

Achieving Equilibrium in a Topsy Turvy World

Carrie Lippincott, OTR/L

December 23, 2016

There are many things you can do to keep your nervous system functioning smoothly, so can pace yourself complete the things you need to do in life.

Take care of your body.

- **Reduce your stress level as much as possible.** Stress is the main activator of the sympathetic nervous system. It can be from many possible sources: fatigue, muscle tightness, spinal misalignment (how is your sitting posture?), sitting too long, or nutritional deficiencies. Stress can also come from external sources in your environment (too noisy, cold, too hot, too crowded, chaos), or psychological/emotional sources such as work and family demands or financial difficulties.
- **Use sensory inputs to help with calming your body.** For example sit in a rocking chair with a lap blanket, while sipping a cup of tea. Different people will have different “favorite items”. Pay attention to what you like and try to carry it in your purse. See the *Sensorimotor Planning Worksheet* and *Discovering Your Sensory-Motor Preferences* for additional ideas to try.
- **Practice breathing deeply.** it is an easy way to control the autonomic nervous system with a voluntary action. Slow, deep diaphragmatic breathing, letting the stomach go out when you inhale, turns off the sympathetic system. My favorite breathing to use for this is Dr. Andrew Weil's *4-7-8 Breathing*. See handout.
- **Use tennis balls to massage out your muscle tension.** Apply pressure over the muscles by rolling the ball under the palm of you hand to achieve a “release.” Press hard enough to do some good, but not hard enough to irritate the knot. It should be a “good” kind of pain, which feels relaxing. You don't want to be wincing, you need to relax. You can also lie on the tennis ball to massage your hips and back. You don't need to find the precise spot, just explore” until you find the sweet spot that works for releasing the tension. Read more at: www.painscience.com/articles/tennis-ball.php
- **Develop routines in your life.** Through the use of routines, we do not have to think as hard about what to do, we just do it. Routines provide structure to our daily life, which is calming. Having a bedtime routine is great for helping to fall asleep at night. For help in developing routines, see the book “Sink Reflections” by Marla Cilley or go to her website, www.flylady.net
- **Rest as needed.** Try to get 8 hours a sleep a night. See the handout on sleep for more ideas for help in this area. Remember when you rest, you give your body time to heal. Even sitting down for a few minutes can be helpful for the body to recoup.
- **Exercise at a sensible level.** Exercise will help to “burn off” stress hormones. The sympathetic system is made to help us to move, so by exercising we give our bodies what it is wired for during stress, making it easier to relax when we are done. Do not exercise excessively or to a point of exhaustion, this does not give the body time to regenerate and rebuild.
- **Make healthy choices in eating.** The nervous system must be properly nourished to function well. Eating a diet high in sugar and refined products will not support good health. The brain

particularly needs good sources of omega 3s. Some good sources of this are: ground flaxseeds, walnuts, sardines, salmon, beef, cauliflower, brussels sprouts and eggs.

- **Drink plenty of water through the day.** Even mild dehydration can drain your energy and make you tired, turning the sympathetic system on. The Institute of Medicine determined that an adequate intake of beverages for men is roughly 13 cups and for women 9 cups. Now where is your water bottle? It should be at your side!

Take charge of your thoughts.

*As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth,
so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind.
To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again.
To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over
the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.*

- Henry David Thoreau

- **Keep your thoughts as positive as you can.** This is what Paul tells us in Phil. 4:8 “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things of of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise think on these things.” Negative emotions (worry, fear, anger, guilt) turn on the sympathetic system. Surround yourself by uplifting books, radio and other forms of media. Spend time with people that contribute to your positive state. Minimize your time with people that just are a drain on your energy (Gal 5:12 KJV).
- **Practice showing gratitude everyday.** Gratitude helps to improve one's physical and psychological health. Grateful people even sleep better and it increases mental strength. It enhances empathy and reduces feelings of wanting to seek revenge.
(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/amymorin/2014/11/23/7-scientificallly-proven-benefits-of-gratitude-that-will-motivate-you-to-give-thanks-year-round/>)
- **Practice forgiveness.** Through forgiveness, you develop in yourself compassion and stability. Not forgiving others leads to one feeling like a victim, which increases stress or leads to an increased sympathetic response. Read Colossians 3:13, Matthew 18:21-22, Luke 6:37
- **Be content.** Contentment happens when you are at peace with your life, even if the world around you is not to your liking. You choose to let God worry about the big picture and walk through your life with as much contentment and peace as you can. Phil 4:11
- **Do not compare yourself to others.** This can cause fear, jealousy and resentment. We are to follow Christ's example, not other people's example. If you knew more about others' lives, you might not want to trade places. Why make yourself anxious, comparing yourself to the wrong yardsticks? Look to God and Christ. I Peter 2:21