

# Coping with stress

Quitting smoking can be a stressful experience. You might have used cigarettes in the past to help you cope, so without them, you'll need to use other methods.

Stress is caused by tension between what we expect of ourselves, and what we can manage. So we can reduce stress by demanding less of ourselves, or learning to cope with the demands. Most people also deal with stress better if they eat properly, get enough rest and exercise, and have people to support them.

## Stress and your body

- Work off your tensions - physical activity is a great outlet
- Get enough rest and sleep to recharge your batteries
- Know when you're tired or ill, and do something about it
- Eat regular meals, rich in fruit, vegetables and whole grains
- Avoid 'self-medication' with alcohol, caffeine, or other drugs

## Stress and your mind

- Learn to accept what you can't change
- Be realistic, not perfect

## Stress and daily life

- Take one thing at a time
- Manage your time better - develop a system that works for you
- Plan ahead, so work doesn't get out of hand
- Take time out to 'play', whatever that means to you
- Develop an interest or hobby outside work and home commitments
- Try to develop a relaxation routine (see other side of this page)

## Stress and other people

- Talk to someone you really trust
- Do something for others - but also learn when to say 'no'
- Find ways to handle criticism and anger
- Try to resolve any long-term conflicts

## Some techniques to try

- Relaxation tapes and exercises
- Count slowly to ten
- Tense and relax various muscles throughout the body
- Gentle stretching exercises
- Stand up and move around
- Take deep breaths of fresh air
- Have a scented bath
- Have a cup of herbal or fruit tea

## Getting more help

- Make the move to seek advice or support - there are now helplines or websites for most concerns.
- You can also see your GP for advice.
- Don't give up if your first attempts aren't successful: you will still have learnt more about what works and doesn't work for you, and changes take time.

Adapted from 'The Really Helpful Guide to Running Stop Smoking Sessions: ASH in Wales, 2001'

# Learning to relax

The following is a simple relaxation method that is easy to learn, and quick to practice. You only need 5 minutes and a chair. It can help you manage daily stresses, and may help you cope after stopping smoking. The more you can practice now, the more you'll benefit later.

## Preparation

- Sit comfortably in your chair - perhaps take off any tight belt or shoes
- Hands rest loosely on the legs or armrest, and feet are uncrossed
- Just be aware of your breathing - let the breath out be complete and gentle, and let the breath in follow naturally
- When you feel comfortable, let your eyes close gently as you breathe out

## Relaxation - head and neck

- Now be aware of your forehead - let any strain melt away as you relax more deeply
- Focus your attention on your face, all the little muscles round your eyes and mouth-just let them go
- Just let the tongue relax - it will often rest gently near the roof of your mouth
- Now all the little muscles in your scalp - let them relax fully

## Relaxation - arms and body

- Now let that relaxed feeling flow down into your shoulders
- Just be aware of any tensions, and let them go - as you relax even more deeply
- Let that feeling flow down into the arms, right down into the hands, right to the tips of the fingers, right to the tips of the thumbs
- Again relax your shoulders, and let that feeling flow into all the muscles of your back
- Now over your chest and into your abdomen - all the muscles soft and relaxed
- Focus on the sensation in your abdomen as you breathe fully and gently

## Relaxation - legs

- Now let that feeling of relaxation move down into your buttocks -just let any tensions go as you relax even further
- Now relax all the muscles of your legs, from your hips down to the tips of your toes
- Now move your attention down the whole body - head, shoulders, arms, back and abdomen, buttocks and legs - and be aware of the wonderful feeling of relaxation
- Just take a few minutes to enjoy that feeling of deep relaxation

## Finishing the relaxation

- When you're ready, just stretch your legs and arms
- Open your eyes and come back to normal awareness
- Perhaps stand up and shake out your arms and legs

## ANOTHER SIMPLE DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE

**When people smoke, they often take 5 minutes 'out', free themselves from interruptions, remove themselves from a situation, and deep breathe. Sound a bit like relaxation techniques?! When you stop smoking, keep deep breathing to help clear your lungs.**

If possible, sit down with feet flat on the floor, hands resting on knees.

Breathe slowly in and out through the nose a couple of times, concentrating on the sensation of air moving in and out of the body.

Start to breathe more deeply, still through the nose, consciously letting the air fill the abdomen, then the lower and upper chest in sequence. Breathe out the same way, expelling the air from the abdomen, lower and upper chest in turn.

Repeat this 3 or 4 times, then return to normal breathing