

LIVING *well*

*He's got the
right idea!*

Why SLOW *is*

Life's so busy these days that slowing your pace will not only keep burn out at

Stress overload has become a part of everyday life. Faced with pressure to squeeze more and more into already crowded schedules – meeting job demands, battling traffic, fielding appointments and domestic duties – we’re increasingly reliant on smartphones and 24/7 email access to stay on track.

And these busy schedules mean our downtime is becoming less frequent.

Living at a permanently heightened pace comes at a cost, though, especially with diabetes in the mix. Stress is manageable over a short period of time, but when it’s a constant fixture in your life it’ll take a major toll on your health – both mental and physical. Besides raising blood glucose and blood pressure levels, and resulting in mood swings and reduced immunity, stress triggers hormonal surges that can wreak havoc on our waistline and internal organs, ramping up the risk of lasting health problems.

Over the next 15 pages, we look at the causes and symptoms of overloaded stress levels, and how you can implement changes in your life, diet and exercise regime to combat it. Start a new stress-free life TODAY. ►



the way to go

bay, but it also clears the way for a *calmer and more effective you*

THE Cortisol TRAP

When we're stressed our body releases cortisol, a hormone that kicks in our 'fight or flight' survival response to perceived danger, mobilising energy stores so that our brain and muscles are fuelled up to meet the challenge. This is a lifesaver in certain situations (say, when reacting to avoid a car accident or you're in harm's way). The problem is that most of the stress we face today is not acute but more likely to be constantly bubbling away, keeping us keyed up on high hormonal alert. But with no actual fight or flight to burn

it off, the cortisol accumulates in our bloodstream, with worrying consequences. One of these is the build up of dangerously visceral fat around the waistline – sometimes dismissed as middle-age spread – where cells have up to four times the number of cortisol receptors compared to other parts of the body. The problem with this fat is that it is highly toxic and wraps itself around internal organs, causing metabolic syndrome – often a precursor to Type 2 diabetes and a potentially life-threatening health hazard.

Making the shift

Finding a way to cut stress levels inevitably demands a change of pace. While the prospect of slowing down can seem an alien concept in our fast-moving culture, it is a shift now gathering worldwide momentum. On the vanguard of change is the 'Slow Movement' – launched in 1986 in protest against the fast-food invasion of Rome's historic centre – its focus is the promotion of a less hurried way of life, starting off with 'slow food'. That is, taking time to gather, prepare and relish meals that satisfy the senses – a far cry from the hit-and-run approach of waist-expanding fast food. This credo has expanded to take in slow living, slow cities, slow travel and even slow parenting (not overscheduling kids' time in the way we do our own). It may seem old-fashioned, but slowing down to take in and enjoy life's scenery need not mean bowing out of the mainstream. In fact, it can actually clear the way to a calmer, more measured approach that improves your efficiency and productivity, while allowing you the time and space to develop better health habits along with greater happiness and pleasure in life.

SMART WAYS
TO GO SLOW

*‘Let us read
and let us
dance – two
amusements
that will never
do any harm
to the world’*

–Voltaire

1 REALITY CHECK Ask yourself why you feel stressed and how much of it is your own doing. Do you keep yourself busy to avoid boredom, loneliness or feelings of low self-worth? ‘People often don’t recognise that they are on this merry-go-round – we don’t know our

level of stress and anxiety until we slow down long enough to notice,’ says Sydney psychologist Cushla Hammond. Taking a long look at your circumstances may see you put changes in place to take the pressure off.



Don't hit the panic button

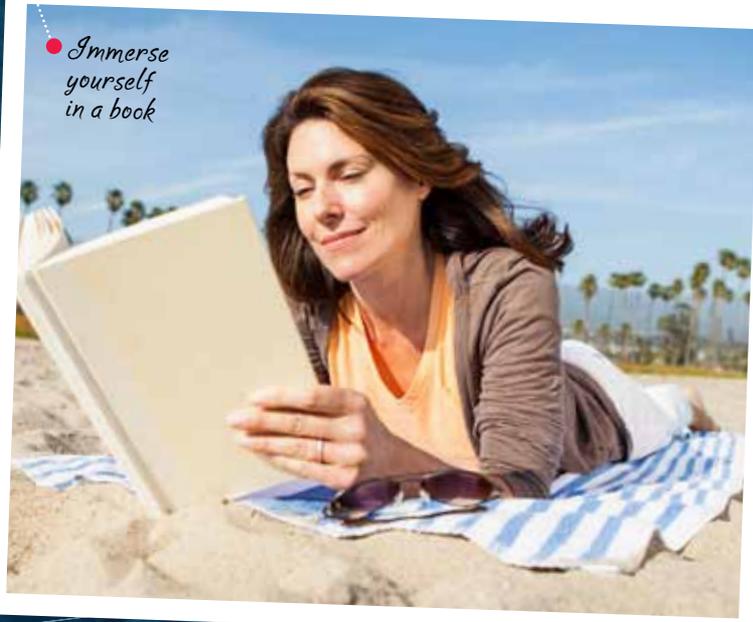
2 EDIT YOUR LIFE List all the elements that take up your time and pinpoint the ones that waste it. In his new book, *The Laws of Subtraction: 6 Simple Rules for Winning in the Age of Excess Everything*, author Matthew May suggests that we all learn the skill of subtraction – that is, ruthlessly ditching any unnecessary drains on our time.

3 PRIORITISE Train yourself to complete tasks on your to-do list in order of urgency – even if they’re the most demanding or least enjoyable – as you’ll feel more relaxed for having at least dealt with the most pressing items.



4 SET LIMITS Keep life simple by putting appropriate boundaries in place that ensure you stay inside your comfort zone – not taking on too much, avoiding overstimulation by limiting computer time and emailing, and leaving work on time. In his book, *The Power of Less*, Leo Babauta focuses on ways we can prioritise our own wellbeing needs with plenty of tips on his blog Zen Habits (www.zenhabits.net) showing us how. ➤

Immerse yourself in a book



5 DE-CLUTTER Having less time seems to go hand-in-hand with having more 'stuff'. After all, this stuff usually needs attention. A cluttered house, office or desk can lead to a cluttered mind and make it hard to focus. So if clutter is a bugbear, have a major clear-out – a tidy house, room or office brings freedom.

6 BUILD IN TIME BUFFERS Forget back-to-back meetings or one activity scheduled to move seamlessly into the next. Life seldom goes to plan, so you need to make space for the unpredictable and create space between appointments and activities to allow for delays. You'll breathe easier when things run late and have the luxury of time to spare when they actually do go smoothly.



7 LIVE MINDFULLY This is the practice of living in the moment, focusing only on the task at hand rather than on the endless distracting thoughts flitting through your mind. 'Mindfulness reduces stress and depression, boosts the immune system and helps you to feel more in control. In turn, this can help people in managing their diabetes,' says Professor Kay Wilhelm from Faces in the Street, an Urban Mental Health Research Institute at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney.

8 QUIT MULTI-TASKING The truth about juggling multiple jobs is that it's stressful on the brain and impairs concentration and memory, making you less effective as a result. 'Try mapping out a series of clear goals that you are trying to achieve,' says performance expert Dr Adam Fraser. 'Then, reduce distractions by working somewhere quiet and turn off things that can interrupt you – such as phone, email and Facebook – and try to exist in the present moment. Bring your attention back to what you are doing, rather than thinking about the other things you have to do in the day.'

'There is more to life than increasing its speed'

– Gandhi

Step away from the phone!



9 SCHEDULE DOWNTIME

Relaxation is all too often the thing we do when all other priorities have been met, which is never! Instead of regarding it as a luxury, see it as a health essential, which, just like a doctor's appointment, must be properly scheduled and prioritised.

10 DISCONNECT All the technology at our fingertips keeps us permanently 'on' and available 24/7, which is leading to sleep disruption and added stress. Do you really need to answer your work phone on weekends or holidays, or check your emails before you go to bed? In his book, *Staying Sane in the Fast Lane*, psychologist Dr Antony Kidman provides some tips for managing 'technostress' including blocking out times in the day when you can't be interrupted by phone calls or emails and taking a 'technobreak'.

11 SAVOUR SLEEP Research shows that sleep is one of the most important things you can do for your health and wellbeing. Poor shut-eye can worsen insulin sensitivity and increase appetite hormones, while also compromising weight control and BGLs, so practicing calming habits will pay off big time.

12 JOIN THE SLOW MOVEMENT One area where slowing down has many benefits is at the table. Slow eating is about taking time to gather,

prepare and enjoy your meals. This could mean growing your own vegetables or visiting your local farmers' market, rather than a stressful trip to the supermarket; taking time to prepare a nice meal, rather than a takeaway or frozen dinner; and eating around the table, rather than in front of the television. Taking time to relax and enjoy your meals means you will be more satisfied, eat less and not be tempted by less-than-healthy choices – a benefit for your weight and BGLs. ■

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

- Slow Food Australia**
slowfoodaustralia.com.au
- The Slow Movement**
slowmovement.com
- Zen Habits**
zenhabits.net
- Dr Adam Fraser**
dradamfraser.com