

Re-connect and De-stress

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*“Let us dig our gardens and not be elsewhere:
Let us take long walks in the open air...
Let us bathe in the rivers and lakes...
Let us indulge in games...
Let us be more simple: simple and true in our minds above all. Let us be ourselves.”*

—Robert Linssen



Sometimes my dear husband comes home from work snarling and cranky, hurling expletives about those horrendous drivers, the hoards of insensitive louts on the train, and the general insanity of the world as we know it. I, on the other hand, have a whining baby clutching the legs of my jeans, a four-year-old tearing around the house (wearing nothing but a cape, rain boots, and underwear), a pot of hot pasta on the

stove, and can barely see straight due to my general exhaustion from a day with two curious, albeit wearing, children.

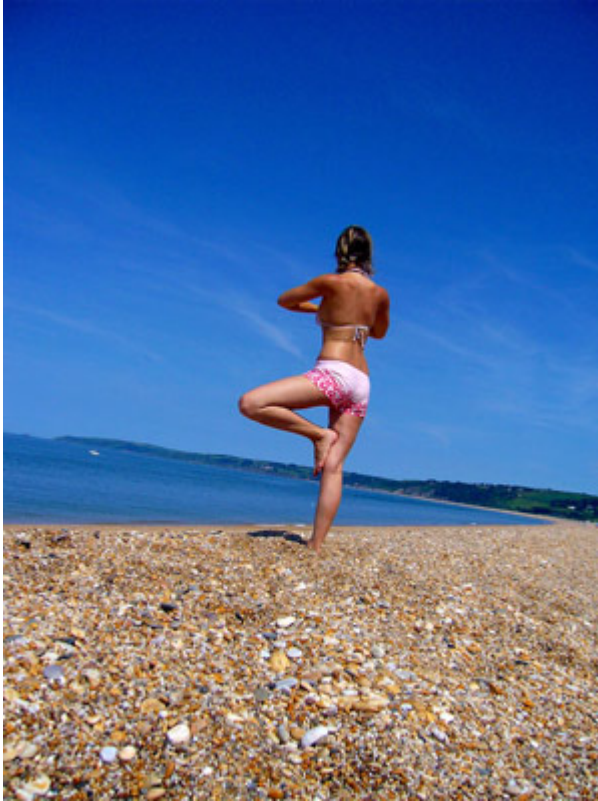
Needless to say, his words go right over my self-involved, self-pitying head. We grunt and grouse at each other during dinner, try to placate our increasingly sleepy cherubs, and finally collapse into bed hoping that the next day will yield better results for the four of us.

What is missing from this picture is a connection, both to the other people with whom we are living, as well as to ourselves. This connection is important - it necessitates taking the extra moments that exist to really look at one another, and to remember to breathe slowly and deeply. Too often we feel as if we don't have any time, that we need to rush to get things done, and the potential moments that truly make life our oyster are lost forever.

The truth is, stress can wreak havoc on your physical being, both inside and out. It can do a number on you health-wise, and leave you feeling and looking like the back end of a rusty pick-up truck. “So how can I counteract such an intrusive force?” you may ask. For your edification, I've made a small list of some ideas to help your harried and pooped little self.

Learn some basic relaxation techniques

When you're really feeling grouchy, close your eyes and try to release and relax all your facial features. It sounds a little simplistic, but I find that if I just relax my face, the rest of my body will follow. You can also try this simple stretch:



- Breathe out slowly, while you raise your arms over your head, palms up. Stretch your fingers out as far as you can.
- Breathe in slowly, and clasp your hands together over your head, turning your palms upward.
- Breathing out again, unclasp your hands and bring your arms slowly downward, palms down. Release your shoulders downward.

If you're feeling ambitious, take a yoga class. Although yoga is part of the pop-culture nowadays - which immediately makes me want to run screaming from it - it is actually an incredible way to connect you with yourself, both mentally and physically. It is an ancient art, tried and true.

Take a nice, warm bath

Yes, warm baths are indeed the heavenly answer to your stressed body's dream. Try adding different blissful things to your bath, such as salts, oils, or bubbles. My sister-in-law recently gave me a bottle of herbs, which I add to my bath and consequently steep like a big pot of tea. The scent is enough to make even the most tense Type-A personality feel like a big glob of jello.

Try lighting a candle to enhance your bathing experience – (Lavender? Ginger peach? Eucalyptus?) – and aromatherap-ize yourself into scented bliss. Just don't forget to blow it out when you're done! A house-fire will do nothing for an anxious mind.

Treat yourself to a homemade facial

There are many different homemade facials you can try. Some include:

- *Avocado* – Mash up a half of an avocado and apply to your face, leaving it on for about 20 minutes. Wipe it off with a warm, damp cloth.

- *Cucumber and yogurt* – In a blender, puree a half a cucumber and add a tablespoon of yogurt, and mix. Apply to your face, leaving it on for 20 minutes. Wipe it off with a warm, damp cloth.
- *Cornmeal* – Mix two tablespoons of cornmeal with enough water to make a thick paste. Apply to your face, and leave it on for about 10 minutes. Wipe it off with a warm, damp cloth.

Another great facial to try is a simple egg wash. I've heard people swear by this, so I tried it myself. Of course, I didn't even think about my egg sensitivity until I awoke around 2:00 in the morning feeling like I was having an allergic reaction. I couldn't figure out why, until my husband said "Didn't you put that raw egg stuff all over your face tonight?"

Little did I know that even when put on the skin, eggs can create problems for the egg-sensitive. So, if you routinely eschew the little oval suckers, you might want to pass on this particular treatment.

Take a tip from children, and play



Ever notice that children manage to work out their anxiety and stress by playing? Try to shake off your cloudy haze of wretchedness by going outside to kick a ball around. Or run around your house a couple of times with your legs splaying wildly, and completely frighten your neighbors. When you have a particularly bad day, try taking a long

bike ride, or find another equally physical activity. Sometimes just pushing yourself physically can really help you release your negative energy, and allow you breathe deeper and slow down. Try to play at something that makes you laugh uncontrollably, whatever it may be – laughter is an extraordinary stress-reducer.

Write, draw, dance, shut up and play yer guitar!

Even if you don't think of yourself as being particularly artistic or gifted, try to find a creative outlet in which to satisfy your inner muse. I firmly believe that everyone is a creator, and has artistic ability to tap into. It doesn't have to be a masterpiece. It doesn't have to be worthy of anyone's eyes or ears but your own. Write a sad, melodramatic poem, draw in bold, black ink, put on a Beatles CD and dance until your feet hurt.

Look into your true love's eyes

Instead of focusing on the cruel, heartless streets, try to just focus on your loved ones. Look into their eyes for a few minutes. Hold them close. Close your eyes and breathe with one another. Sounds schmaltzy? Yes. Will it work? But of course.

Letting go of the stress from your day may be difficult, but it is much more difficult to repair your damaged relationships due to your stress level. When we take the time to enhance our relationships to others and ourselves by connecting and re-connecting, we can relax and let the beauty of our time together overtake us. Find a place where you can have peace, and make sure that you visit that place every day. And above all, treat yourself with great care and love. You are indeed worth it.

Beauty from the inside out

Help those with large amounts of stress in their lives, and volunteer or donate to a battered woman's shelter in your area.

Reduce the stress in a young person's life by becoming a big sister – or contribute to the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, if you can't find the time. Visit their website at <http://www.bbbsa.org/>

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