Toogood Nutrition

How To Reduce Stress

THE REDUCE YOUR STRESS PROGRAM

Stress holds us back from being the best we can be. This 2-week habit coaching program encourages you to reduce your stress by showing you the most effective ways of controlling it in all areas of your life.

DAY 0 - INTRODUCTION OF HABIT (SUNDAY)

Habit Challenge: Reduce your stress

For the next two weeks, I challenge you to reduce your stress.

A common theme I see amongst those with high stress levels is a lack of results when trying to change their body. Stress holds us back from being the best that we can be.

In a very similar way to poor sleep, it can put the brakes on progress, even if training and nutrition are spot-on. Of course, we all suffer stress at some point in our lives. We are involved in regular stressful life situations, including exhausting work schedules.

Stress is a burden on the body, and if it becomes chronically elevated and prolonged, we can end up massively fatigued and run down. That's when it can put a halt to any body composition changes. What we don't always realise is the potential damage stress is doing to the inside of our bodies and how it affects our health.

How can I personalise this habit?

Assess the stressful areas of your life. Family, friends, career and money issues can all be stressful issues at times, and it's important to manage these as much as possible. Find the root cause(s) of stress and then put a simple daily habit into place to reduce, manage or eliminate them.

I highly recommend practicing the art of daily meditation for this habit. It is one of the most effective ways at reducing overall daily stress levels.

Other habits could be taking more regular breaks at work, or getting more exercise in daily, or socialising more with friends and family.

Remember to relax, laugh, sleep and have sex as much as possible, as these reduce stress levels in the body. Reduce the main stressors in your lifestyle and remember not to take life too seriously all the time.

How can I make this habit easy?

The first step is to scale the habit to something you are 90-100% confident you can do for 6 days of the week. Have one day off per week from completing the habit.

What can I piggyback off of?

I highly recommend finding a trigger in the time you choose to meditate. I would however recommend you start meditating in the mornings Why? Because if it's later in the day, it can usually get pushed back when other things get in the way. Choose a trigger that's already in your daily routine that you're going to tie the habit to. Examples: waking up, drinking your first cup of coffee, eating breakfast, brushing teeth, showering, using bathroom in the morning, opening your computer for the first time, arriving at work.

TO DO: Create your personal version of the habit to commit to this challenge!

Here's a template:

I am 90-100% confident that I will [insert habit] for 6 days a week after I [insert what you're going to piggyback off of].

Here's an example:

I am 90-100% confident that I will complete 2 minutes of meditation for 6 days a week after I eat my breakfast.

P.S. Don't worry about making this perfect. We'll help you adjust.

DAY 1 – START OF HABIT REVIEW (MONDAY)

How was Day 1? Did you complete a personalised version of the habit?

Today, after completing your habit for the first time, I want you to answer these two questions:

1. What did I do well today?
2. What did I learn today?

These questions are so important that I want you to reflect on them every day.

The truth is, the most overlooked factor in building new habits is bridging the gap between what you want to do and the behaviour that you're trying to make automatic.

You've got to close the loop between your intention and your behaviour, and it's as simple as answering these two questions.

So here they are for you again:

1. What did I do well today?
2. What did I learn today?

DAY 2 – DAILY LESSON TO REINFORCE HABIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (TUESDAY)

The meditation plan:

1. Find a quiet spot. Sometimes early morning is best, before others in your house might be awake. Others for example might find a spot in a park or on the beach on their lunch break. It really doesn't matter where — as long as you can sit without being bothered for a couple
m i nutes.

2. Sit comfortably. I personally like to lie on my bed, but anything that you find comfortable will do. You can for example place a pillow on the floor and rest your back against the wall or find a suitable chair.

3. Start with just 2 minutes. This is a really important point. You'll find it much easier to start this way, and forming a habit with a small start like this is a method much more likely to succeed. Try expanding it to 5 minutes if you can do the 2-minute meditation for 7 straight days, then 7 minutes if you can do it for 14 straight days, then 10 minutes if you can stick to it for 21 straight days, and 15 if you can do a full month. But don't increase your meditation time unless you didn't miss a day the previous week.

4. Focus on your body and breath. First notice your body — what position are you in? Are your ears, shoulders and hips aligned? Now check in with your breath. As you breathe in, follow your breath in through your nostrils, then into your throat, then into your lungs and belly. Sit straight, keep your eyes open but looking at the ground and with a soft focus. If you want to close your eyes, that's fine. As you breathe out, follow your breath out back into the world. If it helps, count … one breath in, two breath out, three breath in, four breath out … when you get to 10, start over. If you lose track, start over. If you find your mind wandering (and you will), just pay attention to your mind wandering, then bring it gently back to your breath. Repeat this process for the two minutes you meditate. You won't be very good at it at first, most likely, but you'll get better with practice.

And that's it. It's a very simple practice, but it's a great way to form the meditation habit and then experience all the benefit it brings. We will get to some more advanced stuff along the way

DAY 3 – DAILY LESSON TO REINFORCE HABIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (WEDNESDAY)

It's fair to assume you currently have some stress in your life. It's important to know what we can do nutritionally to support our health and reduce negative impacts from stress. I'll outline some of the key points to consider below:

Eat small and often

In times of stress your body is burning through more carbohydrates for energy. It's therefore common for those under stress to experience low blood sugar levels, as demand for glucose is higher.

This can result in hypoglycaemia, or at the very least, to increased cravings for sugar. Those with high stress levels are typically on a constant blood sugar rollercoaster and always looking for their next sugar fix. On top of this, they rely on stimulants such as coffee and sodas to see them throughout the day.

These uncontrollable food urges are likely to cause overeating, as the body constantly strives for homeostasis to balance blood sugar levels. And that overeating generally leads to weight gain.

It is important for those with a sweet tooth to eat regularly throughout the day, with consistent meal timings. The goal should be to never go hypoglycaemic.

Meals should be nutritionally balanced with adequate protein, fats and carbs from high quality food sources. Sugary food, caffeine and alcohol should be limited as these have a negative effect on blood sugar levels.

Don't Fast

Intermittent fasting (IF) has become one of the most debated modern nutrition protocols, and rightfully so because it breaks a lot of rules. For

decades we have been told to eat every 2-3 hours and to eat breakfast upon waking to ‘kick-start’ our metabolism for optimal body composition and hea lt h.

IF goes against this by reducing meal frequency and delaying breakfast. Many fasting protocols suggest eating less during the day and feasting at night.
Fasting isn’t a tool I’d recommend for those with high stress levels as it puts even more pressure on the adrenals to maintain a level of blood g lucose.

When recommending IF protocols it’s important for the user to be in a good state of health, already eating whole unprocessed foods, getting sufficient sleep, managing stress and exercising well. It should therefore be used as an addition to an already effective and consistent training and nutrition strategy.

Eat Your Carbs

Carbohydrates are the body’s preferred source of energy, and this becomes more apparent during times of stress. To provide the energy to support recovery from the stress, follow a higher carbohydrate diet.

Don’t Starve

A low calorie intake during stressful times or recovery from high stress will only heighten the depletion of glycogen, breakdown of muscle tissue and put more demand on the adrenals.

Therefore you should look to eat at ‘calorie maintenance’ level or a slight surplus during stressful times.

DAY 4 – WEEKEND WIN (THURSDAY)

It can be difficult to stay consistent with a habit if you have a lot going on in your life, or if you take a break from your normal routine.

The perfect example of this is the weekend. So let's set you up to win this weekend.

How? By doing an easy version of your habit for the weekend.

This should be so easy that it should require as much energy as brushing your teeth.

Today, I want you to plan how you'll stick to this habit over the weekend.

DAY 5 – DAILY LESSON TO REINFORCE HABIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (FRIDAY)

Sometimes the stress we experience daily is due to our own thoughts.

Thinking habits can be very hard to change, because we're usually not aware we're doing them, and they're harder to notice than physical habits. It's easier to see when you're eating junk food than when you're thinking negative things about yourself.

So the key, as always, is forming an awareness of the habit and triggers.

Keep a journal, write brief entry into it when you notice these thoughts. You might spend a few minutes in the morning just watching your thoughts, noticing patterns.

It's important to note that this habit wont change overnight, but is something that could take months or years to slowly improve.

A good replacement habit is to notice your negative thoughts (about yourself, others, life), and stay with that feeling for a while.

DAY 6 – NO DAILY LESSON (SATURDAY)

DAY 7 – WEEKLY REVIEW (SUNDAY)

When you complete the habit today, take a minute to reflect on the past week or so of doing the habit.

5 *What has it actually been like, as opposed to the fantasy you had about it before you started?*
5 *What have you learned?*
5 *What do you appreciate?*
5 *What obstacles have come up, and are there ways to overcome them for next week?*

Consider writing a short journal entry about these reflections, to solidify your learning. Treat habit formation as a learning process, as a way to learn about yourself, your mind, mindfulness, resistance and more.

DAY 8 – ADJUSTMENT OF HABIT (MONDAY)

If all went well last week, and you didn't struggle or skip the habit for more than a day, I recommend that you lengthen the habit this week. If you've struggled, keep it the same as last week or make it even easier.

For example, if you've been doing 2 minutes of meditation daily, then extend that to 4 minutes this week.

Or if you've been getting more exercise by walking for 10 minutes on your lunch break at work, try extending that to 15 minutes this week.

Never make too big an adjustment so that it becomes too difficult.

This slow change process of expanding the habit a little at a time helps overcome the resistance of the mind to change and discomfort.

Each step isn't difficult, so your mind doesn't rebel much. Gradually the habit becomes your new normal and you can expand a bit more, pushing your comfort zone a little at a time.

DAY 9 - DAILY LESSON TO REINFORCE HABIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (TUESDAY)

I've found exercise to be one of the best ways to reduce stress (alongside mediation). Ironically, it can be hard to start exercising if you're tired and stressed, but I've always felt a lot better after exercise, so it's worth putting some effort into starting.

A fast walk, a good run, some strength training, a swim or bike ride, or playing a sport are all great ideas.

Not only does exercise reduce stress, but it helps you to sleep better at night. While it's good to exercise regularly, it's also best to have at least one or two days break from higher intensity exercise too.

DAY 10 - DAILY LESSON TO REINFORCE HABIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (WEDNESDAY)

Sometimes you're stressed or overwhelmed because there's too much going on in your life or too much information coming in.

To make this more manageable, make a list of all you have going on right now.

Now see if you can eliminate or put a hold on a few of them – simply send an email or make a call and tell people you can't work or do this right now.

Make a short list of three to five tasks you can actually work on today, and focus on the first item only. One thing at a time.

Also remember to take breaks from these tasks. Get away from the computer, and take a walk. This is the best way to deal with stress – find ways to de-stress during the day. Stretch. Move around. Get some fresh air. Talk to someone in real life. Take a hot bath or shower if that's possible.

Remind yourself: all that you have going on...doesn't matter that much. At the end of the day, life will go on.

DAY 11 – WEEKEND WIN (THURSDAY)

It's almost the weekend. Even if you don't have a lot going on, it's possible you're not fully focused on this habit, or fully committed to it.

So let's set you up to win this weekend and achieve your habit with ease.

Today, think about your super easy, almost effortless version of the habit for the weekend.

How are you going to achieve the habit this weekend?

DAY 12 - DAILY LESSON TO REINFORCE HABIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (FRIDAY)

We're almost at the end of the 'Reduce your stress' habit challenge.

As you prepare to move onto the next habit challenge, you'll want to put this current habit into 'habit maintenance mode.'

This is a way of continuing it with less of a focus.

By now, the habit should start to become more automatic if you've been at least a little consistent. You don't need reminders to start the habit, and it's feeling a bit easier, more part of your 'normal.'

So as you begin to move your focus to the next habit challenge, all you want to do is not forget about this habit. You don't need to keep track of it every day, as long as things are going well.

But every few days, pause and reflect on this habit and check in to see that everything is still going well. Maybe once a week, use one of our Sunday reflection sessions to assess whether you have any obstacles around this habit, need to make adjustments, learned anything new.

After a while, you need to reflect on the habit less often, as it becomes ingrained in your life.

Stay focused this weekend and remember to have some fun in the process!

DAY 13 – NO DAILY LESSON (SATURDAY)

DAY 14 – END OF HABIT REVIEW (SUNDAY)

Over the last two weeks you've completed the 'reduce your stress' habit challenge – nice work!

Today, take a minute after practicing your habit to reflect again on the past week of doing the habit.

5 *What has the habit been like and how have you done?*
5 *What have you learned?*
5 *What parts or how much of this habit will you continue to do?*

Consider writing a short journal entry about these reflections, to solidify your learning. Treat habit formation as a learning process, as a way to learn about yourself, your mind, mindfulness, resistance and more.

Tomorrow, we'll be starting our next habit challenge.