

Clear Reflections Psychotherapy, PLLC

Traci Breniser Wilson, MA LLP

Simple Ways to Live a Less Stressful Life

“If you asked what the single most important key to longevity is, I would have to say it is avoiding worry, stress and tension. And if you didn’t ask me, I’d still have to say it.” -- George F. Burns

Stress is a major problem for many people — a hectic, stressful job, a chaotic home life, bills to worry about, and bad habits such as unhealthy eating, drinking and smoking can lead to a mountain of stress. But there are some simple things you can do to get your life to a more manageable level. Now, your life will never be stress-free but that is actually a good thing because reasonable amounts of stress challenges, and enables, us to grow. But when stress gets too high, it causes us to be unhappy and unhealthy.

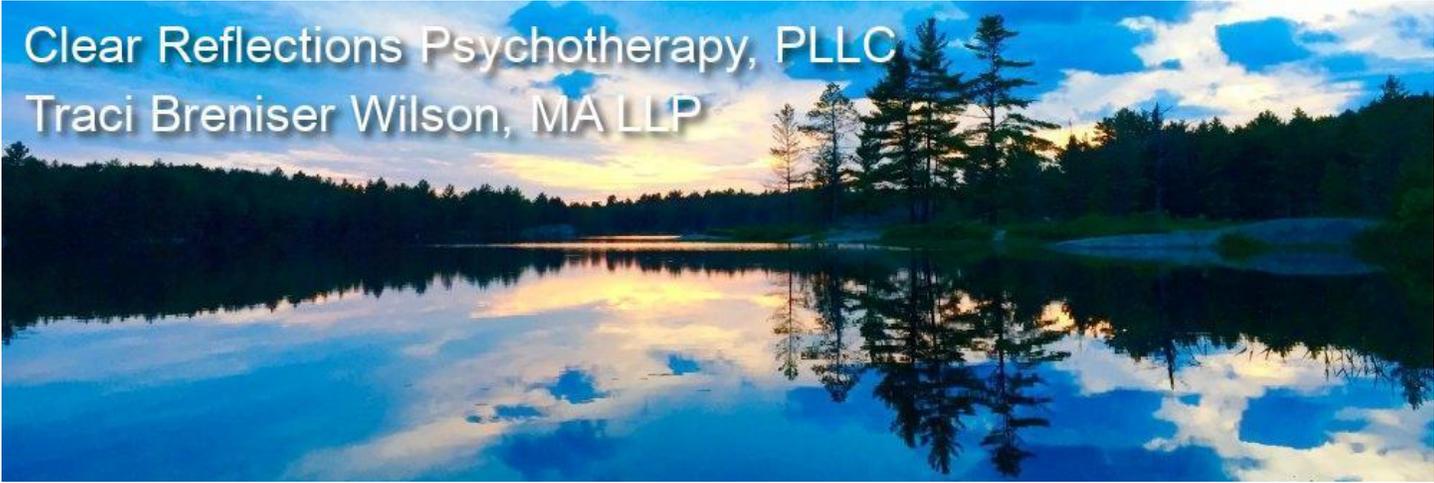
Here are some healthy habits that, when applied daily, one goal at a time, it can really transform the way you live, in a positive way. Do not try to retool your entire life; instead change one habit a month. And remember, everyone is unique so pick and choose the strategies that best fit your authentic self.

1. **One thing at a time.** This is the simplest and best way to start reducing your stress and you can start today. Focus as much as possible on doing one thing at a time. Clear your desk of distractions and pick one project to do at a time. Remove distractions such as phones and email notifications. If you’re going to do email, do only that. And be fully present in doing the task at hand. You’ll get urges to do other things--just keep practicing.
2. **Simplify your schedule.** A hectic schedule is a major cause of high stress. Simplify by reducing the number of commitments in your life to just the essential ones. Ask yourself what is most important and go down from there by saying no to commitments that aren’t really a priority to you. Schedule only a few important things each day and put space between them. Leave room for down time and fun.
3. **Get moving.** Do something each day to be active — walk, hike, play a sport, go for a run, do yoga. It doesn’t have to be grueling to reduce stress. Just move. Have fun doing it.
4. **Develop one healthy habit this month.** Improving your overall health will help with stress. But do it one habit at a time. Eat fruits and veggies for snacks. Floss. Quit smoking. Cook a healthy dinner. Drink water.
5. **Do something calming.** What enjoyable activities help you to feel calm? It could be exercise, taking a nap, a bath, reading, having sex or even housework or gardening. Some people like to meditate, take a nature walk or just sit quietly for five minutes. Find your calming activity and do it daily.
6. **Simplify your finances.** Finances can be a major stressor. Find ways to simplify. Automate savings and bill payments. Spend less by going shopping (at malls or online) much less. Find ways to have fun that don’t involve spending money.

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7. **Have a blast!** Have fun each day, even if it's just for a few minutes. Playing with kids can really take your mind off everything and they sure can be hilarious. Or play sports, a board game, or do something fun with friends. Whatever you choose, be sure to laugh.
8. **Get creative.** Throwing yourself into a creative activity is another great way to de-stress. Write, paint, play music, build things, or do interior design.
9. **De-clutter.** Try taking 20-30 minutes and go through a drawer or closet and get rid of stuff you don't use or need anymore. Look around at anything that's cluttering up a room and get rid of it or find a better place for it. Decluttering will create a peaceful environment for work, play, and live. Do this a little at a time — it can be one of your "fun activities".
10. **Be early.** This goal can be hard but being late can be very stressful. Try to leave earlier by getting ready earlier or by scheduling more space between events. Things often take longer than normal, so add some buffer time. If you arrive early, have some reading material handy.

What is your favorite way to simplify your life?

Traci Breniser Wilson is a clinical psychologist with offices in Brooklyn, MI. She has 30+ years of experience and specializes in eating disorders, weight loss, depression, anxiety, marriage repair and enrichment, addiction, grief and loss, Christian therapy, and goal achievement. For more ideas how to find simple pleasures and authentic happiness or other mental health questions, feel free to contact Traci.

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