

FROM DISTRESSING TO DE-STRESSING

10 Practical Evidence-Based Solutions for Staying Calm in Unsettling Times

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Research shows that by taking frequent, brief breaks for refreshment, you can prevent burnout and boredom, enhance your productivity, cognitive clarity, improve your mood, your resilience, immune response, and more. To reap benefit, you only need to spend 30 seconds to ONE minute, once or twice per hour. By doing various self-compassionate activities throughout the day, you can give yourself a “brain break” and “reset,” as well as activate your “good hormones” such as dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphin. Additionally, you will diminish stress hormones and other things that detriment your wellbeing. Most of the issues and “ailments” we go to doctors for in the U.S. are stress-related and avoidable with lifestyle improvements and activities such as these. I call brief breaks for the busy person a “micro-self-care” system, when longer sessions are not possible. Setting a timer alarm can be very handy, especially at the beginning of the practice. Repetition and diligence are the key to the neuroplastic effect. The research supports the benefit of short and frequent self-care techniques – “little and often.”

- 1) **CLOSE YOUR MOUTH!** Breathe through your nose. Slow it down, and exhale longer. Each of these has a calming effect on the sympathetic nervous system.
- 2) **TAKE A BREAK** frequently for refreshment. Practice regular Micro-Self-Care.™ The research suggests hourly breaks for 1 minute or each half hour for 30 seconds to help us focus better and stay alert.
- 3) **TAKE DIGITAL HOLIDAYS.** Plug your phone in another room. Don't use blue light devices at least an hour before bedtime and put them in “red” warm light mode at nighttime. Consider times of the day when you do and do not use digital devices at all.
- 4) **DON'T FORGET BODY-MIND-SOUL ARE INTERTWINED** as one. You are a holistic “gestalt.” Each leg of the “stool” bolsters the others. If the mind is off, it affects the body and soul. If the body is agitated it affects the other two, etc.
- 5) **SLOW DOWN AND STAY PRESENT** so you can see clearly. You can only wake up when you slow down. Look inside. G-d is forcing us to go inside. Make an inner accounting. If you are willing to do a simple meditation practice, this enhances the prefrontal cortex - the mature brain, “seichel.”
- 6) **YOU'RE THE DRIVER** of your life and schedule. Don't let people or machines dictate your timing and needs.
- 7) **LANGUAGE IS THE BEST DISTRACTION.** When in the head too much, thinking about challenging circumstances, distract with reading, speaking, singing, etc. Most people can generally think only one train of language-based thought at one time.
- 8) **GRATITUDE PRACTICE IS HEALTHY SO IS POSITIVE THINKING.** I recommend a simple “4 Gratitude” practice: In the morning before you begin your day and at bedtime before you go to sleep, write or say to yourself something: 1) you're thankful to G-d for, 2) thankful to a loved one for, 3) grateful to a stranger, 4) show appreciation for something about you or that you did. (G-d, loved one, stranger/outsider, yourself).
- 9) **USE “INVISIBLE TIME” WISELY.** Have “quickie” self-care activities handy while standing in lines, waiting for appointments, in between things, when doing boring repetitive things. Don't allow your phone to be the “go to” that you gravitate to.
- 10) **STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR BODY.** Your bodily experiences are very informative about other things going on. Consider pain, tension, temperature, movement, etc. “The body knows first.” It recognizes threats and warnings before our mind is aware. “If you can name it, you can tame it.” Stay in touch with touch 😊