



Stress

What is Stress?

Stress is a word we hear a lot and is an inevitable part of everyday life. You can't avoid it. It is sometimes used to describe the very fast pace of life that many people lead or the way we feel when the pressure is intense. It is also connected to any change that you must adapt to and generally occurs when we feel unable to cope with the high demands that are placed on us.

Naturally we all respond differently to different situations. Some of us may appear unruffled under almost any conditions while others may feel under pressure over the simplest thing. It is difficult to measure stress, but we all have some experience of what it is like and how we cope with stressful situations.

Not all stress is bad. In fact, stress is not only desirable but also essential to life. We all require a certain amount of stress in our lives to help us respond to the various challenges of every day life; working to deadlines, for example may increase our energy and productivity. In itself stress is not harmful; it can however pose a threat to our physical and mental well being if it is allowed to build up over time unchecked. Whether the stress you experience is the result of major life changes or the cumulative effect of minor everyday hassles, it is how you respond to these experiences that determines the impact stress will have on your life.



Sources of Stress.

You experience stress from four basic sources:



1. Your *physical environment* bombards you with demands to adjust. You must endure weather, pollens, noise, traffic, and pollution.
2. You must also cope with *social stressors* such as deadlines, financial problems, job interviews, presentations, disagreements, demands for your time and attention, and loss of loved ones.
3. A third source of stress is *physiological*. The rapid growth of adolescence, menopause in women, illness, aging, injuries, lack of exercise, poor nutrition and inadequate sleep all tax the body. Your physiological reaction to environmental and social threats and changes can also result in stressful symptoms such as muscle tension, headaches, stomach upset and anxiety.
4. The fourth source of stress is your *thoughts*. Your mind interprets complex changes in your environment and body and determines when to turn on the “emergency response”.

Five Signs You Are Stressed.



1. You've become clumsy... stress affects coordination, making you drop things or bump into furniture more than usual.

2. You're forgetful... leaving shops without taking your change suggests you're too frantic to focus on the here and now.

3. You constantly crave sugary or fatty foods... stress uses up a lot of energy so when we're under pressure, you crave a quick fix.

4. Your temper's frayed... exploding over the smallest things is a sign your nerves are shredded and you need to recharge.

5. You're always ill.... stress suppresses the immune system, leaving you susceptible to coughs and colds.

How Can You Cope with Stress?

In order to cope with stress it is important that you first identify those areas of your life in which stress occurs.

Consider:

1. Self Awareness

You must learn to recognise the situations in your life that trigger stress, monitor your level of strain and where possible learn techniques to help you relax at these times.

2. Physical Fitness

Consider your general physical well being, are you getting enough exercise? Exercise is often neglected in a busy lifestyle and is an effective, enjoyable way to take your mind off your problems.

3. Watch your diet

You may be eating and drinking things that will increase your stress level, salt and alcohol for instance. Also try to cut down on your smoking. Although a cigarette may seem to produce a short term relaxing effect, the nicotine will in actual fact make the problem worse.

4. Limit caffeine intake

Drink plenty of water.

5. Learn and then practice simple relaxation techniques

6. Time Management

Try to manage your time more efficiently, only undertake to complete one task at a time. Set yourself realistic targets.

7. Get Support

Talk to friends, workmates or family. You could also find out about joining a support group or having counselling.

8. Be More Assertive

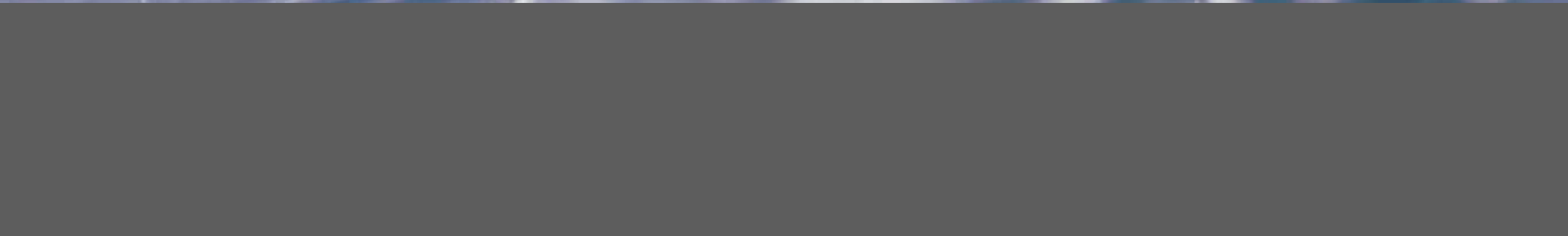
If you find that you have too much to do and feel over-burdened learn to say 'NO'.

60 Second Stress - Busters

Here are simple joys that can help you reduce your stress.
Make sure you get your share.

Water Watching:

Ocean, stream, river or lake will do. Watching falling rain, waterfalls, or fountains have special relaxation producing qualities.



Sunsetting:

Since the beginning of human life, watching the sun go down has been one of the most universal joys of living. Every sunset can be cause of relaxation.

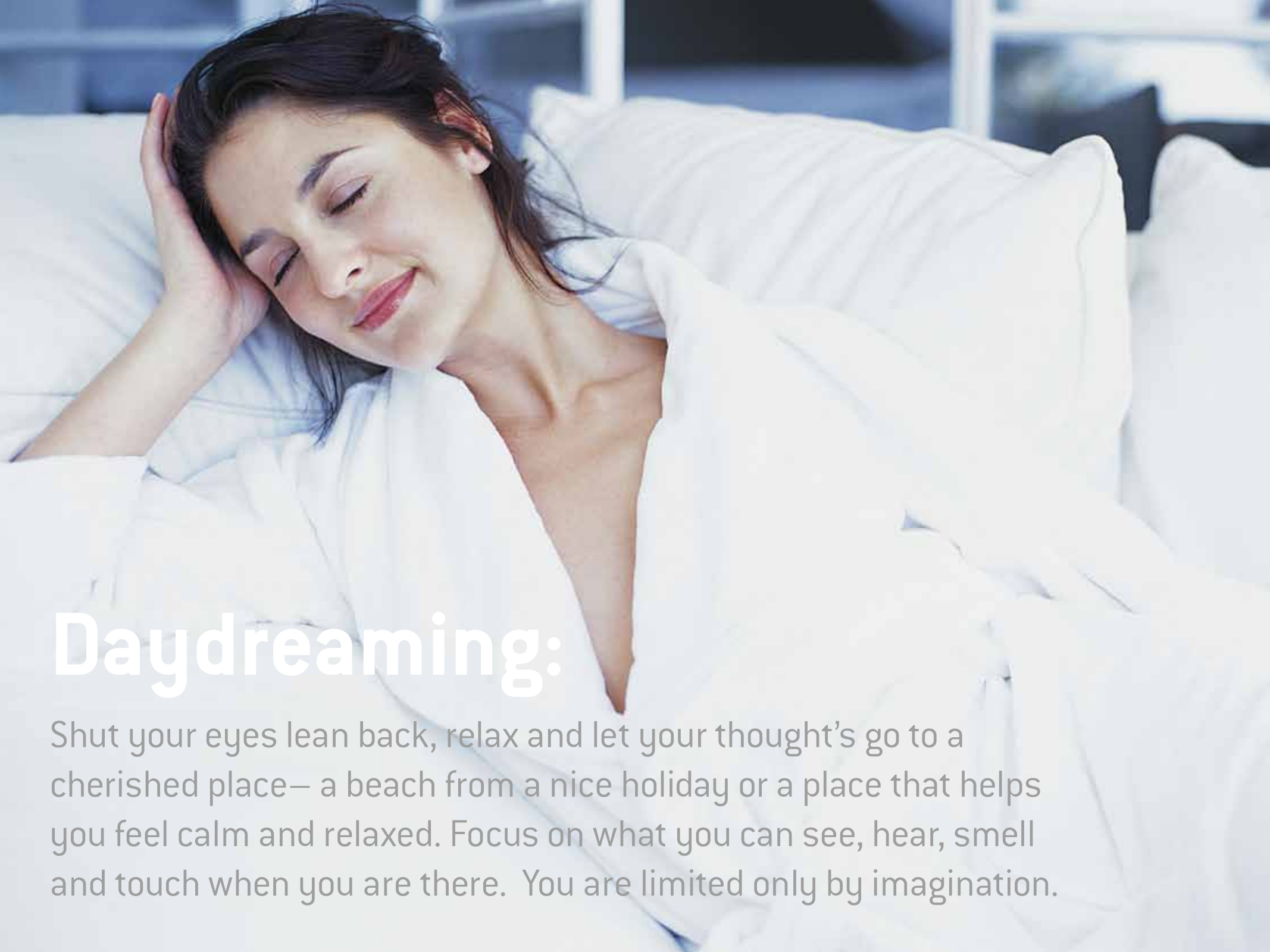
Sunrising:

Equally joyful but much less often experienced, a sunrise can add relaxation and meaning to your day. Recognising the warmth and opportunities brought by each sunrise can help you succeed in life.



Listening to the silence:

The sounds of silence are also common joys. Don't let them fall on deaf ears. Smile when you don't hear them.



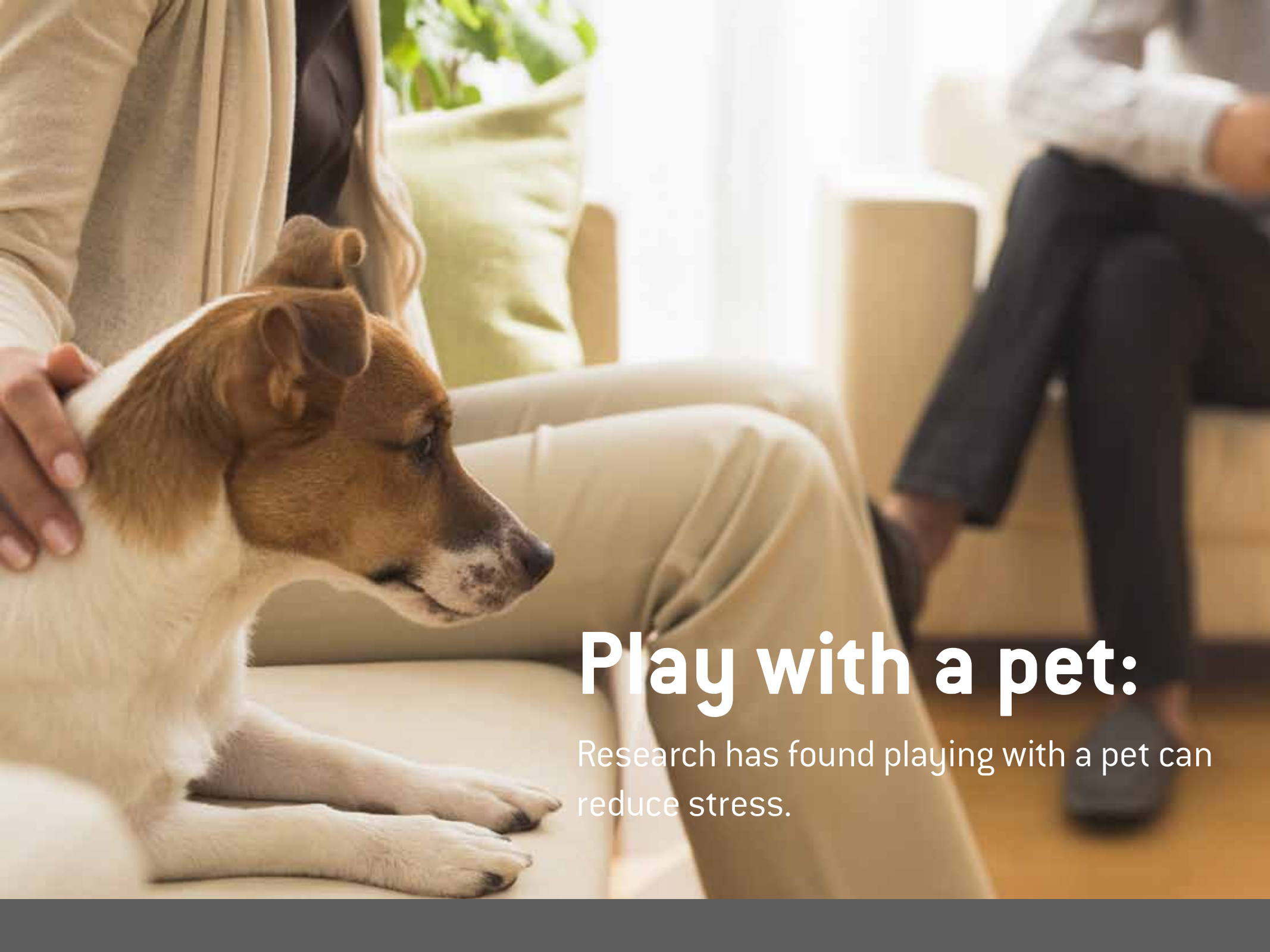
Daydreaming:

Shut your eyes lean back, relax and let your thoughts go to a cherished place— a beach from a nice holiday or a place that helps you feel calm and relaxed. Focus on what you can see, hear, smell and touch when you are there. You are limited only by imagination.



Breathe easy:

Breathe from your stomach – put your hand on your stomach and gently breathe in so you can feel your stomach rising under your hand. Breathe out slowly feeling your stomach fall. Repeat for a minute.



Play with a pet:

Research has found playing with a pet can reduce stress.

Look at the bigger picture:

When bad things happen, ask yourself: Will this matter in six months? Or a year? Or five years? You will find that the answer is usually 'No', which helps you to keep some sense of perspective.

Remember simple things can make a **BIG** difference in your life.

Finally: Stay In The Present: Don't dwell on the past, it's gone; don't live in the future, it does not exist and will fill you with anxiety; stay in the present, you will be amazed at how your stress reduces.

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