

Stress, Tips and Tricks

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ABSTRACT

Stress appears to be an integral part of the life of a statistical programmer. So what can we change to reduce our stress to manageable levels?

There are a great number of techniques to overcome stress. Most of them can be implemented in everyday life. This paper shows a series of stress busting methods that can easily be incorporated into daily working life. Detailed is how to fit them into the day, what you can do for long term effect as well as short term benefit.

Most are quite fun to do. So change your life now!

INTRODUCTION

Stress is becoming a fact of life for a statistical programmer. Therefore combating stress needs to be incorporated into our daily routines. There are many different ways of combating stress. Described here are not only proven techniques used by statistical programmers but also ideas of how to incorporate them into your daily life. For that is the way to really get your stress levels down bring- about a permanent change to your daily routine.

ORDER THE DAY

BEGINNING THE DAY

At the beginning of the day take fifteen minutes out before. Sit down and quietly make a list of what tasks you are going to complete by the end of the working day. Make sure it is realistic. It should not be a challenge but a list of what you can really achieve. Too often we try to do too much and then forget what is actually possible. This creates a situation where we think we are not successful enough and that creates stress. Kill the stress by planning and realizing what are realistic expectations for yourself.

PLAN YOUR MEETINGS

Similarly at the beginning of the day look at what meetings you have. Take a few minutes to consider each meeting in turn. What do you want to get out of each meeting? This planning of meetings will enhance your ability to get a successful outcome and will mean you get a great deal more out of your day, hence reducing your stress.

LUNCH TIME

Constantly having the mind working on the task at hand is not only tiring, it decreases in performance and adds to the stress. So make sure you take your lunch break. Consider your lunch break as a big stress buster and make the most of it. Lunch with a friend. Just make sure you do not talk about work. Go for a walk in fresh air if you can. Take a book with you. Change what is happening in your mind for a short while and see how refreshed you will return to work.

When returning after lunch, look at the list of tasks you have to do. Is there anything short that can be accomplished in a few minutes. Take the time to quickly do a few of these tasks. It will have little effect on any major tasks you wish to complete but will reduce your task list and therefore your stress.

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Friday afternoon is also a good time to tackle tasks that have not had any priority recently. The weekend is approaching and the atmosphere is more relaxed, normal tasks can be put aside to tackle tasks that do not have such high priority. Again, here is an opportunity to reduce stress by making use of particular moments in the week to clear the task list.

END OF THE DAY

The end of the working day is the time when the majority of the stress reducing techniques come into their own. Here the goal of the exercises is always the same. Stop thinking about work. If you can stop thinking about work then your chances of having a stress free evening are high. If you have a stress free evening you are able to have a good nights sleep, enabling you to better function through the following days work.

So after finishing work the goal is to completely stop thinking about work as fast as possible.

AFORE YOU GO- TASK LIST.

Stop work fifteen minutes early. Write down all the things which are 'buzzing' around your head. Many of these may be tasks or simple reminders of things to remember. Note them down in a formal way. If you want, turn this into a 'Todo' list. The important thing here is that the list made at the end of the day is not forgotten, that you will take it up at the beginning of the next day's work. It might well be that at the beginning of the next day you look at the list and find several of the items are quite trivial. This does not matter, the most important thing is that at the end of the day you are no longer thinking about work.

AFORE YOU GO- EXAMINE WHAT YOU HAVE ACHIEVED.

Before you leave work, examine what you have achieved today.

Did you manage to complete what you set out to do? If so, congratulate yourself!

If you have not achieved what you set out to do then- forgive yourself. No one works 100% perfectly all the time, not even you, so accept the fact that you are human and forgive yourself for not being perfect.

THE TREASURE CHEST

So you leave the office and are travelling home and still do not have your mind clear of work.

A while ago I started a new job as a manager. Instead of having say twenty things on my mind, I now had fifty things on my mind. After a few months I was having a conversation with an elderly programmer. I had already known her for many years and she was now retired and working as a contractor. She asked me what I was doing to cope with the stress. I said that at the end of the day, on the train home from work, I shut my eyes and imagined a treasure chest. Into this treasure chest I let fly all my thoughts about work. Once I have finished then I imagine the lid of the chest closing, the thoughts safely locked inside. My colleague turned round to me and replied, "But make sure your treasure chest is located in your office!"

It is a simple mind game but it is very efficient at emptying the mind of all the unwanted thoughts about work. It can be done on the way home in the train, on the bus or the tram. If you take the car to work then do it as soon as you sit in the car, before you set off for home.

Important is to do it regularly and at a fixed point in the daily schedule.

CALL YOURSELF!

So you have written everything in your mind at the end of the day into your Todo list for the next day and cast the remaining thoughts onto the Treasure chest in you office. You go out for the evening and suddenly remember something important for work. You need to get it out of your mind and to do that it needs to go to a safe place. What to do? Why not simply telephone your office number and leave a voicemail for yourself. Or send an email to your work email address. The contents can be quite simple, you only need a few key words. Once done and your thoughts are in a safe place, your mind can be at ease again.

ON REALLY BAD DAYS

TALK IT OVER WITH A FRIEND.

If things are really bad and you cannot get down from your mountain of stress, then talk it over with a friend. Besst to warn them before hand that you are stressed up and need to get things off your chest, so they do not get stressed up themselves from your feedback of the days events.

CHOPWOOD.

One of the best ways of removing stubborn stress is the constructive violent behavior otherwise known as chopping wood! There is nothing quite like taking a large axe and using it to smash some sturdy wooden logs into matchsticks. Half an hour of this exercise is enough to cure even the most fixed stressful moments. Availability of wood to chop is different in different countries of course but there could be some similar type of task or exercise which you could do for yourself or for a neighbor. The keys here are it should take physical strength, be constructive (i.e. useful) in the end result but violent in the doing.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

One of the big stress reduction techniques is regular exercise, The key here is to build it in to the daily routine. Always do it at a certain time, lunchtime or directly at the end of the day before going home.

CALMING SPORTS.

There are certain sports, which have a very calming effect on the Mind. Two of them are archery and target shooting. These are especially good at reducing stress. For example, picture archery. You put an arrow to the bow, pull the string and aim. The bow is strong though and you have to keep the arms steady while you aim. While you are aiming the body has to be perfectly still but the mind has to have peek concentration, to hold the body in position and tp take aim. It is this combination of total concentration and stillness, which is the feature of these sports which make them very good at stopping stress.

GET A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.

Getting out of stress can often be achieved by getting a different perspective on matters. Here are two ways of achieving that.

THE HELICOPTER

One way to really work up your stress is to say the completely wrong thing at the wrong time. This is very easy to do as you are already worked up and not at your best. There is a very effective way of stopping this from happening. When you feel that you are worked up about something and about to say the wrong thing, you imagine you are in a helicopter hovering just above your head. So you are taking a birds eye perspective on yourself and are no longer looking at the world from your head. This disconnected viewpoint makes it very easy to take a step back and stop yourself from saying something stupid. This needs practice though, you need to be already able to do the Helicopter exercise before the time you actually must use it.

THE HAKALAU.

The Hakalau is a technique which comes from Hawaii. The object of it is to get you out of the thoughts in your head, and into the present moment. It is very simple and can be done almost anywhere.

You stare at a spot straight ahead of you preferably not in the immediate vicinity. You stare at that spot for the whole exercise. As you begin, you continue staring at the point but then become aware of the periphery vision, everything that is happening to your left and right. You keep staring at the spot and being aware of everything to the left and right but also expand your awareness so you take in everything above your head and underneath your feet. At this moment you are aware of everything in front of you, at your sides and above and below. Now take in everything behind you. You cannot see it but you can become aware of it. Do you know what is there before you sat down? Can you hear anything from behind you.

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Once you have a complete three hundred and sixty degree awareness, you keep it for as long as possible. It takes concentration. While you are busy concentrating on the awareness of everything that is around you, you are no longer focusing on your stress.

FURTHER HELP.

RECORD GOOD IDEAS!

If your work is getting to be stressful then you need good ideas. Ideas come at the most inconvenient of moments but that does not mean they are not good ideas. The secret here is to always carry some type of notebook around with you or some sort of device where you can quickly jot down some meaningful notes.

UNHEALTHY STRESSFLOW.

It is very easy at peak moments to forget to do the stress reduction activities. You are working too much, your stress increases, so you reduce your stress reducing activities to catch up on the work. Now you are working too much, so your stress increases, etc. You are now in a perfect circle of unhealthy activities. So in stressful circumstances, never give up your stress reducing habits.

CONCLUSIONS.

If stress is a part of your life then stress-reducing activities need to be a part of every day working life as well. If you can make all these tips and tricks part of your regular routine, you can drop your stress down to a manageable amount, even at times of peak activity.

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RECOMMENDED READING

Further light reading on stress reducing techniques.

THE INDEPENDENT: RELAX IN STYLE, 10 WAYS TO BEAT STRESS

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-wellbeing/healthy-living/relax-in-style-10-ways-to-beat-stress-859940.html>

STERN MAGAZIN: SPORTLER STECKEN STRESS BESSER WEG

<http://www.stern.de/wissen/mensch/fitness-sportler-stecken-stress-besser-weg-609380.html>

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