



How to Reduce Your Stress and Enhance Your Well-Being

By Stewart Edelstein

An American Bar Association study¹ released in 2016, based on responses from almost 13,000 US lawyers and judges, concluded that 28 percent of responding lawyers experience depression, 23 percent experience stress, and 19 percent experience anxiety. This study also concluded that alcohol abuse disorders and mental health problems in the legal profession are at higher rates than in other professions and the general population—and that younger lawyers are the segment of the population most at risk of substance abuse and mental health problems.

Consider this: unrelenting low-level stress, unchecked, can cause physical symptoms, including decreased immune system function, increased cholesterol and triglycerides, high blood pressure, faster heartbeat, increased blood glucose levels, digestive problems, loss of mental sharpness, sleeping problems, chest pains, fatigue, headaches, and back and neck pain. And the psychological symptoms? Anxiety, frustration, irritability, and depression. A litany of woes.

You don't want to be on the wrong side of these statistics, and you need not be. Here are strategies that should enable you to enjoy the practice of law without burning out. Adopting even a few of these strategies

should help you handle the stresses inherent in what we do. The more of these you adopt, the better you'll be able to cope.

Health Strategies

Eat right, exercise regularly, and sleep at least seven hours a night. Create and nurture your support system by making time for family and friends, and advising your family of more time-consuming work demands; make time for yourself; take fulfilling vacations; and vary your routine.

Career Strategies

Work smarter by keeping a current to-do list, using an effective tickler system, planning a realistic work schedule, refraining from multitasking, dividing large tasks into chunks, and establishing realistic expectations. Refrain from beating yourself up when you make mistakes, but learn from them, don't put off the worst until last, be organized and focused, complete tasks on time, be prepared, plan ahead, and review all files regularly.

Take advantage of teamwork by getting help with work when needed, keep your clients informed, cultivate staff relationships, and get feedback about your work. Benefit from safety valves by discussing your feelings, listening to your body, and having fun.

For a comprehensive discussion of how you can implement these tips, read *How to Succeed as a Trial Lawyer, Second Edition*. The chapter devoted to coping with stress applies to all lawyers.

For a quick test of your state of well-being, try the checklist on the next page. Well-being is much deeper than happiness, which is merely transitory. Well-being is characterized by a profound sense of fulfillment, engagement, meaning, purpose, accomplishment, positive emotion, and wholesome relationships. **CL**



For 40 years, Stewart Edelstein represented commercial clients as a trial lawyer at Cohen and Wolf, P.C., during which he taught clinical courses at Yale Law School for 20 years. He is on the American Arbitration Association Panel of Neutrals, and is the author, most recently, of *How to Succeed as a Trial Lawyer, Second Edition* (ABA 2017).

Notes

1. "The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys," by Patrick Krill, Ryan Johnson, and Linda Albert, published in the *Journal of Addiction Medicine*, January/February, 2016, Volume 10, Issue 1.

Monthly Well-Being Checklist

Print 12 copies of this checklist to review your progress on the first day of each month, for a year. Score one point for each box you check. Here is the scoring:

- 0 to 6 points:** You need to do better to take care of yourself. Seek help if you need it.
- 7 to 12 points:** You're on the right track. Keep it up!
- 13 to 20 points:** You're making significant progress! Now focus on more ways to improve your well-being.
- 21 to 25 points:** You're well on your way to achieving well-being.

- Eat a healthy breakfast, lunch, and dinner each day; refrain from eating anything after dinner. (See the accompanying recipe for Stockbridge Granola.)
- Get out of your chair at least every 90 minutes.
- Do at least one of the following:
 - Join a fitness club and use it regularly.
 - Hire a personal trainer and attend regular sessions.
 - Exercise vigorously at least 75 minutes a week or moderately at least 150 minutes a week, or a combination thereof.
- At least once a week, go for a walk in nature.
- Refrain from using any electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Go to sleep and wake up around the same time each day, and get at least seven hours of sleep each night.
- Arrive home for dinner at a set time each day, barring unavoidable circumstances.
- Either do not drink alcohol or, if you do, drink only in moderation, which means an average of no more than one drink a day for women, and an average of no more than two drinks a day for men.
- Refrain from multitasking.
- Listen to music that stirs your soul, whether it is relaxing or energizing for you.
- Renew a hobby or start a new one.
- Read a book unrelated to the law or a book on the suggested reading list on the next page.
- Keep an up-to-date to-do list.
- Don't beat yourself up when you make mistakes, but learn from them.
- Each day, do the most onerous task first.
- Clean out all your work spaces; keep them neat and tidy.
- Archive or delete all electronic documents and e-mails you don't need.
- Unsubscribe from all digital feeds you don't need.
- Use an effective tickler system to keep track of all deadlines.
- Review all your files at least once a month.
- Keep a plant in your office and water it as needed.
- Vary your routine.
- With sincerity, express gratitude each day to someone about something specific.
- At least once a week, do something just for fun.
- Frequently, enjoy meaningful time with people you love and with friends.



Suggested Reading

Mindfulness and Reducing Stress

50 Lessons for Lawyers: Earn More. Stress Less. Be Awesome

By Nora Riva Bergman

365 Tao: Daily Meditations

By Deng Ming-Dao

Freeing Yourself from Anxiety: 4 Simple Steps to Overcome Worry and Create the Life You Want

By Tamar E. Chansky

The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative

By Florence Williams

The Reflective Counselor: Daily Meditations for Lawyers

By F. Gregory Coffey and Maureen C. Kessler

Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less

By Alex Soojung-Kim Pang

Spontaneous Happiness

By Andrew Weil, MD

Stress Management for Lawyers: How to Increase Personal & Professional Satisfaction in the Law

By Amiram Elwork

Time Management for Attorneys: A Lawyer's Guide to Decreasing Stress, Eliminating Interruptions & Getting Home on Time

By Mark Powers and Shawn McNalis

Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in the Legal Life

By Steven Keeva

Nutrition and Health

American Dietetic Association Complete Food and Nutrition Guide

By Roberta Larson Duyff

Food Rules: An Eater's Manual

By Michael Pollan

In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto

By Michael Pollan

Why We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams

By Matthew Walker

Yawn!: Bedtime Reading for Insomniacs

By Ellen Sue Stern

Just for Fun

Disorder in the Court: Great Fractured Moments in Courtroom History

By Charles M. Sevilla

Forever Rumpole: The Best of the Rumpole Stories

By John Mortimer

Innocent, Your Honor: A Book of Lawyer Cartoons

By Danny Shanahan

The New Yorker Book of Lawyer Cartoons

By The New Yorker

The Ten, Make that Nine, Habits of Very Organized People. Make That Ten: The Tweets of Steve Martin

By Steve Martin

Options Other Than the Practice of Law The Lawyer's Career Change Handbook: More Than 300 Things You Can Do with a Law Degree

By Hindi Greenberg

Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers

By Gary A. Munneke, William D. Henslee, and Ellen S. Wayne.

Stockbridge Granola Recipe

This recipe is ideal for making granola to sprinkle on cereal, yogurt, and ice cream, and for eating right out of your hand. It is easy to make (although it does require some patience), more tasty, and less sweet than commercial brands—and is healthy eating.

- Preheat the oven to 300 degrees.
- In a large roasting pan, pour in:
 - 8 cups rolled oats
 - 2 to 3 cups nuts of your choice, such as almonds, walnuts, cashews, pecans
 - ½ cup wheat germ (if you use toasted wheat germ, add it at the end)
 - 2 teaspoons dried orange zest
 - 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 - ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- Stir the dry ingredients until they are evenly mixed.
- In a microwavable bowl, combine:
 - ½ cup vegetable oil of your choice
 - ½ cup honey
 - 1 tablespoon vanilla
 - 1 teaspoon almond extract
 - Juice of ½ a lemon
- Microwave the wet ingredients for a minute until warm.
- Stir the wet ingredients until they are evenly mixed.
- Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients until each morsel is coated.
- Pour all the ingredients into an ungreased roasting pan.
- Put the roasting pan in the middle rack of the oven. After 30 minutes, remove it from the oven. Stir, especially from the bottom, top and sides, to avoid excessive browning or burning. If necessary, cover with aluminum foil. Every 20 minutes, repeat the stirring process. Remove the granola from the oven when it is granular, after about an hour.
- After the granola cools, add zest of half a lemon, and dried fruit of your choice, such as dried cherries, cranberries, raisins, currants, or apricots, avoiding clumps.

This granola freezes well, so consider doubling this recipe for a stash that will last longer.

Want to learn more from CBA member Stewart Edelstein about stress in the legal profession? Visit ctbar.org/EdelsteinBarchat.

