

STRIP AWAY STRESS

The biggest health threat for men isn't heart disease or cancer. It's the out-of-control stress reactions that cause or worsen those conditions in the first place. We talked to America's coolest characters to learn how they cope. Steal their secrets and you'll thrive in life's pressure points—like they do.

AND
REAP THE,
AHEM,
REWARDS

THE STRESSOR All eyes are on you at a critical moment in the game (or the presentation, or the ceremony).

BEAT THAT STRESS When you establish a routine, the difficult becomes routine. Chauncey Billups, a Detroit Pistons point guard, describes his formula for nailing two free throws to tie a game in the fourth quarter: "I know it's a big shot, but I don't even think about the moment. If I put more pressure on it, then it becomes a mental thing. I treat it the same as a free throw in the first quarter by doing the same routine every single time. I focus on the rim. I take four dribbles, spin the ball, and get up under it. My routine puts me into a calm state. It's just me and the rim."

THE STRESSOR You've seen your friends' marriages, and worry that you'll end up with the wrong person.

BEAT THAT STRESS Ask yourself a few essential questions. Are you attracted to her? Do you play well together? Is she unselfish?

Does she treat people well and talk positively about past relationships? Does she recognize her family's shortcomings and take corrective steps? Is she respectful of you? Does she share the soap in the shower? If you have a string of positive answers, you have a fun, responsible, thoughtful person at your side, says John Van Epp, Ph.D., a clinical counselor based in Medina, Ohio, and the author of *How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk*. That probably qualifies her as a keeper.

THE STRESSOR Your boss is hassling you, and you're about to explode.

BEAT THAT STRESS Call a time out. If you're in the thick of battle, go wash your hands. Removing yourself provides the chance to think and not say the wrong thing. While you're gone, let yourself be upset. "Anger and agitation tend to be short-lived when you let them play out internally," says Melissa Blacker, a director of professional training at the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts

BY STEVE CALECHMAN Photographs by Steven Lippman



ONCE YOU SEE WHAT'S MISSING FROM YOUR LIFE, YOU CAN SHIFT INTO PROBLEM-SOLVING MODE.

medical school. When you're calm, go to your boss and say, "What can I do to help work this out?" He's probably braced for a fight, so he's bound to welcome the collaborative tone. At the very least, you've expressed yourself. Letting your anger fester increases the chance you'll overreact.

THE STRESSOR Your dad died and you don't know what to do.

BEAT THAT STRESS For 2 days every week, schedule 10 minutes to grieve. Unless you plan, it's too easy to dodge the sadness—especially in the first couple of months after the funeral. And taking control of the process prevents unresolved issues from lingering. Shoot for early evening, when anything kicked up won't affect your sleep. Take a 5-minute walk to unwind, then pull out photos to bring the departed front and center. Now ask two questions: What have you lost? What's the effect? You see what's missing from your life, so you can shift to problem solving, says Michael McKee, Ph.D., a psychologist at the Cleveland Clinic. Now hit the gym. It'll end the grieving session, and the endorphins will

lift your mood. Overall, doing the two activities will model what you're striving for—the knowledge that sad and happy can coexist.

THE STRESSOR Your to-do list at work reads like a phone book, except it's less interesting.

BEAT THAT STRESS Add 10 more entries. Here's how actor Craig Bierko, most recently of *Boston Legal* fame, keeps his lid from flipping. "First, I keep in mind that on-the-job stress is an indication that I'm doing well. I could certainly experience far less stress lying around all day watching *Ellen* reruns. Then I practice something called 'the grateful flow.' It's far cheaper than Prozac. I list ten things for which I'm grateful. Remind yourself of the friend who's always been there, the fact that you can afford your next meal. And include your job. Sure, it's the reason you're making the list in the first place. But where would you be without it?"

THE STRESSOR Your team's success (or failure) is hanging on your performance in the ultimate contest.

BEAT THAT STRESS Focus on the now as

well as the later. Martin Brodeur, star goalie for the New Jersey Devils, uses these techniques when he faces game 7 in the playoffs: "When it becomes stressful, I overbreathe. That opens up everything and makes me aware of the situation I'm in. I also make sure my feet are together as much as possible and that they're really under me. With my feet together, I'm compact. It's less tiring, and I'm lighter on my skates. As for when I'm not on the ice? Before game 7 of the 2003 Stanley Cup finals I booked a vacation online. It took me out of the anxiety of facing a game 7." (The Devils won that game, 3-0.)

THE STRESSOR You're due at Grandma's, the storm is roaring, and you need to pilot the clan safely.

BEAT THAT STRESS Be meticulous in your preflight prep. That's what Rob Kinkade, a bush pilot, does before taking off for what he calls a "rodeo day" in the bucking bronco of Alaska's airspace. "If I know it'll be rough out there, I'll meticulously check everything two or three times—the flight plans, my fuel, the wings. It gives me peace of mind. If I take care of the downside first, the upside will take care of itself. If it's rough and I see people worrying, I'll sing or make a joke or grab the stick with one hand and drink

a soda with the other, to show that it's not affecting me, even if it is. I'm lightening my mood, and it's kind of contagious."

THE STRESSOR You're an hour into the first date and it's going nowhere.

BEAT THAT STRESS Ask her what she likes about her best friend. Relationships are sources of pride and endless fascination for women. By delving into her life, you're trying to understand her, and everyone loves being understood. "It defuses a lot of the tension," says Ann Demarais, Ph.D., a psychologist and coauthor of *First Impressions: What You Don't Know about How Others See You*.

THE STRESSOR Your kid's stressing but won't tell you what it's about.

BEAT THAT STRESS Take him on a long car ride. It's private, and there's little else to do but talk. Start out casually, and eventually bring up the struggles you faced at his age. He'll either identify or tell you that it's completely different now. Either way, the opening is there to gently find out which of three areas—school, friends, or family—isn't working. "You're getting new informa-

tion and can take it to where the problem belongs," says Irene Goldenberg, Ed.D., a family psychologist based in Los Angeles.

THE STRESSOR You have to make your case or lose the day.

BEAT THAT STRESS Before the straining, go into training. Steven D. Benjamin, a criminal-defense attorney in Richmond, Virginia, believes that discipline always carries the day. "Before the trial starts, everything in my life becomes more regimented. I don't drink or go out, and I become more obsessive than usual about my workout. A trial is an endurance event, and training for it makes me much more alert. I also take care of my team members. I can't see everything at trial. They're my auxiliary hard drive, and they give me peace of mind."

THE STRESSOR Your kid is really into playing a violent video game.

BEAT THAT STRESS Observe, or play it with him. Encroaching on his territory removes some of the rebellious fun, but you'll also learn his perspective, says Jeff Bostic, M.D., a child and adolescent psychiatrist at Mas-

sachusetts General Hospital. Make no comments during the game, and at the end, say, "What did you enjoy most about it? That was a little weird for me to be gunning down all those cops." You might find out that he clearly distinguishes fantasy from reality and that his bloody game is just a bloody game.

THE STRESSOR Your name is all over a mistake and you have to tell the boss.

BEAT THAT STRESS As soon as possible, go to the boss and own up, but immediately follow that with what you've learned and (the most important factor) how things will be different. It won't guarantee a full pardon, but you won't have to stew over the unknown. "You will have made a problem less bad, and that's the goal of damage control," says Eric Dezenhall, the author of *Damage Control: Why Everything You Know about Crisis Management Is Wrong*.

THE STRESSOR You have to give some tough criticism to an employee.

BEAT THAT STRESS Deliver the bad with an ample dose of the good. Saying nothing

7 RULES FOR A STRESS-FREE LIFE

His life may look easy and breezy, but **Matthew McConaughey** has to stuff just as much crap into his 24-hour sack as you do (with paparazzi cameras in his face while he does it). "I have a lot of responsibilities, and I love accomplishing goals and marking things off my bucket list," he says. "But, man, things do get overwhelming." We do not weep for him, however, or for you, because there are right and wrong ways to react to stress. McConaughey has figured out a few key ways to eliminate negatives like anger, impatience, and wasted effort. The results are clear.

1. See eye-to-eye with your job

"The situation can never be greater than you are," he says. "If it is, you're never going to be able to engage and give your full talent, because you're not looking at it eye-to-eye." And that cuts the other way, McConaughey says. "You can't look down on it, either. If you go into anything without respect, you're going to miss magic, miss truths."

2. Learn the sneaky workout

McConaughey has those days, too: no exercise time. He compensates with active bursts throughout the day. "I'll drop and give myself 20 pushups at intervals throughout the day. 9 a.m., bang out 20. Sitting in a boring meeting at 10:30. Bang out 20. I do that 10 times throughout the day,

I've done 200. Or even mix it up with crunches, squats, whatever. Also, I have a 12-pound medicine ball. I'll just think, *Pick up the medicine ball and don't put it down for 30 minutes*. Try that once. You will have a workout, man."

3. Customize your to-do list

"I'll put fun things on my list to give me more things to cross off," he says. "Like, 'surf for an hour.' When you get to one near the bottom and it says, 'Watch Monday Night Football,' it's like, yeah!"

4. Adopt a simple philosophy and live by it

Some of life's biggest stressors are the remains of self-destructive things you do, McConaughey says. So he boils his decisions down to one sim-

plicity. "I don't like to leave crumbs," he says. "I like to do things right, and not cheat to get 'em done. That's what a man does. I don't owe anybody anything. I never go anywhere and worry, 'Oh shit, so-and-so's here.' I don't have crumbs in my past."

5. Insulate yourself from natural disasters (that you cause yourself)

McConaughey explains with a metaphor straight out of the Weather Channel: "I like to create my own weather so then I can blow in the wind. When I say that, I mean that whether it's in business or your personal life, if you've got positive, like-minded people around you, then your systems are in place. I don't have to be looking over my shoulder. I can just blow in the wind. I may bounce

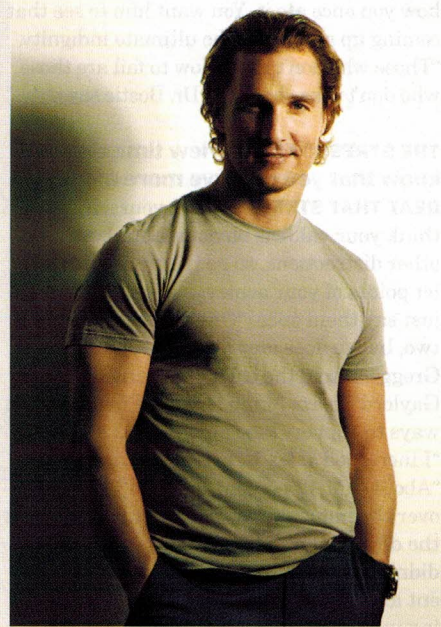
off this wall or that wall, but I won't get caught in any tornados."

6. Know what you don't know

Fighting to prove you know something when you don't wastes time and sucks energy, McConaughey says, and "I have to continue to learn that. The amount of time you can save just by going, 'I don't know,' is huge. We're brought up to be know-it-alls. 'I don't know,' can be perceived as a weakness, but I see it as a sign of intelligence. Then I can experience something so I do know. How else will you ever learn something new?"

7. Never forget to schedule the pleasure, too

"I've always said pleasure is good for you," McConaughey says.



"Well," you reply, "duh." But wait a minute: How much pleasure do you really allow yourself to have every day? "There are some people who are so strict that they become a slave to their healthy lifestyle, a slave to working out, a slave to eating just the right foods. I've seen it happen to other people, and I'm guilty of going overboard

with it. And when you do, man, you're no frickin' fun at all. You have to be more flexible and enjoy having things. I'm not going to a friend's barbecue and say, 'I'm gonna stick to salad.' Who's gonna enjoy that? Lighten up! It's your lifestyle, not your life."

MIKE ZIMMERMAN

For more from McConaughey, flip this issue over to our *Guide to Style*.

Nino Mulino, styling: Brian Boyé, grooming: Catherine Furniss/Celestineagency.com, James Perse shirt, Michael Kors pants

RELATIONSHIPS ARE AN ENDLESS SOURCE OF PRIDE AND FASCINATION FOR WOMEN.

when things are acceptable does not count, says Albert Bernstein, Ph.D., a psychologist and the author of *Emotional Vampires*. Keep track in your head. Your kind-to-unkind ratio has to be 4:1 to ensure that respect is built up and communication lines stay open. After that, structure the bad news like, "When you're late, I feel like you're not fully committed. Was that your intention?" You're making your point, but by giving him the benefit of the doubt, you're avoiding arguments that go quickly and resentfully to nowhere.

THE STRESSOR Your kid's soccer team is down 8-0 and your kid is the goalie.

BEAT THAT STRESS Focus on the success inherent in failure. Release tension by yelling encouraging stuff; you're concentrating positive energy on other people and helping the little version of yourself dying in front of the net. In the car after the game, tell him how proud you were of his bravery/composure/intensity and that you weren't disappointed in him. Share a quick story about how you once ate it. You want him to see that coming up short isn't the ultimate indignity. "Those who don't know how to fail are those who don't take chances," Dr. Bostic says.

THE STRESSOR It's review time and you know that you deserve more money.

BEAT THAT STRESS Repeat yourself. You think your value is obvious. Your boss has other distractions, so go in armed with bullet points of your achievements. But don't just say them once. "One plus one equals two, but so does four minus two," says Gregg Clifton, the chief operating officer of Gaylord Sports Management. Find different ways to support the same point. Lead with, "I increased sales 12 percent." Later, say, "About that 12 percent, it was 43 percent over the industry average . . . it was the best the department has ever seen . . . expenses didn't rise at all." Hammering it from different angles will register with the man signing your soon-to-be-larger check.

THE STRESSOR You want to start dating again, but you still can't forget the ex.

BEAT THAT STRESS Confine her to paper. Make a list of all the things you're going to miss. Making a hard copy creates new connections in your brain, and, with that, new ways to consider your situation, says Peter Pearson, Ph.D., codirector of the Couples Institute in Menlo Park, California. Look at the list and ask yourself if she has a monop-





oly on those qualities. If your answer is no, you can conceive of a future with someone else. You'll have a kind of emotional replacement to-do list, and there's nothing like a to-do list to turbocharge your psyche.

THE STRESSOR You need to handle all the details of a complex operation just so or disaster will ensue.

BEAT THAT STRESS In the moment before you begin, take a mental inventory of the critical steps to success. Here's how Ali Rezai, M.D., a neurosurgeon at the Cleveland Clinic, preps for the first cut. "While I'm scrubbing my hands, I'm reviewing all the aspects of the case. That puts me into a highly focused state and cleans my mind of distractions. During surgery, I'm constantly reviewing the steps with the operating-room staff. It takes everyone onto the next page and into a rhythm. When I'm faced with an emergency, the calmer I am, the calmer everyone else becomes."

THE STRESSOR You're meeting her family or friends for the first time.

BEAT THAT STRESS Channel Matt Lauer and be your charming, head-nodding, inquisitive best. Asking them questions takes the focus off you, and their judgment will be that you're concerned with and interested in others. Drop in a well-placed, "I love how she always wants to learn something new," to show that you understand and admire your new girlfriend—and to nail opening night, says the psychologist Ann Demarais. Bonus tip: When they ask you a question, focus on how it's asked—bluntly or anecdotally—and respond the same way. Rick Brinkman, author of *Dealing with People You Can't Stand*, says that matching question style and answer style gives you the best chance of being heard.

THE STRESSOR Success is at hand, if you can just close the deal.

BEAT THAT STRESS Don't try to be perfect. Just play your role and rely on others who are focused on the same goal. Joe Nathan, a Minnesota Twins reliever, has one of the most high-stress jobs in sports: closer. Here's his mental process, leading up to the last three outs: "Around the seventh inning, I go through some visualization—seeing myself on the mound, making certain pitches. It puts me in a relaxed state and allows me to focus on something I need to do rather than watching somebody else. When I'm on the mound, I try not to overthink the situation. It's about being aggressive, pounding the strike zone, and trusting my defense. It takes the heat off. I don't have to be perfect, so I can relax and throw a better pitch." ■