

How to train your mind to handle stressful situations



**Calm mind brings inner strength
and self-confidence, so that's
very important for good health.**

Dalai Lama

A Yoga master once said that the mind can be like a drunk monkey; a drunk monkey that is in a cage swinging wildly from bar to bar; a drunk monkey that is upset because it has been bitten by a scorpion.

At times the mind seems to speed out of control. It does this when it is worried and is attempting to look at all possibilities while it tries to find solutions. The mind can also spin because everything around us is happening at such a fast pace. Sometimes the mind keeps racing out of habit because it has never been taught to slow down.

We spend so much time multi-tasking that this becomes the norm. When there is a moment to unwind, the mind does not know how to slow down on command. Concentration becomes an effort and the day is spent like a silver ball in a perpetual pin ball machine until exhaustion takes over at the end of the day.

Does the mind seem to be in control or is the mind a tool that can be used as is necessary?



Do you ever feel that you are stuck in your head and can't unwind? When you try to relax or go to sleep, is your mind still going and going on everything from trivial matters to the state of the world?

How do we slow down the mind? Even just asking the mind to slow down may result in discomfort at first.

Most strategies that can relax the mind involve some form of concentration. In earlier times, group chanting to rhythmic drums helped detach the mind from the every day events. Rock and roll may be a derivative of this practice. Praying, chanting and/or singing individually or in a group help bring calmness to the mind. The words or sounds may be irrelevant.



Meditation involves placing the awareness of the mind onto a sound such as 'om' or a word such as 'peace'. This is done while gently ignoring all other thoughts and competing stimuli. If awareness wanders off then the mind is reminded to focus back on the sound of

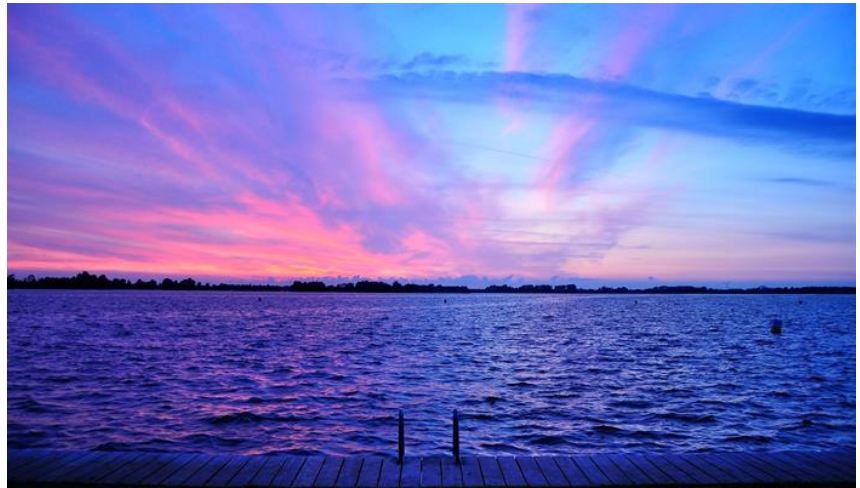
choice. This sound has been called a mantra. Instead of a sound, meditation can also been done by concentrating on the flame of a candle or the flow of the breath. Meditation can be very difficult at first and is not for everyone.

Another word to describe this experience is the word Zen. In Zen you are "one" with your actions. Your mind is still.

A western archery competitor will look at the target and calculate how many points he needs to win. A Zen practitioner will empty the mind and focus only on the target as the arrow is unleashed.

In these types of experiences, the action itself becomes the object of meditation. By focusing the mind in the here and now of an activity, the mind slows down and relaxation ensues.

Even if your day is very busy and speedy, any activity can be used as a respite to slow down. Washing dishes can become a brief meditation instead of something to get over as quickly as possible. When we stop at a red light our mind is racing “Come on..hurry up..let.s go”. The stomach is churning...waiting for the seconds to pass by and the light to change. Instead take the thirty seconds or so to look around you and see what the eye can find that is appealing. Or simply breathe as deeply as you can while you have the chance.



For those of us who live in these times – where economic adversity continues to be the order of the day, where extremism simmers in various quarters from Al-Qaida to Yemen, to Plains, Georgia where an effigy of President Trump was found hanging recently, to a massive growth in domestic violence, to an upsurge in graphic violence on our television screens to the fact that our young children are watching music videos which would have been banned as pornographic fifteen years ago – there is an extraordinary onus on us to stay, or become, calm.

Only mental calm, which leads to clarity of mind, will move you and everyone towards that even keel where we can all benefit from the abundance that this life offers us. It doesn't just offer abundance to some of us, we're all entitled to our share – and the best way to achieve that is through the mental calm that is scientifically proved to engender inner peace and, as a result, success.

Calm works wonders. If we stop to reflect, we all know that we are at our best when we are calm – and at our worst when react hot-headedly. We all know that calm leads to greater effectiveness.



Generally the belief is that we all know the latest bit of bad news or celebrity gossip and that none of us has a clue as to what the really important, ground-breaking news might be. If we all understood the importance of calm, this world would change – it's not some fairytale or

wishful thinking. It is proven experimentally and it is proven by cutting edge quantum physics – energy evokes a response from energy – my energy from yours and vice versa.

Unfortunately, however, most of us, so-called normal people, invest their energies in all the wrong places, having their priorities all wrong, constantly striving for what some might call the “American Dream” of achievement and wealth. For some that dream has become a nightmare as a result of a crisis brought about by the exact opposite of calm minds. Unfortunately, for many scrambling for “success” the words achievement and wealth, go together. But what about the wealth of a calm mind, a soul at peace, happy loving relationships and good health? What about having lots of time to do what really turns you on? What about helping those around you rather than just helping yourself?

The extraordinary thing is that if you invest your energy in these directions, if you cultivate your innate ability to be calm and centred, then that “American Dream” will look after itself. If you put the quality of your life at the top of your list of priorities, everything else falls into place – even the wealth bit – many books provide us with many examples of it and science tells us that we can earn exponential returns on a sensible investment of our energy. In order to put the quality of your life first, you need only have one priority. Your priority for today – and every day – should be to ensure that you’re in a clear and calm state of mind, focused on what you’re supposed to be doing in the here and now, totally immersed in the present moment. Having invested your energy wisely in this fashion, everything else will follow, as surely as night follows day.

Being in a hurry all the time drains your energy. Your work and routine life make you feel overwhelmed. Getting caught up in things beyond your control stresses you out...

There are several techniques that have proven to be efficient:

If you’d like to stay calm and cool in stressful situations, put the following 8 steps into practice:

1. Breathe

The next time you’re faced with a stressful situation perform the following steps:

- Take five deep breaths in and out (your belly should come forward with each inhale).

- Imagine all that stress leaving your body with each exhale.
- Smile. Fake it if you have to. It's pretty hard to stay grumpy with a goofy grin on your face.

Feel free to repeat the above steps every few hours at work or home if you need to.

2. Loosen up

After your breathing session, perform a quick body scan to identify any areas that are tight or tense. Clenched jaw? Rounded shoulders? Anything else that isn't at ease?

Gently touch or massage any of your body parts that are under tension to encourage total relaxation. It might help to imagine you're in a place that calms you: a beach, hot tub, or nature trail, for example.

3. Chew slowly

Slow down at the dinner table if you want to learn to be patient and lose weight. Shoveling your food down as fast as you can is a surefire way to eat more than you need to (and find yourself with a bellyache).

Be a mindful eater who pays attention to the taste, texture, and aroma of every dish. Chew slowly while you try to guess all of the ingredients that were used to prepare your dish.

Chewing slowly will also reduce those dreadful late-night cravings that sneak up on you after work.

4. Let go

Cliche as it sounds, it's very effective.

The thing that seems like the end of the world right now?

It's not. Promise.

Stressing and worrying about the situation you're in won't do any good because you're already in it, so just let it go.

Letting go isn't easy, so here's a guide to help you:

5. Enjoy the journey

Focusing on the end result can quickly become exhausting. Chasing a bold, audacious goal that's going to require a lot of time and patience? Split it into several mini-goals so you'll have several causes for celebration.

Stop focusing on the negative thoughts. Giving yourself consistent positive feedback will help you grow patience, stay encouraged, and find more joy in the process of achieving your goals.

6. Look at the big picture

The next time you find your stress level skyrocketing, take a deep breath, and ask yourself:

Will this matter to me...

- Next week?
- Next month?
- Next year?
- In 10 years?

Hint: No, it won't.

I bet most of the stuff that stresses you wouldn't matter the next week, maybe not even the next day.

Stop agonizing over things you can't control because you're only hurting yourself.

7. Stop demanding perfection of yourself

You're not perfect and that's okay. Show me a person who claims to be perfect and I'll show you a dirty liar.

Demanding perfection of yourself (or anybody else) will only stress you out because it just isn't possible.

8. Practice patience every day

Below are a few easy ways you can practice patience every day, increasing your ability to remain calm and cool in times of stress:

- The next time you go to the grocery store, get in the longest line.
- Instead of going through the drive-thru at your bank, go inside.

- Take a long walk through a secluded park or trail.

The Art of Calm

Practical and powerful ways to bring peace to your day that will eventually train your mind to be calm in stressful situations.

Whether you suffer from occasional anxiety, generalized anxiety, or its more cumbersome cousin, social anxiety, the following strategy will help get you on the other side of calm when practiced regularly.

1. Develop a morning success ritual.

How we begin each day sets the tone for the rest of the day. Wake up 30-60 minutes earlier than usual to focus on personal development. This could include exercise, meditation, reading self-help books or articles, yoga, or simply letting go. The point is not to catch up on household chores or email, but to focus on improving your psychological insight. Make sure your alarm clock is away from your bed and have a glass of water ready to replenish your brain and body. If you're not a morning person, this will be tough in the beginning, but after a month or so, this practice will come naturally.

2. Practice slow, deep breathing.

I like the 4-4-4: Inhale for a count of four, hold for a count of four, and exhale for a count of four. Do this at least three times in succession, and practice when calm, too. Attention to calming breath is the first line of defense when you feel panic coming on.

3. Focus on solutions and not on problems.

4. Check your thoughts.

Organized thoughts contribute to an organized life. Train your brain to be decisive, methodical, and sound. Would you employ a haphazard worker who only showed up to the gig when she felt like it? *Exactly*. Fire unnecessary and unwelcome emotions, just as you would a slacker employee in your company.

Are you aware of counterproductive emotions such as negativity, fear, jealousy or self-loathing? Here's a free downloadable activity to practice whenever automatic and negative thoughts threaten your

peace of mind.

5. Manage your emotional regulation.

The key is to know your triggers and to adjust accordingly. For example, if traffic gets your blood boiling, you'll want to slow your physiological responses to behind-the-wheel stress. Instead of succumbing to the impulsive (and potentially dangerous) reaction of road rage, come up with healthy coping strategies such as driving slower, playing calming music, listening to an enjoyable podcast, or sipping a cool beverage. Pay attention to your physical triggers, and remember you can practice deep-breathing anytime, anywhere.



6. Stop waiting and start living.

Face it: The perfect time, the ideal weight, or the right amount in the bank account does not exist. Make time for fun and adventure now.

7. Choose a personality role model.

This could be a historic figure or someone you know. Asking "*What would so-and-so do in this situation?*" can get you back on track.

8. Drink more water.

Not only does water rehydrate and replenish, it can be used as a distraction tool when your emotional thermometer runs high.

9. Take a break.

This could be a mid-afternoon nap, a time-out from environmental stimulation, or most importantly, technology.



10. Designate a schedule for checking email.

For example, 9:00 a.m., noon, and 5:00 p.m. I suggest no more than three times per day. Just because everyone else is in line for the commuter train, the 3:00 p.m. green tea at Starbucks, or the grocery check-out is bowed in silent prayer to the mobile device, doesn't mean you have to. Be a renegade and focus on your surroundings. You just might make someone's day with your effervescent smile and intentional eye contact.

11. Boost productivity with the 25/5 Rule.

Work continuously for 25 minutes, then take a five-minute break. Set the egg timer accordingly. After three consecutive sessions, take a 30-minute break. Repeat. Bonus points if you introduce this to the kids' study routine.

12. Let go often.

13. Smile more.

14. Consciously connect.

Schedule in-person time with others at least twice a week. We're wired to connect. Period.

15. Appreciate what you have.

We're so focused on the end goal that we forget about the small triumphs along the way. And remember what your mom used to say: "Someone else is thankful for less than what you have."

16. Switch up your responsive routine.

If you know the monthly family dinner inevitably includes too much alcohol, bickering, and reverting back to childhood sibling rivalry, *do differently*. Acting in the same manner and expecting different results is akin to believing your teen will wake up early tomorrow morning to wash last night's dinner dishes and then prepare a delicious family breakfast...plus cleanup.

17. Take advantage of therapy.

One of the beauties of being in treatment is you have 50 minutes of designated time every week to focus on personal development. This is your "me" time -- use it wisely.

18. Choose simplicity.

Talk less, buy less, eat less, stress less.

19. Resist the urge to regret your DNA, childhood, weight, body type, choice of spouse/partner/vocation, etc.

It is what it is, or *was*. Leave the past where it belongs: behind you. Focus on today instead. Mindfulness is where it's at.

Picasso didn't wake up one morning and paint the masterpiece Guernica. Conversely, you didn't become nervous, hyper-vigilant and stressed out overnight. Take it slow. Time is your friend, and not something to race against or fear. Calm can be yours when you treat it as an art to be practiced, contemplated, and honed each and every day.



Final thoughts

Staying calm in stressful situations is possible, all you need is some daily practice.

Taking deep breaths and eat mindfully are some simple ways to train your brain to be more patient. But changing the way you think of a situation and staying positive are most important in keeping cool whenever you feel overwhelmed and stressful.