

HOW TO BEAT STRESS

in a high-pressure world



Timothy J. Carroll
Carroll Consultancy Group



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IN competitive environments – like business and elite sports – the outcome is the most highly prized part of any success equation. Whether it's athletic or economic success, we measure how effectively it's accomplished, rather than the effect it might have on the individual. The 'success at any price' mindset is costing high achievers dearly when weighed against peace of mind, happiness and true presence.

We often don't see the mental and emotional burnout that is too often the price of success. The cure to stress and burnout can't be found in the hyper connected world – the solution isn't a modern medical one, but rather an ancient art practised by those who have never engaged in the competitive, high-pressure world: meditation.

It's becoming a more and more popular technique to deal with the intensity of modern life. Meditation is a process whereby a person trains the mind to become still and attain a state of consciousness that promotes relaxation and many other health and energy-boosting benefits.

Meditation is both a relaxing and invigorating process. However, it's a skill that needs to be practiced, otherwise the benefits will be lost. It's recommended that you meditate 20 minutes in the morning before your day begins and 20 minutes in the evening before dinner.

This white paper offers 10 tips on how you can learn and practice meditation effectively.

What is meditation?

Meditation is the process of training the mind to become still and awake to the present moment. Also known as mindfulness, meditation offers its practitioners many benefits:

Stress relief

Studies have shown that people who meditate on a regular basis are much more able to cope with stress because it decreases muscle tension (and resulting pain) and headaches.

Better sleep

People who meditate can go into a relaxed state, twice as deep as a deep sleep. This can happen in ten minutes, compared to four to six hours when we are sleeping.

It reverses biological age

Robert Wallace at UCLA found that people who have meditated for five years or more have a biological age on average twelve years younger than their actual age. It has been proven that meditation transforms the molecular and genetic structure of the body.



It improves overall health

Although meditation is usually considered a spiritual practice, it also provides many physical health benefits, which is one of the reasons professionals in the work place practise it. Meditation can produce [lower blood pressure, enhanced immune system and more energy.](#)

Increased athleticism

Studies have found a direct correlation between meditation and the [performance of sports professionals.](#) Meditation enables athletes to control their minds, thus strengthening it and providing effective guidance to the physical body to effectively execute all its projects.

Hence, many athletes and sports professionals regularly use meditation methods in their training programs as a way of improving concentration and mental strength. Meditation also helps athletes by lowering oxygen consumption, decreasing respiratory rates, increasing blood flow, and slowing the heart rate, amongst many other benefits.

Boost overall well-being and performance

Meditation improves our ability to focus, our creativity, learning ability, and memory. Meditation also promotes neuroplasticity – that is, our ability to be agile and respond quickly to new information, learning and situations. It supports us in coming into the 'now' and staying present in the midst of dynamic activity, which is key to being able to perform at your peak.

There are also plenty of health benefits that can also be derived from meditation, such as minimization of anxiety attacks, normalization of blood pressure, increased serotonin, lower risk of chronic and lifestyle diseases.

How to meditate effectively

Meditation is deceptively simple. While there are many apps and aids to meditation that you can use, ultimately, the key is simplicity and presence.

Here are the 5 basic steps to follow in meditation:



Find an appropriate time and place

Although meditation can be done anywhere, it will help if you find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed for at least fifteen minutes or longer.



Assume the right position

Prepare to meditate by sitting down, relaxing, and resting your hands on your lap. You can sit on the floor cross-legged with the support of a meditation cushion, or on any chair with your feet resting on the ground. (Note: it is not necessary to force yourself into a lotus position if you find it uncomfortable.) Regardless of how you sit, it is important to sit comfortably and up straight; don't slouch.



Breathe slowly and deeply

Close your eyes softly. Begin by taking a few slow and deep breaths – inhaling with your nose and exhaling from your nose. Don't force your breathing; let it come naturally. The first few intakes of air are likely to be shallow, but as you allow more air to fill your lungs each time, your breath will gradually become deeper and fuller. Take as long as you need to breathe slowly and deeply.



Be aware

When you are breathing deeply, you will begin to feel calmer. Now, focus your attention on your breathing. Be aware of each breath that you take in through your nose. Be mindful of each breath that you exhale through your nose.

Continue focusing on your breaths for as long as you like. If you find your attention straying away from your breath, just gently bring it back. It may happen many times: don't be disheartened. What's important is to realize that you have wandered and bring your attention back to where it should be. As you develop greater focus power, you will find it easier to concentrate.



Ending the session

When you are ready to end the session, open your eyes and stand up slowly. Stretch yourself and extend your increased awareness to your next activities.

It's recommended to meditate 20 minutes in the morning before your day begins and 20 minutes in the evening before dinner. However, even a few minutes a day will start to be beneficial.

Case study: How learning to be present impacts everything aspect of life and work



I started executive coaching with a VP from a multi-national corporation and could quickly see that she had problems focusing and being present. This impacted her productivity in her role and trust between her and her colleagues as well as her confidence in herself. I introduced three concepts to her to help her come into balance.

1. The practice of meditation, or taking the time to just be, to release stress from the mind and body. This trained her mind to be still, present and focused.
2. The practice of being present with people, to eliminate distractions mentally and externally with the goal of creating trust and confidence within herself and with others.
3. The practice of listening proactively without thinking of how to respond. To trust her gut feeling and respond in the moment.

Quickly she started to see, hear and feel the benefits of being in the here and now. People were giving her feedback on how she had changed; she felt more joy and fulfilment in her life, her relationships improved not just at work but in her life and she got more done in less time.

At the end of the coaching over a 6-month period she wrote that learning to be present had the greatest impact on her as a leader and person.

Going Deeper: The secrets of successful meditators

The physical aspect of meditation is actually easy to follow but if you are to reap greater benefits from it, you have to go even deeper.

Here are some tips on how you can meditate effectively:

Relax

It may not be easy to relax in an instant especially when you are engaged in other activities immediately prior to your meditation session. However, you can help yourself relax and get you into the mood to meditate by listening to light, soothing music, or taking a warm bath. Listening to binaural beats can be a good technique as well.

Let go of expectations

Do not look for spiritual experiences usually associated with meditating such as feeling calm and peaceful. Meditation can be unpredictable and may produce different feelings and experiences. Accept them as they arise.

Get adequate sleep

Make sure you had an adequate sleep before attempting to do meditation. It is difficult to make much progress in your meditation if you are prone to falling asleep during the session.

Meditate in an environment that's conducive to peace

Choose peaceful surroundings, avoiding ambient noise as much as possible. A cool room with incense or dim lighting can help you create a ritual around meditation and help you get in the right frame of mind.

Avoid eating a heavy meal before meditating

A heavy meal induces drowsiness since more blood flow is required for digestion, so it's not optimal for meditation.

Avoid meditating on an empty stomach

On the other end of the spectrum, feeling hungry may tempt you to cut short your sitting time, or distract you further from your meditation.

Set a time to meditate

Set aside a special time and space to meditate. Clear your mind of the various activities that may pre-occupy your mind. Be a 100% in the present moment. Be neither in the past nor the future. There is always time for those when the session is over, so forget them for the present.

Don't make it too hard

Although meditation requires discipline in calming the mind, it is not meant to be a painful and complicated exercise. To meditate effectively, it is not necessary to follow strict regimes such as sitting on bare wooden floors or meditating for hours. Forcing yourself to do so may cause you to give up even before you start.

Make the experience pleasant. Use a cushion if that will make you comfortable. However, try your best to maintain your posture by keeping your back straight.

Maintain your focus

To stop the mind from wandering, focus on your own breathing. In fact, breath meditation can be beneficial because you tend to breathe slowly and deeply which helps relax your heart and lowers blood pressure.

Avoid self-judgment

As you meditate, your mind may wander and that is normal because the mind is used to keeping busy with thoughts. By meditating, you give your busy mind a break and bring your attention back to your breath and continue to sit. However, don't beat yourself up if you lose focus – it's the act of returning to the present that promotes mindfulness.



Implementing these steps are easy, what is hard is to change mindsets. If you encounter stumbling blocks in meditating successfully, remember that there is no failure, only feedback.

To truly integrate meditation as part of your daily routine and reap the benefits that effective meditation can bring, click here to find out about my [meditation for business executives](#) program

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Timothy can hardly remember a time when leadership and performance weren't important themes in life. The son of an entrepreneur, he was raised in an environment where leadership values were prized, and no one was surprised when, later in life, Timothy started a successful business of his own. An avid sportsman from childhood, Timothy mastered Barefoot Waterskiing and was chosen at just 16 years old to represent New Zealand. He later went on to compete at four World Championships. By his early 20s, Timothy had already started fashioning his own philosophy of leadership as a way of being – something that stems not from external forces, but from personal patterns of thought and behaviour.

After working in the personal/professional development industry in Australia and studying cognitive behavioural sciences and self-actualizing psychology, Timothy founded the Carroll Consultancy Group. Today, he is a recognized expert in organisational and behavioural change, and has helped some of Europe's most successful organisations dramatically develop their people and performance. In addition to corporate clients such as Schneider Electric Group, KAEFER Group, Yellow Pages and Philips Lighting, Timothy has worked with PGA of Sweden and the Swedish Golf Federation and continued to coach a number of elite athletes. In 2008, he served as performance coach for a Swedish equestrian eventing rider at the Beijing Olympics.

Timothy believes you should never stop learning, and he has continually sought out the best in the world to learn from. He has devoted his career to sharing his insights with people who aspire to lead in the corporate world and the world of sports. Timothy's genuineness, experience, passion for growth and "Down Under" personality make him a natural and comfortable person to work with.

