



Coping With Your Tensions

The passenger's comfort and safety can be directly affected by how well the cabin crew reacts to stress. Tension is both positive and negative, explains the author, provided a person keeps his or her upsets in check and copes with them effectively.

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by

Jeanne M. Koreltz-Elliott

In the fast-paced, high-pitched world of today, anxiety and tension are commonplace. They also, incidentally, are essential functions of living. Without the experience of anxiety, we would not be prepared to avoid or overcome situations harmful to ourselves and to our families. Without the ability to tense ourselves, we would fall short in emergencies, often to the peril of our lives and those for whom we have responsibility as an integral part of our jobs.

Tension also serves as a stimulating source of excitement. To gain this kind of pleasure, we play, or watch, competitive sports, pursue adventurous outdoor activities and follow drama on the stage, screen and television.

Tension and anxiety are our self-protective reactions when confronted by threats to our safety, well-being, happiness and self-esteem — threats such as illness, accident, violence, job unrest or problems in family relations.

Life today is much more complex than that of only a few decades ago, but the dangers we face daily — and the tensions they arouse — are not new. Our ancestors faced similar perils of equal magnitude. But today many more conflicting demands are made on us.

A traditional code of “do’s” and “don’t’s” in the face of a threat to security of life or peace of mind no longer apply to current conditions of constant change in our world. The answer must often be instantaneous. What might apply one day might be disastrous the next.

Everyone is confronted by threats and, as a result, experiences tensions. There are times, however, when we become tense and anxious when no reasonable threat exists. This may occur

when we have been through an extended period of unrest or fatiguing work, which leads to exhaustion and the inability to reason things out or control our feelings as we can when rested and in good condition.

Conflicts produce the same effect, particularly when we cannot solve them. Examples of this include the conflict between the impulse to do something unethical or to not follow an established procedure or rule and the prompting from our conscience, which forbids it.

Some past experience may be the basis for anxiety and tension. For example, a person who grew up in economically stressed conditions may react with panic when there is a possibility of a furlough or layoff from the job. In a similar situation, the reactions of others may not be so abrupt.

The average person has the capacity to live through emotionally upsetting situations and bounce back when they have passed. An occasional spell of anxiety and tension is normal and, while unpleasant or painful at the time, need not be a cause for undue concern.

The time for concern is when emotional upsets are frequent, have a severe effect and persist. An example here is where life becomes a series of small and major crises well beyond an occasional passing emotional upset. Individuals who find themselves engulfed in such a series of varying degrees of crisis show signs of prolonged and intense anxiety and tension.

What can be done? Following are a few simple actions that may be of assistance. By applying determination, persistence and time, the results will be worth one’s efforts, whether you

suffer from an occasional mild upset or one that is more lasting and severe:

- **Talk it out.** When something worries you, talk it out. Confide in a person you trust. This can help to relieve your strain, put your concern in a clearer light and often enlighten you to exactly what can be done to correct the situation.

- **Escape.** When things go wrong, it sometimes helps]to escape from the problem for a short period, lose yourself in a movie, book, sports event or a brief trip for a change of scene. It is reasonable and even healthy to briefly escape the self punishment imposed by making yourself “stand there and suffer.” The brief escape can enable you to recover breath and balance, allowing you to return in a frame of mind to deal with the difficulty in a composed, logical manner.

- **Work off anger.** Anger often can leave you feeling foolish and regretful. If you feel like lashing out at someone, try holding off the impulse for awhile. Wait until tomorrow. In the interim, the pent-up energy can be used constructively in physical activity or a do-it-yourself project. Working the anger out of your system and cooling it for a day or two will leave you in a better position to deal with the problem.

- **Give in.** If frequent quarrels leave you feeling defiant and obstinate, remember you are behaving in a way frustrated children behave. Stand your ground on what you know is right but do it calmly, allowing for the fact that you may be wrong. Even if you are absolutely right, it is much easier on your system to give in once in awhile. Yielding usually works both ways. If you do, others will. If this can be accomplished, tension will be relieved, a practical solution found and a feeling of satisfaction and maturity achieved.

- **Do something for others.** Try “doing” something for someone else if you often find that you are worrying about yourself. This will remove the impetus from your own worries and give you a genuine good feeling of having done well.

- **Take one thing at a time.** Under tension, an ordinary workload can seem insurmountable. When that occurs, remember that it is a temporary condition and that you definitely can work your way out of it. To learn to prioritize tasks that need to be accomplished can be the key to relieving the tension such a workload can produce. Select the most urgent tasks and work at them, setting aside the rest for the time being. Once this prioritization has been accomplished, you will find that what remains is not so bad after all.

With the flow of work begun, the remainder of the tasks will go more smoothly and with a great deal less effort.

- **Shun the “superman/super- woman” urge.** Many persons place high expectations upon themselves and, as a consequence, are constantly in a state of concern and apprehension. These persons simply feel that they are not achieving as much as they should. “Perfection” in everything is their goal but is an open invitation to failure, as no one can be perfect in everything. Some prioritizing is helpful here. Decide on which things you do well and then put your efforts into these. These things probably are the things you like and, therefore, provide satisfaction. With the things you cannot do as well, give your best effort and ability. Most importantly, do not take yourself to task if the impossible is not achieved.

- **Go easy with criticism.** When people place high expectations on themselves, they often expect too much of others. When another person fails to measure up, they become frustrated and disappointed. The “other person” may be a loved one we are attempting to fit into a preconceived plan. It must be remembered that each person has his or her individual rights, virtues, shortcomings and values. Rather than being critical of the other person’s behavior, seek out the good points and help that person to develop them. This is a wonderful way to give both of you satisfaction. You will gain a better perspective on yourself as well.

- **Give the other person a break.** When under emotional tension, persons often feel the urge to “get there first,” edging out another person even when the goal is insignificant. If enough of us follow this path, everything becomes a race in life, with the accompanying physical and emotional injuries. Competition is contagious but so is cooperation. When you give the other person a break, you often make things easier for yourself. Conversely, if the other person no longer feels threatened, he or she stops being a threat to you.

- **Make yourself available.** At times, everyone has felt “left out,” the feeling of being neglected or rejected. Often, we simply imagine that other people feel this way about us, when, in reality, they would like us to make the first move. Instead of using feelings of neglect or rejection to withdraw, it is much more practical and healthier to continue to make yourself available, take the first step rather than all ways waiting to be asked.

On the other hand, to be “pushy” and always attempting to be in the limelight can be equally futile. This

often can be misinterpreted and lead to real rejection. There is an acceptable middle ground.

- **Schedule recreation.** Persons driven at a fast pace may not permit themselves time for recreation, an essential element for good physical and mental well being. Such persons find it difficult to make time for recreational activities. A set routine in a busy life can help. Just as work is scheduled into the day, recreation can be scheduled to include a plan for a definite time for some form of recreation. It generally is desirable to have a hobby that totally immerses a person in his or her off hours, producing pleasure and putting the work day to the back of the mind.

The above suggestions can aid in coping with everyday ten-

sions, anxieties and apprehensions. Interacting forces outside and within each of us tend to have a cumulative effect that leads to emotional difficulties arising from one's problems and long-standing habits and attitudes. The result is conflict.

A counseling or guidance service may be useful if this becomes the case. If, however, emotional disturbances become too distressing to a person or to others, this should be recognized and more professional treatment sought. Providing a good direction in these matters is the objective of the U.S. National Mental Health Association. Its address is the National Mental Health Association, 1800 North Kent Street, Arlington, VA 22209 U.S. ♦

Portions excerpted from "How to Deal with Your Tensions," a publication of the U.S. National Mental Health Association.

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