

TARA GOULDING MASSAGE THERAPY - Ph: 0404 096 730

### managing your stress

**“Between 60 and 90 percent of complaints brought to a doctor’s office are due to stress.”**

*Dr Herbert Benson, Harvard Medical School*

Believe it or not, you need stress in your life. Research shows again and again that the healthiest and most productive people are not those that avoid stress, but those that learn to manage stress in their lives. Stress stimulates your physical and mental performance, so rather than trying to eliminate your stress, you want to find ways to keep it at an optimal level so it becomes a positive force in your life.

#### fight or flight

To appreciate why massage is so effective in fighting stress, it is important to understand what is known as the *stress response*. Stress begins with an event that places

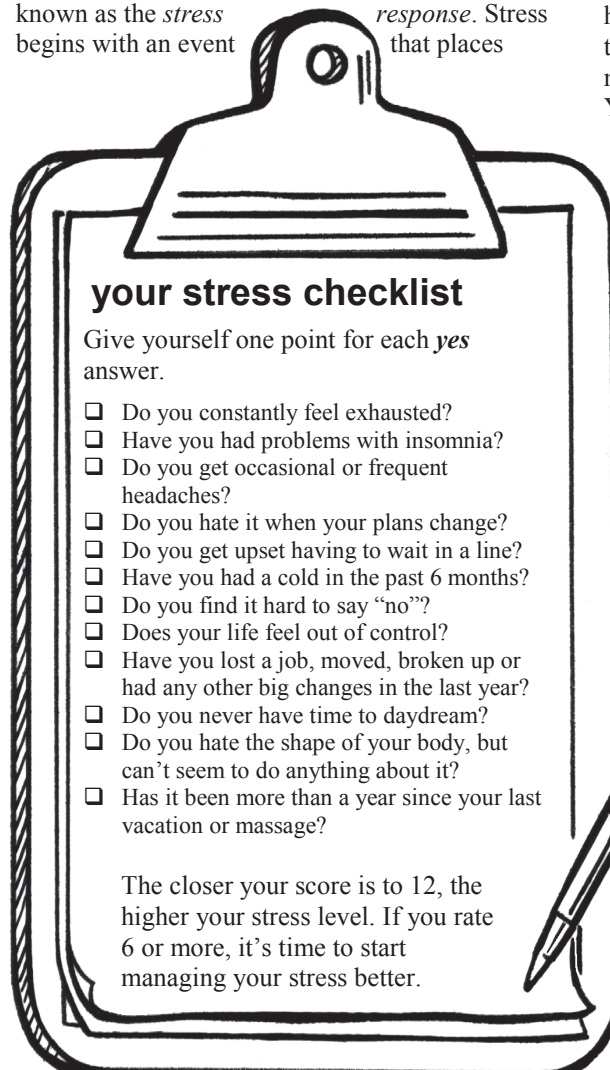
some sort of demand on you. Your mind decides whether that event may be potentially harmful to you either physically (your body) or psychologically (your self esteem). If your brain determines that there is a possibility of harm, it initiates a *stress response*. This response is also called a *fight or flight response* because it causes the same bodily changes that allowed our ancient ancestors to fight or flee from predators.

All the physiological changes that happen in your body with this response occur for one reason only: To prepare your body for physical action. Your muscles tense in preparation for activity. Your heart rate and blood pressure increase to get blood to your muscles. To deliver oxygen to your muscles, your breath becomes quick and shallow. Your digestive and reproductive systems shut down to conserve energy. Hormones are released to keep you awake and alert. Fats and sugars are released into your bloodstream for energy.

Unfortunately, fighting or fleeing are rarely useful ways to deal with the stresses we commonly face, like money worries, relationship problems, or troubles with co-workers. Because we don’t respond with physical action, our bodies don’t feel as though the problem is resolved and we continue to store the stress in anticipation for action.

With constant pressure, your stress never ends and you can’t slow down and unwind. As a result, the stress, in a sense, builds up in your body. You get caught in a self-perpetuating cycle of stress in which you become less and less able to relax. Tension turns into chronic headaches, or perhaps neck, shoulder, and back pain.

You may not be able to sleep well which leaves you feeling so fatigued that you have little energy to deal with your problems effectively. You may also find that it takes very little to trigger another stress response. It becomes difficult to cope with even small stresses and even taking time for recreational activities becomes burdensome.



#### your stress checklist

Give yourself one point for each *yes* answer.

- Do you constantly feel exhausted?
- Have you had problems with insomnia?
- Do you get occasional or frequent headaches?
- Do you hate it when your plans change?
- Do you get upset having to wait in a line?
- Have you had a cold in the past 6 months?
- Do you find it hard to say “no”?
- Does your life feel out of control?
- Have you lost a job, moved, broken up or had any other big changes in the last year?
- Do you never have time to daydream?
- Do you hate the shape of your body, but can’t seem to do anything about it?
- Has it been more than a year since your last vacation or massage?

The closer your score is to 12, the higher your stress level. If you rate 6 or more, it’s time to start managing your stress better.

**“Massage, once a luxury for the elite, is now becoming a necessity for people trying to cope with fast-paced lives.”**

*The New York Times*

When you're under severe or chronic stress, massage can be a fast and effective way of breaking the vicious stress cycle. Massage triggers a *relaxation response*. This response counters the stress response and promotes various restorative processes.

As the massage progresses and the relaxation response kicks in you'll find that your breathing deepens. Your heart rate and blood pressure decrease. Muscles start to relax as tension is gently kneaded out of your muscles. Painful sensations gradually subside. Your mind is also affected as you focus on the pleasant sensations and break the cycle of mental distress. Studies show that anxiety and depression decrease and your mood improves, possibly through the release of endorphins.

Although the relaxation effects of massage are immediate, the real benefits come when massage is used on a regular basis. Research has demonstrated that as your experience with massage increases, the effects become more pronounced and more long lasting. Repeatedly experiencing feelings of deep relaxation with massage helps you recall those feelings of relaxation through your daily activities.

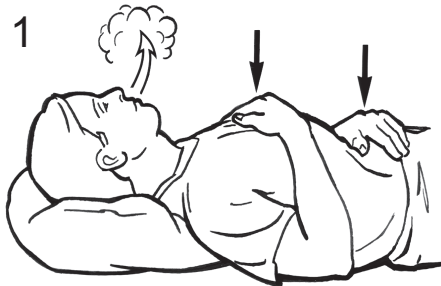
Massage also makes you more aware of sensations in your body allowing you to notice more subtle signs of stress and tension. Heed these early warning signs and you can take control of your stress before it gets out of control.

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## blow away your tension

When you don't have time to see your massage therapist, you can use your breath to help you release tension. When under stress, your breathing typically becomes fast and shallow. You breathe from your chest instead of taking deep relaxed breaths from your abdomen. This heightens your stress and causes unwanted tension through your neck and shoulders. You can break this pattern by using deep breathing, or “diaphragmatic breathing” as it is sometimes called. As you do this diaphragmatic breathing you will feel the tension releasing from your back, neck, shoulders and chest. As your breathing becomes more relaxed your mind will relax and you'll feel less stress and anxiety.

To learn how to do this, place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen and follow the instructions that accompany the illustrations. You can do this either sitting or lying. Focus on the sensations you are feeling in your body as you breathe. Repeat this sequence six to eight times. If you start to feel light headed stop immediately. Practice this several times a day. If you do this exercise when you are relaxed, it will be much easier to perform when you are feeling stressed.



1 Start by exhaling to completely empty the air from your lungs. Feel your chest drop first and then your belly.



2 Now inhale slowly directing the air into your abdomen. You should feel your belly start to rise.



3 As you continue to breathe in your chest will also rise. When your lungs are full, hold your breath for several seconds and then slowly exhale.

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### TARA GOULDING MASSAGE THERAPY

Professional and friendly mobile massage in your own home or office,  
on the lower Central Coast.

Ph: 0404 096 730 | Email: [mail@tgmt.com.au](mailto:mail@tgmt.com.au) | Website: [tgmt.com.au](http://tgmt.com.au)

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