

**N**obody would compare the effects of driving in traffic to those of a massage and hot bath, but there are ways you can keep the stress of the daily commute from getting out of hand. Take this little quiz to find out if you're "driving" yourself crazy.

- Do you find yourself getting angry at other drivers?
- Have you had close calls or minor accidents lately?
- Do you arrive at work feeling stressed out?
- Does it take you an hour or more to unwind after the daily commute?
- Do you cope with rush-hour stress by drinking more coffee or alcohol than you would otherwise?
- Do you sometimes feel like the road is a battleground?
- Have you found yourself "taking it personally" when someone else drives too slowly or cuts in front of you?
- Do others tell you that you seem upset while driving or after driving?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, maybe it's time for a little driver stress therapy. It's not just a matter of arriving at work or home to your family relaxed and refreshed instead of all wound up like an alarm clock. It could make the difference between arriving and not arriving at all. Unresolved stress can affect both your health and your driving safety.

## Rush-Hour Stress-Busters

Commuters who successfully manage the rush hour have developed ways to cope with the daily grind. They are a mixture of relaxation techniques and self-talk, the message being that it's a lot easier to work with something you can't change than to fight it. Try these approaches:

- Listen to relaxing music instead of the daily disaster digest.
- Notice how your body reacts to stress such as tense neck and shoulder muscles, white knuckles or facial tics. Make a conscious effort to relax these areas one at a time.
- Every few minutes, take a series of deep, slow breaths, inhaling slowly through the nose and letting it all out through the mouth. Picture the tension and aggravation going out with your breath. (Try saying "Aaaaaaahhhhhhh...." as you breathe out. Nobody but you will know.)
- Try to remember that the road, other drivers, and obstacles in the road do not exist just to make your life hard. In fact, the other drivers are facing the same difficulties as you are.
- Allow more time to get to work so you don't have to rush. Take the scenic route and give yourself extra time to do it.

## Consider Your Alternatives

Why not join a carpool or take a bus to work, even if it's only some of the time? Or see if you can change your hours to avoid the rush.

If rush-hour driving is your only choice, make a conscious effort to accept it. People who say, "There's nothing I can do about it, so I might as well make the most of it" often achieve a surprising measure of peace and even discover unexpected benefits in a stressful situation.

## What's Causing That Stress?

Stress on the road may be a symptom of deeper anxieties. Take time to resolve conflicts in your life. Exercise, meditate, practice yoga or take up another activity that you find relaxing. Taking charge of your behavior on the road is what defensive driving is all about.



# Are You Driving Yourself Crazy?