**Two techniques for reducing stress**

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It happens to everyone from time to time: a thorny issue sprouts up, a worry takes root. Soon those roots dig in so deeply and spread so wide that they leave little room for anything else to grow. Worrying, searching for a solution, and forecasting the future move from preoccupation to full-time work.

When that starts to happen, it’s critical to call a timeout, explain stress experts Herbert Benson, MD, and Aggie Casey, the medical editors of Harvard Medical School’s Stress Management Special Health Report. Certain hormones fuel the body’s stress response (also dubbed “fight-or-flight”), speeding breathing and heartbeat, directing extra blood flow to the brain and muscles, perking up the immune system, and triggering other changes that prepare your body to respond to a perceived threat. At times, the stress response is appropriate and necessary, helping us rise to meet physical and emotional challenges. But stress hormones that are triggered too often or stuck in overdrive can fuel worrisome health problems—from headaches and heartburn to high blood pressure and heart disease.

Relaxation techniques can counteract this. Learning and practicing the relaxation response or other similar stress-reduction techniques for 10–20 minutes a day can protect your health, improve your mood, and boost your overall well-being.

When you find yourself stuck on a particular worry, there are many quick and easy techniques that can help you break the cycle of stress. Here are two that I tried recently and found helpful:

**Schedule your worries**

When your mind is racing, you feel overwhelmed, and you can’t seem to focus, call a time-out for yourself. Set a timer for 15 minutes and write down everything that you’re worried about. But when the buzzer sounds, put your worries away and allow yourself to focus on something else. If you are going through a tumultuous or difficult time—perhaps you are in the midst of a divorce or you are facing a financial setback—and worry is persistent, try setting aside a specific time each day to record your worries. Simply having this time each day can help you contain your worries. You know you’ll have time to tend to them without having them take over your day.

**Make a worry box**

Find any box, decorate it however you like, and keep it in a handy place. (I found that this was a great activity to do with my young children, since they loved helping to decorate the box.) Jot down each worry as it crops up on a piece of paper and drop it into the box.

Once your worry is deposited in the box, try to turn your attention to other matters. The worry box essentially allows you to mentally let go of your worries.

Later on, you can throw out the notes without looking at them again. I decided to look through mine at the end of the month, and while a few of those worries were still bearing down on me, most were unfounded. It was a good lesson that worrying is often fruitless, as a favorite quote of mine from Leo Buscaglia underscores:

“Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy.”

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