

EMOTION AEROBICS®

for Stress Management

Sometimes when we feel a lot of stress, we would like to know one good, key stress-reducing technique, something that

- o can be used at almost any time,
- o doesn't require changing clothes,
- o doesn't hurt that bad knee, ankle or back, and
- o doesn't cost money,
- o doesn't get you sweaty,
- o **IS FUN !**

One good answer is EMOTION "AEROBICS." Here's how it works:

We know about exercising our bodies, and most people do some. We know about exercising our minds, thinking, reasoning, figuring things out, learning new things. Most people do some of that. But oddly enough, we don't realize we need to exercise our emotions too, to have a full range of emotion, and not get stuck in certain ones. So first "do the scales," as a musician might say.

The general procedure: Start with some positive emotions, and make a noise that goes with each one: neutral, optimistic, confident, delighted, blissful. Next, do some negative ones: neutral, bored, hurt, suspicious, angry. Now positives again: neutral, optimistic, confident, delighted, blissed.

Then improvise and be creative. While you're driving along, yell, scream, make noises. Hurt or sad noises, whimpers, sobs. Angry noises, roars, growls. Musical noises, tones, wordless melodies. Baby noises. Kid noises -- noises that kids make to each other, tongue blatts, raspberries. Womanly noises, that only women would make to each other in vocal, non-verbal responses in a conversation. Manly noises that only men would make to each other in vocal, nonverbal responses.

So you can be non-social, even anti-social, but cleverly and at the right times and places. Namely, alone. In the car where there's nobody to answer to, or have a social face on for. It's a place and time that's completely your own. Or on your bike. Or in the shower. Or any other time you don't need to be "social." Do these exercises on your own, for your own release.

The focused exercise: The first part is making faces that go with emotions. Look through the set of faces, on the reverse side, notice what emotions have been big for you the last few hours, and starting with the biggest feeling, make that face for about 30–40 seconds as though you were expressing it in pantomime to an audience. Do not look in the mirror, just sense your face.

The second part is making noises that go with emotions. Add in a sound that goes with that emotion for you. You don't need to be loud—loudness doesn't make it better or more effective. And keep that face and let out that sound for exactly 2 minutes. You might want to set a kitchen timer to be reasonably accurate. Then stop for 1 minute, let your face go to neutral.

Then take the next emotion that comes to you, or the next on your recent-feelings list, and repeat the process. A facial expression, 30–40 seconds. Then add the sound, 2 minutes. Then 1 minute of neutral. And then do the same with your third emotion. Overall don't go more than 15 minutes. This cluster of 3 emotions is 1 set.

Then later that day do a second set, with whatever feelings have been prominent for you in the few hours before. Do this process 3 sets each day.

Also..... You can release emotion this way while you're driving along, walking, or any time you like: make faces. Gruff faces, sad faces, hurt faces, mad faces. Grit your teeth. Stick your tongue into your cheeks, go all around. Pretend you're at the dentist and she's got both hands in your mouth! Stretch your face muscles out in every direction. Roll your eyes around 360°. Leer, jeer, scowl. Look warm, sympathetic. Cold and forbidding and rejecting. Disappointed and dejected. Elated, deflated, jaded, high-rated.

The idea here is to EXPRESS every kind of emotion, with our major expressive tools, the voice and the face. It puts feedback right back into the brain, and changes the neurotransmitter hormones. We need to let emotions flow through and out. We get restricted to a small set of them, whatever's allowed at work, at home, with clients, with store clerks — the "social" settings of life.

We need this emotional exercise to stay healthy. How often? Once a day is nice, but just gets the stream unblocked, and what we want is to keep it flowing. Good times for this are usually driving to work in the a.m., to home in the p.m., and to and from appointments. Or bicycling at any time. When at home, it's not always convenient to be making odd noises, so there you can always just do the faces as you walk down the hall, take a shower (maybe noises are okay there!) etc. etc. Just make sure to take the time to... take the time!