

BLUE ZONES POWER 9

DOWN SHIFT

LOOK ON THE SUNNY SIDE

Is your immediate outlook usually sunny? If it is, you are not alone. Scientists are finding that humans naturally tend to have a positive outlook. Studies suggest optimistic people may be happier, healthier, and have a lower chance of heart problems and lung disease. This may have to do with the amount of stress hormones released by the body. Someone with a happy outlook on life may release fewer stress hormones during difficult times.

Residents living in the original Blue Zones areas share common lifestyle habits called Power 9®—helping them live longer, healthier, happier lives. Downshifting, whether through a nap, meditation, prayer, or a happy hour with friends, is one of them.



A Good Laugh Goes a Long Way!

An emerging field known as humor therapy is helping people relieve stress and heal more quickly. Our on-the-go society means that many of us experience a certain amount of chaos on most days. Whatever your degree of stress, reducing it to the lowest level possible is good for your health, and humor is a great coping mechanism.

Research has found that laughter lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormones, and boosts immunity. Laughter also triggers the release of endorphins – the body’s natural painkillers – and produces a general sense of well-being. In fact, hospitals nationwide are building formal and informal laughter therapy into their treatment programs. Humor is a universal language. The domino effect of a good laugh is more contagious than a sniffle, a cough, or a sneeze. A shared laugh connects people and gives them a sense of joy and closeness. According to Laughter Therapist and author of *We Need to Laugh More*, Enda Junkins, “Anyone can join the laughter movement. All it takes is a willingness to risk some loss of control. The timid may start with a few shy giggles. The courageous may jump in with deep belly laughter. A sense of humor is not required.”

So the next time stress is getting you down, remember that laughter is fun, free to all, and has no known negative side effects.

Sleep Tight!

Getting plenty of sleep every night recharges your brain and keeps your immune system functioning well. Adults need around seven to nine hours of sleep per night. To meet your sleep needs, try going to bed and waking up around the same times every day. Sleep on a comfy mattress and pillows in a dark, quiet, and cool bedroom.

Test Your Stress Savvy

Which activity is most likely to reduce your stress quickly?

- a. Deep-breathing exercises**
- b. Meditation**
- c. Music**
- d. Laughter**
- e. All of the above**

The correct answer is: **e. All of the above.** Deep breathing is an easy stress reliever that can relax muscles and quiet the mind. Meditation is an effective way to slow down, unwind, and de-stress. Music has proven to benefit people with anything from stress to cancer, calming the body and mind. Laughter lifts the spirits and lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormones, and boosts immunity.

Q & A: Ask the Expert

Q: I feel as if I'm always racing the clock to get everything done. How do I find the time to slow down when I have so much to do?

A: Be early. Even something as simple as arriving 15 minutes early to every appointment can significantly reduce the stress that arises from driving in traffic, getting lost, or underestimating the time it takes to get somewhere. Being early to an appointment will help you to slow down and focus on the meeting or event.

TOP 5 WAYS TO DOWN SHIFT & STRESS LESS

- 1 Nurture yourself.** Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as walking, working out, or listening to music. Unwind after a hectic workday by reading, practicing yoga, or taking a bath or steam shower.
- 2 Protect your day off.** Try to schedule some of your routine chores on workdays so your days off are more relaxing.
- 3 Spend time with family and friends.** Surround yourself with people who listen, laugh easily, and find the humor in everyday events. Avoid the “Debbie Downers” of the world.
- 4 Slow down, unwind and de-stress.** Some of life’s most precious moments will pass us by if we don’t take the time to notice them. Make more time for slower-paced activities by turning off the TV, leaving work at the office this weekend, and reclaiming some time and space in your routine.
- 5 Get happy.** Happy hours are a great way to relax and connect with co-workers, neighbors, family, and friends. It doesn’t have to include alcohol; but if you want, grab a beer or a glass of wine since studies suggest that a drink or two a day may be good for you. But more than that, studies also point to personal connections and friendships as being an important factor to enjoying a healthy, long life.

Learn more about Power 9[®] Principles at bluezonesproject.com