

Recipe for a Substantial Stress Soup

Ingredients:

Many bleak working hours, frequent interference of work and leisure, self-perception as a victim, constant focus on stress, lack of exercise, unbalanced diet, comparisons with others, perfectionism, destructive environments

Preparation:

The basis for the substantial stress soup is a joyless employment that is marked with many hours of overtime and a poor working atmosphere. Mix it well with your leisure and vacation time by constantly checking your business e-mails and responding business calls at your mobile phone. Now add an ample dish of perceiving yourself as the situation's victim and season it with a constant focus on the stress you are exposed to. Flavour this with high TV consumption in the evening and a lack of exercise. Add an extra shot of unhealthy eating and drinking habits to complete the dish. Excessive perfectionism and frequent comparisons with others give a special taste to your stress soup. To add the optimal zest to your dish, it is recommended to get roped into many assignments in your private life and spend much time in environments where people talk about each other and not with each other.

Joking apart, perhaps you really feel highly burdened and do not feel like laughing at all. Stress is a significant phenomenon of our society and studies have shown that even children, teenagers, and students may be affected.

If you are caught in the stress trap, in my opinion, the first important step is to stop your negative thoughts. As scientifically proven, our brain cannot differ between imagination and reality which is used by professional sportsmen in their mental training. If you continuously focus on the stress you are exposed to and repeatedly talk about this in your personal environment, you keep visualizing the actual stress situation in your brain which is sufficient to actually produce physical stress symptoms. Thus you do not give your mind and body the chance to come to a rest, you waste energy, and hardly have the opportunity to relax, release the situation, and look at it from a different perspective.

Often we can hardly change anything concerning the circumstances of a stress situation, provided that we do not come to the decision to quit our job and look for a totally different solution. Least of all we can change other persons or their behaviour. We could start with ourselves and change our ways: What could I change to make my work more fun? How could I improve my self-organisation? How could I contribute to improving the working atmosphere? Could I ask somebody for help or do I have to learn to say 'No' in an appropriate way at certain occasions? How could I relax and relief my stress from time to time? How could I control the physical symptoms of stress?

We have to become aware what stress does with our body: Stress hormones are released with the effect that our pulse is quickened, our muscles are well supplied with blood, our immune system is inhibited, and our digestive system is slowed down. Our body is prepared for a heavy physical

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exertion such as flight or fight. If stress becomes a permanent condition and the stress hormones are not reduced e.g. by physical exercise, this may lead to diseases such as high blood pressure, heart rhythm and digestive disturbances.

Physical training reduces the risk for such diseases and further leads to the release of 'happiness hormones' such as serotonin. Even if sometimes it is difficult to conquer your weaker self, you might start with small steps and intensify your exercise gradually. The reasoning of 'having no time for sport' is mainly a negative pattern we use to obstacle ourselves – your health has to be given the highest priority and if you are not prepared to invest any time now, you will probably have to spend much time in the doctor's waiting room at some day.

What is the effect of watching TV every evening on a stressed person? In addition to the known lack of exercise and its usual consequences, there is another issue. Many of us keep watching shows in which all catastrophes and disasters in the world are broadcasted; we witness murders and gaze at bodies that are shown in all grim details. Alternatively, we become upset following talk shows in which the EU Greece crisis or the current refugee problem is debated. Even if we do not notice immediately, this further causes stress with physical and mental effects. Certainly, it is important to keep up-to-date, nevertheless, we should keep an eye on our current stress level. At times, some extra hours of sleep, a nice walk in the evening or a pleasant relaxation exercise are more beneficial than watching TV.

To make things worse, we are often conditioned to relax or relief frustration by unhealthy eating or drinking habits. If the digestive system is slowed down by permanent stress, it cannot compensate which may lead to chronic digestive disorders and obesity. Again this results in tiredness and a lack of exercise.

Mental training can help to leave such a downward spiral and reach the decision for a different life!

Perhaps you are doing many things right with regard to your eating habits and sports, however, you place stress on yourself in a different way. Perfectionism and constant comparisons with others may aggravate your stress level in your private life. Allow yourself and your family members to make mistakes every once in a while and abandon the concept of perfectionism. This leads to a lighter and more relaxed feeling in your life.

Verify if you move within a supporting or a destructive environment in your private life. If you notice that you spend your leisure time with persons who rather talk about than with others, who constantly think they get the short end of the stick or draw energy from you in another way, protect yourself and stay away. Definitely, private commitment is often worthy of praise, however, it should correspond to your own targets or ideals and should be a pleasure in the end.

I wish that my tips will help you to avoid such a stress soup in the future and that you will be able to add an extra topping of cream to your self-stirred 'life soup' in the future!

TIP:

If you notice that your stress soup is just about to come to the boil, you can quickly calm down by the following short exercise e.g. in your lunch break:

- Make sure that you will not be disturbed in the next five minutes. Close the door of your room and switch off your telephone.
- Make yourself comfortable e.g. in your office chair and focus a point in the distance of approximately 10-20m for a while (e.g. a plant which you see looking out of your window).
- At some point you will notice that you are prepared to close your eyes.
- Focus your breath for a while. You will feel how your chest is lifting and lowering while you are in- and exhaling.
- Now focus on your heartbeat. You could also place a hand on your heart and feel your heartbeat, if you find it easier this way.
- Imagine that you inhale energy into your heart and exhale through the solar plexus (point below your chest close to the pit of the stomach). Continue inhaling relaxing energy into your heart and exhaling all strain through the solar plexus for some minutes.
- Open your eyes and stretch out a bit. Definitely you will feel much more relaxed now and you will have regained strength to tackle your tasks!

Enjoy the exercise!

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