

Steve Barrett, a clinical social worker at the Atlanta VA Medical Center, wrote the following article. Steve works in the Mental Health Clinic, and primarily works with Vietnam veterans. Steve is a Vietnam veteran himself, and was in Pleiku in 1967.

Since our country is at war, a lot of combat veterans have increased stress on them. So I have taken some time to come up with some stress management techniques, that we can use at all times. The important thing is to practice the stress management techniques on a regular basis. Some may work for you, and some may not work for you, but give them a try. It may help the next time you are watching the war on television.

1. **RECOGNIZE STRESS:** Learning to recognize when your body is reacting to stress, and identifying your stressors, are the first steps in managing stress.
2. **TAKE A BREAK:** A change of pace, no matter how short, gives us a new outlook on old problems. Take a vacation 20 minutes everyday - enjoy a change from the daily routine.
3. **LEARN TO RELAX:** Under stress, the muscles of our bodies stay tight. One of the most effective ways to combat tension is deep muscle relaxation. It is an essential life skill that anyone can learn. Just a few minutes of peace and quiet everyday makes a big difference. Other techniques that produce muscle and mental relaxation are yoga, prayer, and deep breathing.
4. **BE NUTRITIONALLY AWARE:** Good nutrition is vital to optimum health, and it is essentially critical when we are under unusual stress, or going through a major life change. Keeping our weight under control, maintaining a low cholesterol count, and cutting down on foods with concentrated sugar can be beneficial for us.
5. **EXERCISE REGULARLY:** Just like nutrition, exercise is imperative for maintaining a high level of fitness. Whatever you enjoy - swimming, walking, jogging with “Jody”, aerobic exercise - will help you let off steam and work out stress.
6. **PLAN YOUR WORK:** Tension and anxiety really build up when our work seems endless. Plan your work to use your time and energy more efficiently. Get the entire family involved in the planning, and take one thing at a time.
7. **TALK IT OVER:** This may be the most important thing you can do for yourself if you can't get a handle on things. Find a good and trusted listener. Just as a pressure relief valve allows steam to flow out of a pressure cooker to keep it from blowing up, talking allows stress to flow out of our body, and keeps us from blowing up.
8. **ACCEPT WHAT YOU CANNOT CHANGE:** If the problem is out of your control at this time, try your best to accept it, until you can change it. It beats spinning your wheels and getting nowhere. This could decrease your frustration. This technique usually takes a little time to learn, so start now! (This is just like the Serenity Prayer.)
9. **TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE:** Believe that you are basically in charge of your life, and how you react to stress. Meet challenges and problems head-on,

maintaining a sense of order and priorities, and use available help to stay on top of things.

- 10. EVALUATE YOUR PERCEPTIONS:** What we think is sometimes what we feel. If we constantly think unrealistic and irrational thoughts about ourselves and other folks, then our stress level is increased. Henry Ford once said: “whether you think you can - or you can’t – you’re always right.”
- 11. RELAX YOUR STANDARDS:** When we set unrealistic expectations for ourselves, we usually can never reach them. If we do, then we burnout quickly. Set reasonable standards and goals.
- 12. REWARD YOURSELF:** Find ways to reward yourself when you've completed a minor or major task. We cannot always depend on others to recognize our accomplishments, so we must develop our own reward system.
- 13. BECOME ASSERTIVE:** Take steps to solve problems instead of feeling helpless. Distinguish assertiveness (respecting others’ rights and your rights) from aggressiveness and passivity can do much to resolve internal stress.
- 14. GIVE IN ONCE AND A WHILE:** If you find the source of your stress is other people, try giving in instead of fighting and insisting you're always right. You may find that others will start to compromise with you.
- 15. REDISCOVER HUMOR:** Learn to laugh at yourself and your situation! This may be the most important strategy.
- 16. MONITOR WATCHING THE WAR NEWS:** Many veterans that I treat have exacerbated symptoms secondary to watching too much news about the war. To stay abreast of what is happening, try reading the newspaper or listening to news on the radio. That way, we are not re-traumatizing ourselves with combat again.