



Six Practical Tools To Manage Your Stress Response

**November 12, 2025 • 3-4pm
MCBA MCLE Fair**

What Are We Doing Here?

Our purpose today is to help you learn techniques to counteract the effects of the inevitable stress inherent in the work you do, and in life in general.



Learning Objectives

1-Understand that stress is part of everyone's life and we are not helpless to manage it.

2-Understand that our stress response is biological. We are born with it. AND, we can modify what our bodies do in response to stressors.

3- Know some quick, easy to use tools that will help you, and some helpful habits too. Be able to use them starting today.

Carolyn's Journey

Regardless of my solid nursing background in understanding the relationship between stress and disease, I was not independently managing my own stress very well. Having my own 'in-house' mental health provider was a huge help! I was very lucky that way.

I recall sitting on the couch crying that I couldn't do this anymore. I had too many cases set for trial, my admin had been caught stealing money from my trust account, my associate was screwing up, and we had two young kids at home. I had to learn what to do to get through things like that. I did learn.

I want to share some of that with you today. We can manage what seems overwhelming.



Mikol's Journey

Mental health provider in Marin for over 45 years

Witness to my wife's stress in her law practice, as I did the accounting for the practice.

I have volunteered as a settlement panelist at Family Law court for about 15 years, witnessing high conflict divorce cases and the high stress and damage they cause both the parents and their children.

I have treated many lawyers and other professionals in my practice. I see what happens when stress management is absent, and the worst things that can happen to a person.

We're talking about PREVENTION today.



So, What Is Stress?

Stress is generic. Every species experiences stress. It is much more than the old idea that it's merely a leftover thing from evolution when we had to flee from lions chasing us or fight off an attacker.

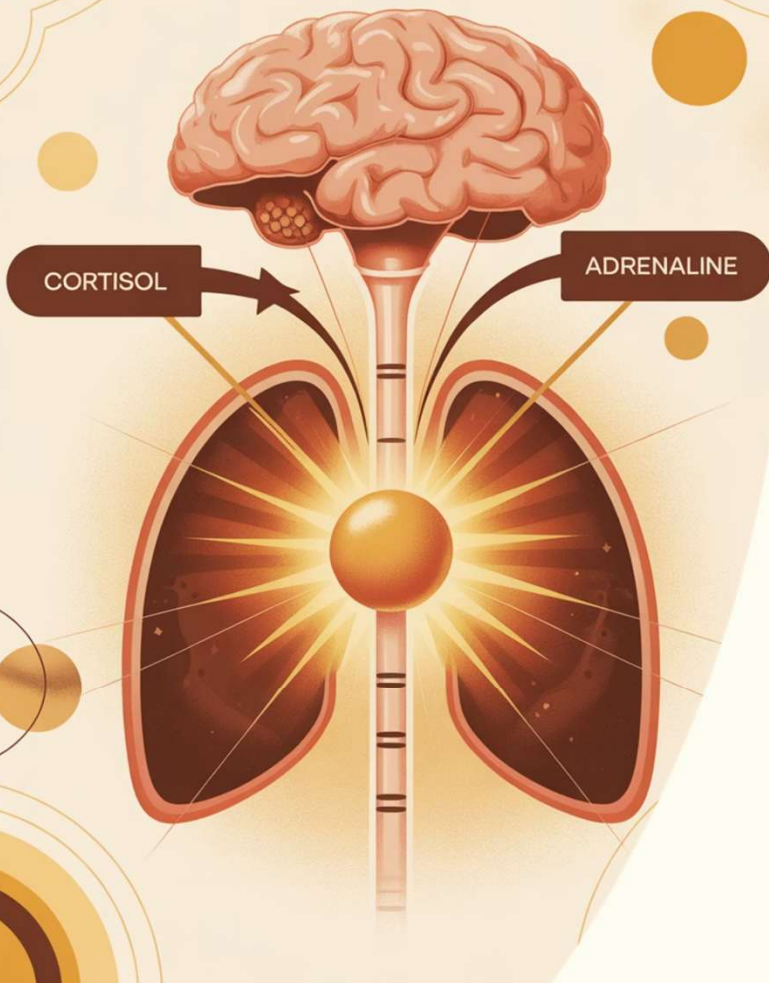
It is a stimulus we perceive through our senses that tells our brains we must act.

The message comes from any of our senses, which could be sight, hearing or smell for example, or it comes from our **perception** of a stressor.

It can be purely psychological, not just a physical threat.



HUMAN STRESS RESPONSE



The Body Responds to Stress Automatically

The brain perceives stress. It signals the adrenal glands to produce chemicals that change our bodies from a resting state to an activated one. Immediately, we can feel the changes.

Heart rate speeds up-we're ready to do something
Pupils of our eyes dilate-we can see ahead and focus
Muscles tense-ready to go
Non-essential body functions stop-for example, digestion.
We need saliva for digestion and that stops. Our mouths get dry.

What NOT to do in the immediate feeling of your automatic stress response

Your stress response stimulates you to DO or SAY something. As you understand your automatic response, it's best not to say something immediately if you can avoid it.

A wiser strategy is to use one of the tools we'll show you. A moment's pause to use a tool can help a lot.

But know that telling yourself to calm down doesn't work. Your body is programmed from birth to get agitated in some way and you can't exactly talk yourself out of being ready to act.

That's what **not to do!** So
what else is there?

Let's look at what you CAN do, right in the moment. We will address six tools, some for

short term,

medium term

and some for chronic, long term stress

Three Types of Stress

Short-term

Short-term: happens right now. You react in real time. You can't follow the usual advice to meditate, or go to the gym or tell yourself not to worry about it.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of a person screaming at you on the phone?



Three Types of Stress

Medium-term

Medium-term: ongoing, lasts for weeks or longer. You have deadlines, pressure, repetitive irritants. You can use longer term tools we are going to describe next. They can be used daily to manage your response.



Three Types of Stress

Long-term

Long-term (Chronic Stress) : This is stress you live with. This requires more of the lifestyle changes you have probably heard about, such as sufficient sleep, exercise habits, meditation, and ways you personally find to dissipate the automated stress response your body does.

This chronic stress is perhaps the most dangerous to your health long term.



Stress Response Management Tool #1

The physiologic SIGH. This may sound strange, but when you take a deep breath or two in and then exhale slowly, you are slowing down your heart rate. That speeded up heart rate is part of the automatic response when you perceive a stressor. Pushing back against that automated response changes the response!

This is how it works: double inhale deeply first and then exhale slowly. You are actively taking control of your heart rate.

Here is how it sounds:

Stress Response Management Tool #2

4 Part Breathing

This tool is helpful when you are about to enter a stressful situation and want to get ahead of the stress response. In real time, you may have to interact with someone you dread or someone you know is difficult. You may be doing a presentation to a client or even having a personal conversation with a problematic colleague or family member.

As you anticipate the stressor ahead, you are in some ways using the same physiological principle as the sigh.

Here's how it works: Inhale deeply to a count of 4. Hold your breath to a count of 4. Exhale to a count of 4.

Hold after the exhale to a count of 4

Stress Management Tool #3

Medium-Term Stress: Raising Your Threshold

Activate Your Body

1. A brief brisk walk can dissipate those chemicals, the stress hormones epinephrine (adrenaline) and cortisol. If you can, make an appointment with yourself that you will do this every hour or so when you are under heavy pressure, Go hard at it. And think calming thoughts when you are breathing more heavily. In a way. You are separating mind from body. Your body wants to do something. So let it.

2. Cold exposure. A cold shower activates your body and frees up adrenaline. The technique is to use calming thoughts, mantras (repeated positive statements), music or whatever you like to then dissipate adrenaline after you have stimulated it.

Long Term Stress-What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

Our bodies are not designed to maintain high levels of stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol
These are designed to activate us for shorter term use.

Chronically high cortisol, for example, wears down nearly every major system of the body. Instead of being a short-term survival tool, it becomes a long-term *toxin* when stress never ends.



Stress Response Management Tool #4

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

As we've said, the automated stress response includes muscle tension. Your body wants to DO SOMETHING. To counteract this part of the stress response we can deliberately choose with intention, to relax each part of our musculature with this method.

From the book, The Body Keeps The Score, the theory is that our physical selves store information about things that have been stressors for us, and we have to push back on that with a plan.



Stress Management Tool #5

Talk It Through

Keeping things inside is not a strategy for coping with stress. Many of us can rely on friends or someone close to us to listen, but stubborn refusal to open up and admit that we are struggling is a barrier.

Men, historically have a harder time admitting that they are struggling with stress than women do. Social programming tells men to “be strong”, be tough, not show feelings, power through it, and so on.

Here is what I see in many years of practice when anyone, male or female adopts this attitude. By the time I see them, they have often been referred by their physician after a serious illness or chronic disease.

Stress Response Management Tool #6

Create and Participate In **Community**

It's well researched that people who are engaged in community of any kind have better health outcomes than those who don't engage and aren't connected to others of similar interests.

There are endless ways to create community. You have to join one or more and you need to show up. Since Covid, many of us learned that just being online wasn't all that satisfactory. It's better than no community, but as we say, there is no substitute for person-to-person, face-to-face.

We need connection to others to remind us that we are not alone. It relieves stress. We don't have to "talk shop" but we can.

We can also just hang out with others and socialize, a way to diminish our own stress response.

MCBA is doing a good job of offering opportunities to participate in our community!

Notice what we have right here in Marin: Thank you Julie Cervetto!

- ❖ Bar picnic
- ❖ Thirsty Thursdays
- ❖ Holiday parties
- ❖ Networking before MCLE in-person programs

None of us are immune from the ravages that stress can cause. We need to be intentional about staying socially connected with our colleagues or our other outside communities we enjoy.

Meditation: Another Coping Strategy

Guided Meditation, or Unguided Can Help Reduce Stress Hormones

Meditation and mindfulness practices have been scientifically proven to reduce cortisol levels, lower blood pressure, and improve emotional regulation. These benefits occur relatively quickly—even a few minutes of practice can provide measurable stress relief.

Popular Apps for Guided Practice

- **Headspace**
- **Calm**
- **Insight Timer**
- **The Honest Guys**

Meditation Changes Your Focus



Can Stress Ever Be Good?

All species need stress for growth. In our bodies, stress of an invasive virus or bacteria stimulates our immune response. Injury also stimulates the stress response, but at a less perceptible level than a perceived threat.

We need the stress response at times to stimulate high performance, sharper focus, athletic achievement, acute problem-solving skills and analysis under pressure.

The Downsides of Your Unmanaged Stress Response

If you are not paying any attention to the effect of stress on your body, you will pay a price for unmanaged responses. Long-term stress in particular is dangerous to your overall health.

This attention you need to give to yourself is not something you learned in law school. Some lawyers never learn to pay attention to their own elevated stress response at all. Hard work, client demands, financial pressure, your belief in your reputation all gang up on you. You may not see or feel the damage right away.

Specific Effects on Health Of Unmanaged Stress

Cardiovascular Impact

About 2 in 5 adults over age 50 in the US have some form of cardiovascular disease, according to the American Heart Association, National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Mental Health

Prolonged unmanaged stress can cause depression, anxiety, and cognitive problems. Burnout is a risk.



More Effects on Health Of Unmanaged Stress

Immune System Weakness

When we are too busy to attend to our bodies, we can get sick more often. The overall consciousness of our stress response can prompt us to do what we know is good for us. We need a stress response to fight off diseases but unmanaged stress weakens our body's ability to fight viruses and bacteria.

Sleep Disruption

Have you ever heard anyone brag that they only get 4 hours of sleep a night and they're proud of it? That 4 hour a night person has nothing to be proud of and everything to be concerned about.



We Know What **Doesn't** Work With Lawyer Stress

Alcohol and other substances as attempts to escape stress. These **do not** dispose of stress related hormones.

Emotional eating

Ignoring the unrelenting pressure and hoping you will somehow feel better eventually.

Withdrawing from everything but work, working obsessively

Failure to delegate any tasks because no one will do things as well as you can.



Many Simple Things In Life, Besides The Tools We Described, Can Also Help

Journaling-putting it in writing, especially handwriting it can release stress and give you perspective

Music-the universal language of music can help change any mood. Listen intentionally





More of the Simple Stuff That Also Works

Animals-we know that stroking a pet lowers blood pressure. That unconditional love from your pet can help ease stress.

Nature-the Japanese concept of “forest bathing” can ease stress by just being in a wooded area. Marin has ample opportunity for this!

Laughter-use whatever makes you laugh: a silly show, a comedy special on Netflix, , live shows, anything you know you will like.

Walk up and down a set of stairs a few times. Movement and breath work together can be done in minutes.

Be Accountable: Measure Your Heart Rate and Sleep

Wearable devices, smartphones and all electronic means allow you to see your own data in real time.

If, for example, sleep is an issue for you, for stress management, you can see just how much and what quality of sleep you get each night with a smartwatch, Oura ring, or other device.



Self Nurturing Activities “SNAs”

We have probably all learned some things in our lives that do soothe us.
Even babies have to learn to self-soothe to stop crying all the time.

What works for you? Your personal preferences are stress relievers.

- ❖ Massage
- ❖ Yoga
- ❖ Manicure/pedicure
- ❖ Watching movies
- ❖ Going for long drives
- ❖ Meeting someone for a leisurely meal out
- ❖ Spa day
- ❖ Hobbies
- ❖ Working with your hands
- ❖ Vacations



That All Sounds Great But I Don't Feel Like Doing All Those Things

Yes, making personal changes is never easy and you may not feel like it. And, you know the saying: "If you don't have your health, you don't have anything"

All the lawyerly success in the world is not going to keep your body, mind and spirit safe and healthy. It can certainly do the opposite.

We suggest you start with just one thing we've discussed today. The smallest change in how you deal with stress is fine. And you have to notice how it works. Noticing results is easier than ever.

Caution: Taking In Your Client's Stress Is Also A Risk For You

Anxious and upset clients do affect us. They want us to fix it. They can pour out their own stress and reactions to what you are doing and others are doing

This is a risk we need to be conscious about so we can address it. Stress is inherent in just the normal working day.

This applies to everyone, whether you are a litigator or a mediator, at perhaps opposite ends of how much stress exposure you have in your work.

Summary

1. Stress is part of life and we are born with an automated response to it.
2. We can push back on our stress response by managing what we do with various tools.
3. Start with breathwork and 4 part breathing or some variation
4. Use any of the other tools we described here, and other techniques to protect yourself against the relentless corrosive effects of unmanaged stress. It can kill you!
5. Be conscious of how to address short, medium and long term stress. They are all different.
6. New habits take time, Start small and build from one new thing to getting skilled at this stress management. You can.

Takeaways

Make a commitment to yourself to make at least one change in how you deal with stress, starting now.

Write it down, put it on your calendar, set a reminder or whatever helps you stay aware.

The commitment is long term. You will do better, feel better, and most likely succeed more when your stress is managed better



Contact Us

Carolyn Rosenblatt, RN-Attorney

clrosenblatt@gmail.com

415-250-7379

Family consultations in age related matters: healthcare, legal, financial and family conflicts about elders. Co-Mediator of family conflicts with Dr. Davis. Advice-only practice. Interpreting the health care jargon and legal jargon for regular people and empowering them to keep elders safe.

Dr. Mikol Davis, Clinical Psychologist

drmikol@gmail.com

415-250-7380

Expert in stress management, elder capacity evaluations, and brain injury assessments. Providing psychological support and expert witness services for families dealing with conflicts and aging-related legal and healthcare issues.

Two wooden directional signs are mounted on a dark post. The top sign is a light-colored wooden arrow pointing to the right, with the word 'QUESTIONS' in black, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The bottom sign is a similar wooden arrow pointing to the left, with the word 'ANSWERS' in black, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a bright blue sky with soft, white clouds.

QUESTIONS

ANSWERS