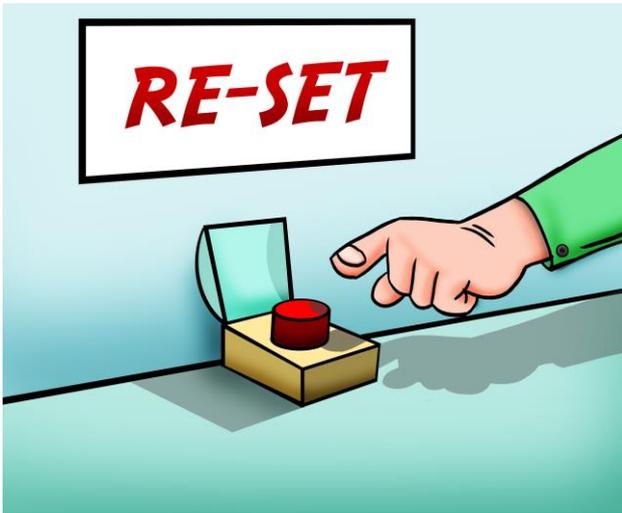


FAST Pathways® Skills to Keep Stress Useful - Quick Re-Set



This is a quick and effective way to change unhelpful emotional responses. Even the unpleasant ones can be helpful sometimes - a little worry making sure that you prepare well, and avoid unnecessary risks. Feeling hurt or angry, telling you that a boundary's been crossed, and that you might need to act to stop it from happening again.

But when the emotion becomes so strong that it takes over, then it's useful to have a way of getting back into neutral – even if it's only to consider rationally what's caused you to feel that way, and what action to take.

This exercise works in two important ways: Firstly, by slowing your breathing, you take in extra oxygen. This helps your body re-set back to your optimum chemistry, neutralising extra adrenaline. Breathing is a very present activity – you never reminisce about breaths of the past, or store up a few extra for the future, just in case.

Slowing it down, and noticing how it feels to breathe all the way to the bottom of your lungs, helps to gently bring your thoughts into now. Focusing on the feeling and the gentle rhythm, and for a few minutes, letting go.

In this respect it's similar to meditation, but with an important difference: When you meditate, you're meant to have a quiet mind (there's a lot more to it, but that's one important part) – which, unless you put in a lot of practice, can be very difficult.

This isn't about not having thoughts, but about letting the ones you have drift through; rather than linking in a chain of one to another and the next. So that you can notice whatever thoughts are there, and just for those few minutes, let them pass through, without giving them any extra energy.

This is much easier, and also has the advantage that often, the thoughts as you relax can be really useful: That name you were racking your brains for a few hours ago, comes easily into your awareness – it was there all along, but with everything else going on in your mind, it couldn't get through....

Or you get a really creative insight into something you've been mulling over – one of those 'D'Oh!' moments, where it's suddenly blindingly obvious. You're giving your outside-awareness thinking a little extra space, accessing resources that you may not otherwise use.

The second ingredient was discovered when scientists were experimenting with reading brain waves: Look straight ahead, then keeping your head still, look up to the ceiling (so that only your eyes move). They found that this movement of your eyes in the sockets changes your brainwaves – from the type which you make in conscious activity, to those of a light sleep. When you combine this with the shift in body chemistry from slowing your breathing, and a bit of imagination; you can quickly get back to feeling comfortable.



Uses of the Quick Re-Set Technique

- You've just had a difficult conversation, which didn't go your way. Rather than stewing over it, you want to switch off replaying it in your thoughts, and get on with your day
- You're experiencing a craving, whether it's for food, cigarettes, or anything else which isn't good for you. Rather than having a prolonged battle with yourself, you want to simply switch it off
- You're getting ready for a test or exam, and you want to remain relaxed and calm while you study or practise – so that instead of thinking what it's leading towards, you're fully focused on the task in hand
- You've been engrossed in doing something. Now it's time to stop and move on to something else, so you want to clear your mind ready for what's next
- You're about to give a speech or presentation, and you want to stand up feeling relaxed and comfortable
- Something's going on in your life which upsets or frustrates you, or makes you angry. You know that responding from a place of raw emotion isn't going to do you any favours; so you want to get those emotions out of the way, to properly express yourself
- You've plucked up the courage to do something which you used to worry about or avoid, and you want to feel confident in your ability to do it with ease
- You're having an important conversation, and you want to focus fully on what the other person's saying, rather than on what's going on inside your head
- You've had a hectic day at work: As you leave to go home, you want to switch off any more work-related thoughts, so that you can immerse just as fully in your time away from it

If you ever find it difficult to sleep restfully, this is also a great exercise to do just before you go to bed. Then, it works even better if you make it a little longer – perhaps about ten minutes rather than the usual two or three. Taking the time to gently and naturally relax every part of your body. You're allowing some extra space for your mind to make you aware of anything that's important, for you to learn from or act on; rather than it happening while you sleep. You can even do it if you wake in the night to help you drift easily, and even if you don't drift all the way back into sleep, you'll be much more comfortable letting your body relax and your thoughts wander.

But what about the times when you want to be able to let go of negative emotions really quickly; when you can't take the few minutes to do the whole exercise? You can't start deep breathing and rolling your eyes when you're stressed at driving in heavy traffic. If someone's just said something which touched a nerve, you can't put them on hold for a couple of minutes, while you breathe yourself back to calm, before you respond.

These are times when you'll really enjoy the benefits of doing it often; setting another mind pattern, which soon becomes so automatic, that you can feel that same calming in a single breath.