

## Surefire Solutions for “Stress-Busting” Your Life

By Zonya Foco, R.D.



Busy with work, busy with kids, busy with social obligations, busy with holidays—busy, busy, busy. Regardless of where we live, the season we’re in, how old we are; whether we have a houseful of kids or kid-free, single, married, divorced or widowed—today’s busy lifestyle spells S.T.R.E.S.S. And the constant low-grade tension brought on by everything from mismatched socks to burnt toast to unpaid bills and traffic jams spells a constant drip of the hormones adrenaline and cortisol. And does this ever spell trouble!

Adrenaline and cortisol can be hero hormones if you’re competing in sports, exerting high physical energy or in an emergency situation. But if you’re just driving your car, sitting at your desk or exerting normal energy, these hormones aren’t properly utilized and become corrosive to your arteries by raising your blood pressure, cholesterol and inflammation markers. I’m not talking about your typical muscle tightening and stress headaches here. I’m talking about increased risk of heart disease, compromised immune system, weight gain and even depression!

To help you manage these menacing stress hormones—without medication—here are a few surefire solutions for “stress-busting” your life. And as the Lickety-Split queen, you know they’re going to be quick and easy!



### Just Think BLT and ESP!

#### Breathe Deeply

Give yourself INSTANT relief from the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Oxygenate your muscles and mind to give you an instant sense of calm. Deep breathing works while driving, in a meeting, trying to find that coveted parking space.... Actually ANYWHERE.

#### Laugh and Listen to Music

Ever notice how a good laugh dispels stress and makes you feel better? Are you getting your share of this helpful “jogging for your insides”? What’s your favorite music that makes you feel energized? Relaxed? Is it readily available in your car? Within easy reach in your home? Utilized daily? Start employing music as your response in combating stress and feel the difference! (Check out my favorite music by Jana Stanfield at [www.JanaStanfield.com](http://www.JanaStanfield.com))

## Talk to a Friend

How many times might you reach for an unhealthy coping response (stress eating, smoking, drinking) when you could have picked up the phone? Talking about your conflict with a friend can help you keep the problem in perspective and keep you from exaggerating the problem in your mind, creating even more internal hormonal stress. Keep a phone number list handy and use it.



## Exercise and Eat Right

Burning off the excess “stress hormones”; i.e. cortisol and epinephrine, through regular exercise adds to the multitude of health benefits exercise already provides. Eating right means committing and planning ahead for smarter choices, even when time is tight. (See the following Stress-Busting Eating Plan and Exercise Quickies)

## Simplify and Say No

Do your floors and toilets have to be cleaned by you in order to be a good husband/wife? What would the stress benefit be to you and your family if \$100 of your monthly expenditures were redirected to a house cleaner every other week? Do you really have to volunteer every time you are asked for girl scouts, school events or church? Pick your commitments wisely. Saying “no” sometimes may be exactly the solution you need.

## Prioritize and Plan

Try scheduling a mandatory “family management meeting” on Saturday to plan the week’s menu, grocery list, and assign a night of cooking to each family member. If there are special supplies or materials the children need for school projects, they must be requested at this meeting. (No more emergency shopping runs during the week.) Extra chores on Sunday, pitching in to shop, doing laundry, preplanning meals for the week are all responsibilities of being “in the family.”

## Zonya’s Stress-Busting EATING PLAN

- 1) **Stress headaches and muscle fatigue? Hydrate! Starting the moment you get up in the morning.** You’re always a little dehydrated upon rising. If 8 glasses of water make you float, 3 or so may be all you need. (Clear urine is a good indicator that you’re drinking enough.)



- 2) **Does stress make you gain weight and feel lethargic? Limit high-fat meals . . . yet don't go completely "fat-free" either.** Aim for between 30-60 grams of fat per day. Remember that every 5 grams of fat you see equals one teaspoon of lard or shortening! Choose nonfat or low-fat dairy products, and low-fat meats, desserts, breads and crackers. Include a moderate portion of good omega-3 fats like olive oil, nuts and seeds.



- 3) **Do you rely on sweets for a "pick-me-up," or suffer from sweet cravings? Then be sure to eat (3-4) fresh fruits per day,** starting with breakfast. This helps bring up your blood sugar naturally in the morning, and does wonders to fend off sugar cravings. If you've become dependant on sweets for a "pick-me-up," fruit will be your best friend. This still allows room for you to safely enjoy **2 or less SMALL sugary food servings per day.**



- 4) **To keep your brain chemicals and blood sugar in a healthy balance, eat some but not too many complex carbohydrates at each meal and snack.** One serving for the person trying to lose weight, 2 for the person maintaining, and 3 for the extremely active person (preferably whole-grain). But do not overdo! Since ½ cup of cooked pasta is a serving, a typical restaurant portion of pasta runs 7 servings of grain! Choose from bread, potatoes, corn or dessert—just not all in the same meal! Try visualizing so your plate stays "balanced." If you'd like another serving of scalloped potatoes or another brownie, also take another serving of broccoli and protein to "fill you up." This can keep a brownie binge to a low roar.



- 5) **Eat protein for muscle repair and growth, and spread it out across all your meals** to aid in blood sugar stabilization. Strive for 7-10 ounces/day of lean chicken, beef, pork, tofu or cheese or ½ cup of legumes.

- 6) **Since stress often plays havoc on digestion and your weight,** don't eat just one or two large meals per day. **Eat 3 smaller meals per day, with 1-3 healthful snacks.** Eat smaller in the evening as this helps minimize gastric distress, helps you control your weight by overall less calories and also helps keep your blood sugar level for steady energy and concentration.

- 7) **Eat lots of deeply colored vegetables** favoring carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli, green and red peppers, cauliflower, cabbage, spinach and kale. These build the blood with the nutrients that help combat the negative effects of stress.



- 8) **Since stress makes it harder than ever to eat right, take a moderate dose multi-vitamin** and mineral supplement for nutrition insurance, and commit to taking it consistently.

## Zonya's Stress-Busting EXERCISE "QUICKIES"

### Upon Rising in the Morning...

- Sit at the edge of the bed and do gentle trunk twists.
- Now standing with your arms stretched above your head, bend to the right and then to the left.
- While brushing your teeth, stretch your hamstrings, calves and quads. Then strengthen with "calf raises," "kick-backs," and for the more advanced: "lunges." Don't think 2 minutes of exercise everyday can change the way you look? The secret is in the "everyday" part.) Do lunges everyday and you'll be amazed!



### While at the Office...



- At your desk, refreshed and immediately able to focus; sit up straight, take a deep breath, reach with your arms straight up, hold...release. Repeat. Follow with forward then backward shoulder rolls.
- While talking on the phone, stand up, put a leg on the desk and stretch for 2 minutes. Change legs and repeat. Then change to a calf stretch and finish with a quad stretch. The person on the other end of the phone will have no idea!
- While working at your computer, do "sitting calf raises." Set a heavy book on your knees for added resistance.
- Offer to run an errand to the other side of the building. Breathe deeply the entire time and enjoy your body moving. Arrive back to your desk refreshed and immediately able to focus.
- Enjoy an invigorating walk out to your car. (You did opt for parking in the "fitness spots" didn't you?)

### While Watching TV...

- While sitting on the couch, place your hands at your shoulders and the lift your arms up, down, up, down and repeat for one entire commercial break. Did your arms get tired? Do this every night for two weeks and notice how much easier it gets. Then advance to holding dumbbells or two soup cans.
- Do one commercial break worth of sit ups, push ups and leg lifts. Stay on the floor stretching until the next commercial break...then repeat. Do this every night for just one week and you'll see a difference. Make it a habit and you'll be amazed at the transformation!



- If you insist on watching a second show, then pull out those dumbbells from underneath the couch. Stand up straight and do bicep curls, triceps curls, overhead presses, etc. Doesn't it feel good to move your muscles, instead of just sit?

