

SPECIAL REPORT

COPING STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

.....
Practical Help
in Times of Stress
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www.behaviourneeds.com

Coping Strategies for Teachers

Practical Help in Times of Stress

<http://www.behaviourneeds.com>

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Heather Beames, Teacher, London course attendee

To book Rob for INSET or to enquire about live training please visit the help desk at www.behaviourneeds.com/helpdesk OR CALL **08452712818** (UK)

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1. A Really Simple (but *very effective*) Time Management Plan

It is essential that teachers have a system for organising time effectively because the pressures are just too great without one. Efficient time management will help you alleviate stress, grow confident, keep promises and reach goals – and hence will keep you on the road to success in the profession. Time management also aids behaviour management. In order to be able to successfully manage the increasingly challenging students in many of today's schools teachers need to be at their best – organised and full of energy. The ideas in this free report can help.

The first thing I'm going to share with you is a method to help keep your head clear and free from all those annoying appointments, jobs and unfinished tasks that are always at the back of your mind.

I'll let you in on a secret: I'm a messy thinker, and my head left unchecked is like a sieve. I have projects and ideas flowing through it all day and everything would trickle through the holes if I didn't have a system to manage them. Files and folders are the key which, if used correctly, will make your working day much easier.

You need a folder for each of your main projects. A list of projects might include:

- Classes you teach (each will need a separate folder)
- Trips and excursions
- Meetings
- CPD, further reading
- Resources to buy
- Useful websites
- Templates (letters etc.)
- Future projects and ideas

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If you want this system to spill into your life away from school (and yes it is possible!) you might have an additional list of projects such as:

- Bills
- Health
- Kids
- Holidays
- Birthdays
- Car

Finally, you need folders called '**Update**', '**One month schedule**' and '**Today's jobs**', not to mention a **calendar/diary**.

You run it like this:

Each folder (they can be all PC-based but I also have hard copies in the form of card folders in a filing cabinet) will hold all information to do with the relevant topic as well as a '**Project: To Do**' list. This sheet can be updated whenever you remember something or have something to add for this particular topic.

Let's use a 'Holiday' folder as an example of how this works. A holiday folder would contain my passport and all details of bargains and suitable hotels, trips etc. As I come across more good holiday ideas I would add them to the folder. (If I only had a digital folder I would scan any hard copies and keep the scan in the folder). My '**Holidays: To Do**' list is where I would put anything that comes into my head about future holidays or any steps I have to take in order to make my next holiday happen; for instance if I've decided that I'm going to go away for a break at half term, I will write that I have to book flights and sort out any jabs etc. Basically, whenever an idea enters my head about holidays, it goes in the folder. This might sound obvious but it's surprising that many try to get by without such a system.

Getting back to school – my '**Meetings**' folder would hold everything to do with upcoming meetings – agendas, times/dates etc. My '**Meetings: To Do**' list is for anything I have to do prior to forthcoming meetings such as approaching staff for relevant information, catching up with relevant paper work, making adjustments to schedules in order to be able to attend etc.

You've probably guessed that there is a flaw here. Carrying round a load of folders with you wherever you go so that you can download ideas from your

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brain at will is neither convenient nor sensible unless you hire a pack horse – and just try getting one of those parked. It's also unnecessary. This is where the '**Update List**' comes in.

Your **Update List** is just an A4 pad of paper, much easier to carry round than a pile of folders! Every time you have an idea or discover a new piece of information which needs filing you just write it on your update list together with the relevant folder it belongs to.

At the end of the day, every couple of days or even once a week, you take out your **Update List** and transfer the information to one of four places:

1. A relevant **project folder**. If the idea/job/information is not urgent it just goes into the folder for storage.
2. Your **calendar/diary**. Only *confirmed* appointments – this isn't the place to write ideas and other information because it soon gets cluttered.
3. Your '**one-month schedule**'. This sheet has headings for 'week 1', 'week 2', 'week 3' and 'week 4'. Tasks are added under the relevant weekly heading so that you have a monthly overview of things you have to do.
4. Your '**Today's Jobs**' list. This list is the final part of the system and is a fantastic organisational tool when used correctly.

In addition, once a week, you purge your project folders and pick out urgent or 'next step' tasks. These are added to the '**Today's Jobs**' or '**one-month schedule**'.

Important point (cue warning bells): *Don't* put too much on your '**Today's Jobs**' list. If you get into the habit of never completing your '**Today's Jobs**' list the whole system will fall apart. There is no point in putting everything on this list that you HOPE to complete because you will only be frustrated when you don't manage them all. It is far better and efficient to only put three or four items on this list as 'MUSTS' and get them completed. By all means if you get through them with plenty of time to spare, you can revisit your ideas folder and perhaps add to the list. But only perhaps - finishing your 'Today's Jobs' list gives you a great feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction so it pays to make it easy on yourself.

Do you see how this method can keep your head clear and de-cluttered? Everything has its place, so that you don't have to store everything in your head! The knowledge that you can instantly lay your hands on whatever you need will give you phenomenal freedom.

2. Time-Saving Tips

1. Create a block of time during free periods and other non-teaching time to handle paperwork. Schedule this in your planner and *stick to it*. Chatting with colleagues is an effective way to let off steam and relax but it is more enjoyable doing it when you've first got some paperwork out of the way. Get some books marked first, then chat. Or mark the books at home – I know which I'd rather do.
2. Never handle a piece of paper more than once. Avoid putting things that can be dealt with straight away on a 'to do later' pile, or worse, somewhere they can easily get lost. If the piece of paper can be dealt with in two minutes or less, deal with it there and then. If not, put it in the relevant folder as described above in chapter one.
3. Spend time familiarising yourself with some internet lesson plan sites that suit your style and that of your school. There are always times when you get caught short so it helps if you know exactly where to go and how to navigate the site at short notice.
4. Have well-labeled files for important documentation and put all loose papers into correct files *as soon as you get them*. You don't need to waste time looking for 'lost' papers. Throw away previous drafts - they serve no purpose and you need to keep your files and boxes tidy.
5. Limit the length of letters, recommendations, responses, meeting requests and other correspondence to one page. Extra details can be provided later if requested.
6. Handle routine requests or tasks *immediately* if you are able to.
7. Reduce the number of memos you keep - memos are primarily for short-term information. Either record the information you need and bin the memo, or create a specific file for old memos.
8. Avoid school politics and gossip. It wastes valuable planning time and costs friends.
9. When leaving a conference, workshop or meeting, go through all materials and discard *there and then* whatever you know you won't need again.
10. Use class registers effectively. Take a register at the start of the lesson and use it to record the obvious details such as pupils who forgot their book, didn't hand in homework etc.

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11. Schedule your work-related reading during non-teaching times. Try reading on the bus or train, during free periods, during lunch, or at breakfast instead of reading the paper. We all have handouts or course feedback to wade through and it makes sense to get it done in these slack periods rather than letting it encroach on your private life too much.

12. When you find items you keep putting off reading, ask 'How likely am I to read this and how valuable is this information?' If you're not going to benefit by reading it *throw it out*.

13. Throw out redundant paper from time to time; storage space gets filled up quickly and provides a constant, distracting reminder that you have a lot of paper work. A good clear out can do you the world of good.

14. Create a 'template' file for certificates, letters home, reports etc on your PC.

15. Use your computer! Store as much information on it as possible. Papers can easily be misplaced, but letters, lesson plans, teaching units, worksheets etc can be pulled up, reviewed, revised and reprinted in a matter of minutes. Be sure to name the files something you recognise instantly, and always keep back-up disks. If possible, find yourself a 'technician' too. This might be your own son/daughter or a local student, in fact anyone who can be on hand to help you with technical issues as and when they arise. Unless you're technically minded yourself, dealing with technical issues wastes countless hours.

16. Set up templates for as much of your paperwork as possible, and use them.

17. Do all copying at the end of the week. Get it out of the way so that your weekend is free and you don't have to get stuck in queues next week. Better still, get your teaching assistant to do it. Delegating is an important skill and worth perfecting.

19. Have a nightly 'stop time' for any work-related tasks - anything not done by then can wait.

20. Get to school an hour or more before classes begin - that can be a quiet, productive time to prepare lessons, mark books or catch up on other time-consuming tasks that get put off during the day.

21. Include valuable relaxation time in your schedule. Making time to relax is more important than your job itself, because if you fall ill due to stress-related illness you will not be able to do your job at all.

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22. Clean off your desk before going home each day, leaving only your '**Today's Jobs**' list (see chapter one) for the next day. As you well know, once the loose bits of paper start to pile up, there's no stopping them!

23. Write something on the board for students to answer or complete as they come into the classroom - this will cut down on transition time and get productive time going right away. It also gives you a few minutes at the start of the lesson to gather your thoughts.

24. Put all your keys, papers and other belongings by the door at the end of your working day - it will help you relax and save time looking for them in the morning.

25. Cut back on television time. Only watch those shows you decide on beforehand. Circle them in the listing magazine. Then turn off the television when the programme is over. Better still, save loads of time and stop watching television! I'm not saying we shouldn't have relaxation time, but television can be a curse and if allowed can literally suck your life away through your ears and eyes.

26. Make a plan for the weekend that doesn't involve work. Plan to spend more time with your family or with people who make positive contributions to your life. Don't spend time with people who are a drain on your energy or vitality.

27. Make time for *yourself*. Set aside time each day to do things that please you and help you recharge.

28. Give responsibilities to your pupils. By delegating some of your menial tasks – collecting form/trip money, taking the register, tidying the room/cupboards, running errands, photocopying etc you can free up a tremendous amount of time for yourself. But by far the biggest benefit is that your pupils will love to do this for you. They love responsibility – particularly the more disruptive ones, so give it to them and make your life easier.

29. Work in 'Blocks of Time'. I've found that there is a constant distraction when running an online business – the internet! Other websites and emails are a constant interruption and a job which should take an hour can often end up taking three or four hours or more. I discovered that working in blocks of thirty minutes at a time gets round this issue and makes me far more productive.

My attention span is, at best, around thirty minutes – if I have to work longer than that I wander and nothing gets done. So I set an alarm for half an hour and for that block of time I do nothing other than the job in hand. I focus on it 100%. No checking emails, no talking to anyone else, no getting up and walking

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round and *definitely* no web surfing! I've now found that I can accomplish more in half an hour than I used to in a whole afternoon.

I know that teaching isn't quite the same as running an online business because the distractions are very different - but the principle is the same. Working in blocks of twenty or thirty minutes and shutting out all interruptions during that time will increase your productivity and give you more time to relax.

3. Reduce Stress with a Pupil Behaviour Record File

Most teaching courses train you to be adept at organising the 'teaching' part of the job. When new teachers qualify they very quickly develop special mark-books, subject files, schemes of work files, assessment sheets, report banks, lesson plan templates etc.

But there is, of course, much more to the job than just teaching. Increasingly, a large part of the busy teacher's day is taken up managing behavior problems and dealing with associated pastoral concerns, external agencies, parent contacts etc.

Teachers seldom get shown how to handle the sheer mountain of paperwork related to this part of the job despite the fact that it takes up a large part of the working day and causes endless stress, headaches and frustration.

The best way to cope with this is to have a separate file specifically for behaviour and associated issues.

The benefits are enormous and it will make your job a whole lot easier if you don't already do this. Being able to lay your hands on important information from impromptu meetings, documented evidence of behavior incidents and having a comprehensive record of conversations with outside agencies and parents is very useful.

How to make your behaviour file

1. Have one file for each class you teach – otherwise your file will fill up too quickly.
2. Have dividers labeled as follows:

(Note: if you use plastic wallets to hold individual sheets of paper they will end up being wider than the actual dividers – so you won't be able to see the dividers without leafing through the whole file – very time consuming. Instead, you can use masking tape to extend the dividers outwards by sticking a piece of tape to the divider folded over on itself. You can then write on the tape instead of the divider and it will stick out past the plastic wallet for easy visibility).

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i) Pupil Timetable

In this section you keep a timetable for each child so that you know at any time of the school day where they should be. One day we'll be able to tag them, but not yet!

ii) Teacher Timetable and contacts

In this section you keep a timetable of all the teachers so that you know where to find them at any time of day. Also have a sheet with email addresses and other contact methods for each member of staff.

iii) Map of the School. In case you forget where you work.

iv) Student Contact Details

In this section you have a separate page for each pupil in the class – phone numbers, medical details, specific behavior problems (if any), Communist Party membership, and any other relevant information.

v) Record Cards

Have a copy of each child's completed 'Record Card' (hobby/interest questionnaire).

Note: These questionnaires should be filled in by all pupils in the class but are most useful for building relationships with the very difficult pupils and troublemakers in the class. You can read about them in our resources on building positive [teacher/student relationships](#).

vi) Parent contact log

In this section you have a sheet for each child and record any phone calls or conversations you have with parents.

vii) I.E.P for each child

This document (Individual Education Plan) details recommended strategies for dealing with a individual students as well as specific short term targets the child should attain in a given period of time.

viii) Pupil Log

I find these absolutely INVALUABLE. They are so simple to use and yet so beneficial – for writing reports and feeding back to parents, staff, outside agencies etc. I strongly advise you start keeping these.

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All you really need is a blank sheet of A4 paper for each pupil with their name at the top so that you can log information about a child when you teach them. You don't **have** to write in them every day – it's just there as a place to log important events, conversations, achievements, incidents etc as and when they occur.

Whenever a child has caused trouble in a lesson, or conversely has been helpful or hard-working, simply turn to their page, and under the date write a sentence or two about what happened. 'John used foul language repeatedly throughout the lesson (but never repeated himself)', 'Stephanie had to be removed from class today for refusing to follow instructions' or 'Jake finished his work early and helped two other pupils'. That sort of thing.

Over time, these comments build up to form a comprehensive record of a child's performance so that whenever you are in a position in which you have to give feedback on the child, you have at your disposal this wonderful record. More reliable than a dubious memory!

4. How to Deal Assertively with Requests from SMTs and Other Colleagues:

Sometimes we need to say 'NO' in order to protect our time. We say 'YES' to others because we want to please them but sometimes our desire to please can lead to us taking on more than we can cope with. When eventually we can't continue, we feel guilty and both parties suffer. A desire to please often prevents us from saying no in the first place and preventing ill feeling or stress.

Next time you're asked to do something outside your normal duties:

1. Make sure you understand exactly what is being asked of you before you respond.

Perhaps the task will be more time consuming than you think. On the other hand, it may not take much effort at all. Think it all through *carefully*; knowing all the facts can save you from embarrassment or frustration.

2. Remember that others may take you for granted and even lose respect for you if you say 'yes' to every request.

You have a right to say no. Be polite but firm if you say no. You only build false hopes with wishy-washy 'maybe' responses and plant doubt within yourself.

3. Don't waffle - keep your answers and reasons short.

This way, you can say no without feeling the need for a lengthy justification. ('I'm sorry, I'm not available that night/it clashes with Eastenders') On the other hand, some say that giving a longer answer with reasons reinforces your credibility. Let the situation decide.

4. Always try to provide suggestions or alternatives for the person who is asking.

This is a key point and stops people thinking you're just being awkward. You should always look for a suitable alternative or helpful suggestion.

When in doubt, it's easier to say **no** now and change your mind to a **yes** later, than it is the other way around.

Sometimes, saying no is simply unavoidable but that doesn't mean you have to be any less assertive. Here are some techniques to use when you *have* to say 'yes':

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1. Tell the person you can agree to their request this time, but suggest the two of you discuss how they might plan better for the next time.
2. Tell them yes, but remind them they owe you one. For example, they might cover you for a lesson/break duty next time you need time off.
3. Tell them yes, but take control by saying you'll come back to them with a timetable. For instance, say, 'I expect I'll be able to do that for you by the end of the week'. Perhaps lean back slightly, narrow your eyes and tell them calmly you'll make them an offer they can't refuse.
4. Put a condition on your agreement such as 'If it would only take an hour, I'd be able to help, but I can't give you more than that.' You can always respond to requests by asking for a bit of time to think about it. Sometimes we make decisions without really considering whether we have the time to do a job, or whether we really want to do the job in the first place. Give yourself some 'think time' to look thoroughly at what's involved.

5. Beating Stress

Here are a few pointers on avoiding stress before it happens, but which work equally well in controlling it if your level is already too high. Some of what follows may seem obvious, but too often you can become stressed without even realising it.

If you're genuinely ill, stay off.

This is not an invitation to take a 'sickie'. Often people who are genuinely too ill to work will force themselves to attend as normal in the belief that 'the work must be done', and that they are the only person capable of doing it. If they are the only one capable, it is a good argument for more staff, to lessen the workload.

In teaching, the feeling of guilt associated with taking time off is immense – you're letting your department down (someone has to cover your classes) and you're letting the kids down (they deserve an education). But you have to remember that your health **MUST** come first above and beyond anything else. If you push your body to the limit it will need time to recover. Better to take notice of the warning signs and recharge your batteries when you're feeling genuinely run down.

You should also consider the others around you; if you stagger into school with the 'flu, your colleagues and pupils may well be doing it soon too.

Delegate work.

You probably don't work all alone in your department. If work that does not have to be done specifically by you can be delegated to somebody else, delegate.

Be assertive!

Stand up for yourself. If you act like a doormat more and more will be heaped upon you, and the greater your stress becomes.

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Don't undertake extra work you don't need to.

... even if it seems selfish. You only have to work what you are contractually obliged to. I'm not suggesting that you follow your contract to the letter and should never do anything 'extra'; but if you're already half-buried under a mountain of work, give careful consideration to the implications of taking on more.

Don't accept responsibility that isn't yours.

Responsibility is a burden, and one that is not always welcome. That burden is more unwelcome if it should not be yours, so if you have to decline work on the grounds that the added responsibility is not yours, do so.

Exercise!

Exercise is one of the most important coping mechanisms to combat anxiety and stress. By discharging negative emotions and stress hormones through physical activity, you can enter a more relaxed state from which to deal with the issues and conflicts that are causing your anxiety.

The benefits come in many ways: the sheer distraction from your worries, the effects on self-image, and the biochemical and physiological changes that accompany the exercise. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, releases hormones, stimulates the nervous system, and increases levels of morphine-like substances found in the body (such as beta-endorphin) that can have a positive effect on mood and pain.

Physical fitness is linked to personal effectiveness and success in every way. The results are almost instantaneous and noticeable in every area of your existence, not just physical health or reduced anxiety.

I know exercise can seem a daunting prospect for many people so let me try and convince you that exercise should play a part in your life.

Exercise increases your energy levels.

Exercise causes an increase in the number of *mitochondria* (tiny energy-producing organelles) in your cells. In numerous studies and surveys, people who exercise regularly have been found to have higher energy levels and significantly less tension and stress than they had before they started exercising.

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Exercise helps you beat stress.

Studies have shown that definite psychological changes take place in people who undertake regular exercise. They seem to find it easier to accomplish their daily tasks and become more effective in achieving their potential in all areas of their lives. Participants in exercise studies have been found to be more emotionally stable, better able to cope with stress and much more self sufficient and confident.

This is precisely why large corporations around the world continuously fund programs of exercise for their executives.

Exercise makes you feel *sooo* good!

Exercise enhances the production of *noradrenaline*, a hormone found to be responsible to lift your mood and combat sensations of fatigue and depression giving a much more balanced emotional state. This accounts for the fact that so many emotional disorders have been successfully treated with exercise.

Even moderate exercise can raise levels of brain chemicals such as endorphins and improve a person's mood. One such substance is phenylethylamine, or PEA, a natural stimulant produced by the body. It is related to amphetamines but does not have the long-lasting effects that make 'speed' or 'ice' such deadly drugs.

Researchers now argue that this increase in PEA causes the euphoric mood often called 'runner's high'; and because depressed people tend to have low PEA levels, the researchers say this is an explanation of why exercise has a natural anti-depressant action. It is hoped this information might give doctors more confidence in prescribing exercise for mild depression and as an adjunct to drug therapy.

And let's face it, when you feel good about yourself it is much easier to leave behind bad habits and leave out foods that will sabotage your success. You simply become hooked on feeling good.

Exercise burns fat.

Studies in both animals and people have shown time and time again that exercise helps burn fat and make you lean. In some studies overweight, inactive individuals actually seemed to eat fewer calories than their more active, slimmer counter parts.

Other studies have shown that regular exercise on its own, *even without reducing food intake*, can cause a reduction in body fat. This shows that eating

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more will not necessarily make you overweight – but being inactive almost certainly will.

The benefits of exercise don't stop when you leave the gym or get off your bike. Studies have shown that after 30 minutes of exercise you will continue to burn calories throughout the day at a faster rate than normal because the exercise speeds up your RESTING metabolism. That means you not only burn extra calories during the exercise, you burn extra calories when you rest as well!

So there you have it. Now you know why you simply *have to* start exercising!

Eat well.

This goes hand in hand with the above in that they are both common-sense ways of looking after your body. If you fill your body with rubbish it cannot possibly work to optimum levels. The body is a complex machine composed of systems which work synergistically, and if one system starts to falter due to neglect or abuse the others will follow. Processed foods simply clog up your body and make it more difficult for it to function.

Drink plenty of water, eat plenty of water-rich foods and avoid as much of the processed foods that litter our supermarket shelves as possible.

Sleep well.

Aim for a regular sleeping pattern - poor sleep patterns can affect both your work and home life. We all need sleep; some people can apparently cope with as little as four hours a night, but we will assume for the time being that you aren't superhuman. Aim to be in bed by midnight and try for up to eight hours' sleep. If you have something on your mind that is causing you worry try to exorcise it before you turn the light off; read for a while or listen to music.

Learn to relax.

Make the most of your time off. Try not to do any work at home. If you don't have a hobby that you can lose yourself in, consider starting one. Anything that can distract you from work in your own time is beneficial.

Invariably people who enjoy the best health are those who have learned to manage the stress and emotional burdens in their lives. The aim here is to increase your body's ability to deal with stress so that your normal waking state is much calmer and more relaxed.

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One way to reduce your anxiety levels is through deep breathing.

Shallow breathing is *inefficient* due to the imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood. It is so common and yet the effects are seldom appreciated: racing heart, anxiety, inability to concentrate, diminished intellectual and physical performance and disturbed sleep.

By contrast, *deep breathing* ensures that your emotional, physical and intellectual well-being is enhanced as it allows optimum exchange of gases.

This is the reason health systems such as yoga and martial arts focus so much attention on healthy breathing. Practising deep breathing exercises reduce the stimulation of your sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for making you feel anxious.

The benefits of deep breathing include increased oxygen supply to the brain and musculature and stimulation of the *parasympathetic* nervous system.

Unlike the sympathetic branch of your autonomic nervous system the parasympathetic promotes a state of *calmness*.

Breathing Technique 1

This method of deep breathing, using the whole thoracic cavity, is presented in three easy steps. Start with the first step, until you've mastered it, then progress to the next step. Once you have reached the third step, you will have learned the Calming Deep Breath Technique.

Once steps 1 and 2 are learned, step 3 is the exercise that you will use daily for ten minutes to calm your nervous system.

Step One

This step uses the diaphragm to fill the lower part of the lungs. Lie flat on your back and breathe in so that your stomach rises but your chest stays still. Exhale with the chest still and the stomach falling. If you put your hand on your belly you should feel it rise and fall with each breath. Repeat for 10 breaths.

Step Two

This step uses the muscles between the ribs to expand the chest cavity and fill the top portion of the lungs. This time breathe in so that your chest rises, while your stomach is still. Exhale so that your chest goes down again, while your stomach remains still. Repeat for 10 breaths.

Step Three

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Now that you've mastered these first two stages, step 3 brings them both together into one breath.

Begin by stomach breathing. When you feel you can't inhale any more in this manner, switch to chest breathing, until the upper part of your lungs are filled. Then exhale by chest breathing first, progressing to stomach breathing so that you empty the lungs fully. Continue breathing like this for 5 minutes.

Breathing Technique 2.

Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest. Breathe slowly and deeply through your nose. Be aware of the muscles in your abdomen wall pushing outward as you inhale. Inhale one count, hold four counts, exhale two counts. So if you inhaled for four seconds, you'd hold for sixteen and exhale for eight.

Start by filling the lower part of your lungs first and feel the diaphragm move downwards. When you exhale, feel the diaphragm move up.

When you are holding the breath for the four counts, your cells are becoming fully oxygenated. There is no vitamin pill or dietary supplement that can give the same wonderful benefits as correct breathing.

The second way to reduce your anxiety levels is through deep relaxation.

This is a way of reducing your stress triggers before they even have a chance to affect you by addressing the emotional issues that underlie them.

Deep relaxation is very easy to learn and only requires 10 minutes' practice twice a day but the benefits to your overall health are amazing. Every time you carry out these exercises you will teach your body how to relax – something that it has no doubt forgotten in this busy world of ours!

I use the following script which is common to many self-hypnosis type programs. If you think you'll have problems remembering the instructions you could try reading them into a tape recorder and playing them back to yourself whilst you relax. Alternatively, you could buy one of the many 'relaxation' tapes on the market. There are literally hundreds and they all follow more or less the same format. If you read through the following instructions though you'll see that there's nothing complicated, it's just a case of focusing on each body part in turn and feeling it relax.

To begin, isolate yourself where you will not be disturbed. Choose a time when there is as little noise as possible – I find one session first thing in the morning

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and another last thing at night to be particularly beneficial. If you can squeeze one in at lunchtime too the effects will be even more apparent.

Make sure there are no tasks that require your immediate attention after the session or you will find yourself preoccupied. Initially, you may find it helpful if you can arrange to be quiet and relaxed for an hour or so prior to the session but with practice such preparations won't be required.

Make yourself comfortable on your bed, lying on your back with your arms by your sides, not touching your body. A small cushion in the small of the back or behind the knees can be used if required. Rest comfortably looking at the ceiling. Don't stare hard but 'gaze' at one spot. Close your eyes if it becomes an effort to keep them open but don't try and force anything – just relax, let go.

The object of this resting is to quietly and gently let your mind and body gradually slow down of their own accord. You can't force this, just 'let go'. If your mind starts racing off, working out problems or thinking of things you have to do just gently bring your attention to your breathing. And let go.

After a short while you will start to become more aware of tiredness throughout your body of which you were not conscious before. You will start to feel these sensations of tiredness specifically located in various muscles in the arms, legs, back, shoulders and feet. The body is letting go. The next step is to mentally 'feel' these parts of the body in turn.

First direct your attention to your feet. Feel your feet with your mind. Feel the soles of the feet, the toes and the tops of the feet. Feel your feet relax. Feel the skin relax. Feel the bones relax. Feel the cells relax.

After a brief pause (you will probably feel some sort of tingling sensation in your feet as you imagine them) move your attention to your calves. Feel your calves relax. Feel the skin relax. Feel the bones relax. Feel the muscles relax. Feel the cells relax.

After a brief pause move your attention up to your thighs and so on through the various parts of your body – stomach, back, shoulders, arms/hands, neck, head, face – lips, mouth, tongue etc.

With practice you'll find that you get better and better at directing your attention to the various parts of your body and you will find yourself being able to relax much more deeply and quickly. The effects are cumulative and the quality of relaxation will continue to improve.

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Eventually you will find that you can quickly put yourself into a very relaxed state even when you're not lying down – your body will be so used to relaxing - and this is a very healthy skill to have!

There are other ways of achieving deep relaxation of course and hugely successful businesses have been built by selling them. One of the best I've found is meditation. It is beyond the scope of this book to explain how to do this and there are many different methods but teachers are available in every city throughout the world. It really is worthwhile and makes a very subtle yet massively powerful difference to your whole life – especially in terms of coping with stress.

These easy to learn acupuncture and breathing techniques reduce stress and anxiety, relax you, improve your sleep and develop a growing sense of inner calm and control that flows over into all areas of your life. The effects are immediately noticeable, however you must practise daily for a couple of months to achieve maximum benefits. It's also important to eliminate, or at least reduce, the anxiety and stress factors in your life. Not doing so will minimise the enormous benefits of what you're about to learn. While each stress relaxation technique is safe to do, you should *check with your health professional* before trying them. Note also that combining acupuncture and breathing exercises provides far greater benefits than either technique alone.