

Rx for Stress & The Jitters

Ever find yourself rushing around in a whirlwind of activity; going faster and faster until your head feels like it's dizzy? The more you do, the less you get done? As though you are spinning your wheels in a rut or swimming harder and harder just to keep your head above water? If so, you are experiencing life in the new millennium!

Many of you have found that your lives have become faster paced and more complicated. This was described by Alvin Toffler as the "Future Shock Syndrome." You have less and less time to do more and more.

You might find, as a result, that your quality of life suffers. In addition, you might experience certain symptoms of discomfort. Perhaps your body is feeling jittery and nervous. You might notice that you have trouble catching your breath, as though you cannot take in a breath that is deep enough to satisfy your needs. You might find that your thoughts are racing and your heart is beating faster. **It is not uncommon for symptoms like these to occur when people are caught up in the rush to succeed or even the rush just to survive nowadays....or when you are thinking about deployment...or returning home as a soldier.** What is happening and what can be done about it?

The answer lies in the strange fact that we have pretty much the same bodies as our cave-people ancestors did. Although the human physiology has changed little since then, the world around us sure has. We now live in the age of multiple demands and modern technology. The same complex set of bodily reactions which once-upon-a-time helped our cave ancestors to react to imminent danger (such as the sudden appearance of a saber-toothed tiger!), still exists in us today. The only problem is that the saber-toothed tigers have become replaced with the numerous little irritations and daily hassles of every day life.

When you perceive something to be threatening to you, whether it's a dangerous animal or an angry spouse, you instinctively react in self-defense. This response involves a complex chain of hormonal reactions. Within ten seconds every cell in the body might be chemically altered in preparation for what is known as the "fight or flight response." **This helps to prepare for danger by activating all the muscles either to run or fight. This high state of autonomic nervous system arousal is very adaptive when you face a dangerous situation, like in combat in Afghanistan.** When this reaction is extended over a long period of time — such as is the case with modern life where you probably react to many little things as though they were really threatening to you — a chronic state of arousal results and it can be very dangerous to your health. Therefore, what was once helpful to a cave person and still is to a modern person in a moment of dire need, can be very harmful to that same modern person when it is extended over a long period of time.

So what is the solution? The solution is simple. You need to train your body to relax. You need to learn to get over each stress-reaction by allowing the process to wind down to a natural state of relaxation. What this means is that you cannot allow stress to accumulate so that over time it builds up and you become the frazzled kind of basket case described above.

When you find your body is chronically tense, you might want to try any of a number of relaxation techniques. The simplest and perhaps the most appropriate for the kind of symptoms described above might be "deep breathing." Try it when you find that your breathing is out of control or that your body is very tense or even when your mind is racing with panicky thoughts. This may or may not be the best technique for you but because it is brief and can be practiced readily, you might find it to be very handy indeed. It is also a "building block," a technique frequently included as part of other methods.

RELAXATION BY DEEP BREATHING

STEP 1: Find a comfortable position where you can sit quietly in a darkened room.

STEP 2: Close your eyes.

STEP 3: Draw in a very slow and deep breath through your nose. Do this by using the muscles in your diaphragm. In order to breathe deeply, the air must circulate to the bottom of your lungs. You will find that the muscles of your diaphragm are pushing outward, away from you, rather than upward towards your head.

STEP 4: Hold that deep breath for 5 to 10 seconds. As you hold that breath, notice the tension that builds in your lungs and elsewhere in your body. This is not unlike the tension you feel in reaction to stress.

STEP 5: Exhale through your mouth even more slowly than you inhaled. As you are exhaling, repeat the words "PEACE AND CALM" or "NOW RELAX" to yourself. As you do this, you will notice a gradual sensation of relaxation taking over.

STEP 6: Allow your breathing to return to a nice natural normal pace. You should notice that your breathing slows down considerably. Try to get in the habit of repeating "PEACE AND CALM" and "NOW RELAX" every time you exhale.

STEP 7: Every once in while, repeat the deep-breathing procedure. Be sure that you breathe in very slowly and that you breathe out even more slowly. Do this several times a day or whenever you feel the effects of stress building up and leading you out of control.

For further help from our counselors or coaches, call a [Guard Your Buddy](#) coach privately, confidentially and at no charge. We can be reached 24/7 at 855 HELP GYB (855-435-7492).

[And remember to breathe.....](#)

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