you are not feeling particularly happy, can greatly increase your mood. It's truly bizarre, but it works – give it a try.

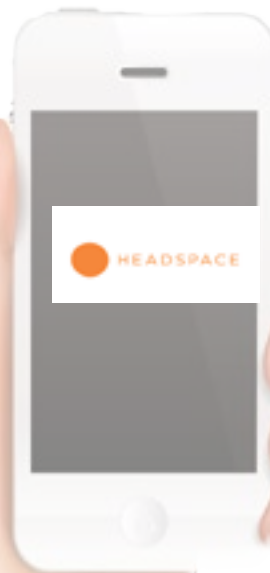
Be part of the fun crowd. Make regular plans with friends who make you laugh and smile. You know what they say; you become more like the people you surround yourself with, so you might even become a little funnier yourself!

Don't sweat the small stuff. People will always do things that irritate you: a coworker strikes your pet peeve or your spouse forgets to do the one thing you asked of them that day. Fight the urge to let these small things build up and turn into frustration or anger and, instead, find the humor in it and laugh it off!

App in a Snap

Name: Headspace
Price: Free version, plus paid membership available
Focus: Meditation

Lisa Underwood, CBIZ Wellbeing Coordinator, uses Headspace meditations to enhance her day-to-day capacity to process, relax, regroup and refocus. "I already have several ways that I unwind, but this 10-minute exercise relaxed my breathing and heart rate tremendously and increased my focus more, too! I plan to upgrade to a paid subscription soon."



Headspace is an app that provides short, guided meditations to help you reduce stress, anxiety and worry and increase focus. Users can choose from several focus areas with the free version to find a 10-minute meditation that addresses their needs.

You can purchase additional subscriptions to focus areas such as health, relationships and performance.



Mindful Minute

The concept of a “mind like water” or “Mizu no Kokoro” is most commonly traced back to Japanese philosophy. It has many metaphorical meanings that can help us lead a more mindful life. Making your mind like water is no simple task, but try carrying this symbol and its many meanings with you this month for a visual cue to find your inner calm and improve your ability to “go with the flow,” reacting and adapting effectively.

1. Reaction. Imagine you throw a pebble into a still pond. How does it react? Appropriately – every single time. The ripples are a perfect reflection of the force of the disturbance; it never overreacts or underreacts. Most of us give more or less attention to things than they deserve, operating without a “mind like water.” When we overreact or underreact to situations – your email, your boss, your kids – we lose our perspective and don’t get the most effective results. Reacting appropriately requires a keen self-awareness. If we allow small annoyances to build up by ignoring that they may deserve some attention (i.e., underreacting), then we are bound to have that proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back and may overreact to a small event. Work to cultivate awareness of your reactions to daily events. Simple in theory, difficult in practice; this discipline can greatly affect your relationships, productivity and emotional health.

2. Adaptation. Water is formless; it adapts to and takes the shape of whatever vessel it is put in. The lesson here is more obvious: adapt to what life gives you. Harmonize with your circumstances and embrace change. Although we do not always have the ability to control what happens to us, we always have the ability to choose how we react. Be like water: stay fully true to yourself while adapting to your surroundings. As Charles Darwin said, “It is not the strongest of species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change.”

3. Stillness. The surface of the vast ocean is full of activity, continuously experiencing and reacting to countless disturbances. Despite all of this, in the depth of the ocean there is always a place of calm. So it is with your mind. Regardless of what is happening in your life and the constant stream of stimuli we have to respond to, always remember that there is a calm, still, unshakable and unmovable place of pure peace in your mind. We often forget this, and perhaps sometimes we don’t even believe it’s there, but we need only take the time to tap into it. In turbulent times, practice connecting to your stillness; your mind like water.

Easing Financial Stress

While aspects of the U.S. economy have improved since the 2008 recession, money continues to be a top cause of stress for Americans, according to a 2015 survey by the American Psychological Association (APA). Regardless of the economic climate, financial stress has always remained one of the top sources of stress. The APA's survey found that 72% of Americans feel financially stressed. Financial stress has been shown to be highly predictive of individuals' perceived overall health and is a primary stressor in relationships and marriages. Here are some tips on how to stay grounded and combat financial stress from the source:

Evaluate your situation

In the age of credit cards and digital finance, it's easy for us to avoid or deny our financial standing, if we choose, by pushing bills aside or maxing out credit cards and putting minimum payments on autopilot. But these tactics only make our financial stress worse in the long run. The sooner you can lay out a plan, the less stressed you will feel. Start by gathering all the statements and assess the damage. Once you confront your current situation, you can set goals to get where you want to be. Create an action plan by finding budget leaks (i.e., small amounts of money you are regularly spending on non-essential items) and funnel those extra dollars toward debt with the highest interest rate.



Be grateful

You must stop comparing your financial situation to others' and being envious of those who are wealthier. For starters, research has shown that our financial wellness is overwhelmingly dependent on our spending habits as opposed to our income. Secondly, feelings of gratitude actually trigger a fascinating response in your body that combats the harmful effects of stress. "The key factor is to remain positive and optimistic. Keep an upbeat attitude," advises Chellie Campbell, author of *The Wealthy Spirit*.

Be realistic about control

There are many things that we just cannot control in life... the stock market, the price of gas and groceries, and the weather, to name a few. However, you can control your financial future. You can choose to avoid mindless spending on things you do not need. You can choose to make a home-cooked meal instead of going out to eat. One key is to not resort to soothing financial stress by shopping. Find alternative stress reducers such as exercise, yoga and meditation.

Avoid fixating on debt

Campbell also suggests that you don't look at your debt more than one hour a week. Use that hour to pay bills, cry, moan and feel sorry for yourself, if needed. The rest of the time you need to be proactive, celebrate your victories and think of positive ways to reduce frivolous spending and save money. Be happy about the fact that you're doing everything you can, and sleep well at night.

The *Wellbeing Insights* Newsletter is prepared for you by CBIZ ESO. The contributions included in this newsletter do not specifically reflect your employer's opinions. Consult your health care provider before making any lifestyle changes.

Contributing Writers

Abby Banks..... Wellbeing Account Manager
Lisa Underwood Wellbeing Coordinator
Chelsea Katz Wellbeing Intern
Jin Kim Wellbeing Intern
Molly Magnuson Retirement Plan Consultant

Visit the CBIZ Wellbeing website at
www.cbiz.com/wellbeing