

Keep calm and carry on.

What a simple and straightforward idea!

Yet not always so easy to do. Stress, anxiety and worry make us uneasy and can derail efforts to carry on. However, 10 simple ways to keep calm can make it possible to carry on even in difficult situations.

1. Watch what you take in. Every day you are surrounded by opportunities to take into yourself things that can be toxic to you. Simple changes can help you stay calm. How do you feel after watching the news? Scared? Angry? News programs have a single goal: keep you listening. And they accomplish it by scaring you about local disasters, injustices or far-away terrors that you cannot control. Maybe the daily toxins are poor nutrition or too much caffeine or alcohol. Try to limit your intake of what stresses your mind or body. You don't need a big overhaul. Just turn off news in the afternoon and evening, or skip the extra cocktail, or switch out a bag of crisps for an apple.
2. Breathe. Slow breaths with long exhales are essential to calmness and the most important way to calm agitation. The long exhale lowers heart rate, respiration and blood pressure. A few deep breaths can center you in a crisis or enable you to face a conflict without so much distress. Try using one of many good apps to help you practice breathing slowly.
3. Be Mindful. Living in the moment has a lot to recommend it. It is the opposite of worrying about the future or the past. Get into it gently. Every morning take your first sips of tea slowly and attentively. As you walk out of your door, pause and smell the air or look at the sky. Try to really see the people you encounter at home and at work. Then expand that momentary awareness a little each day until you can stay present to the moment for several minutes. Observing without judgment will allow you time to form a more reasoned, objective view of what is happening and decide how to carry on from there.
4. Relax. This is as much about mind as body, but it starts with body. Reducing muscle tightness can help you carry on with fewer headaches or any condition made worse by tension. Progressive muscle relaxation involves tightening and then relaxing each muscle group from head to toe. The internet is your friend when it comes to finding good guided imagery for relaxation. Try the loving kindness meditation (available from many sources) as a beginning guide to relax the mind.
5. Stop Catastrophizing. If you find yourself muttering, "This is awful," or "I can't stand it," you are speaking as if a catastrophe has occurred. Ask yourself, "Is this an inconvenience? A major inconvenience? Is it a genuine catastrophe?" Once you identify the seriousness of the situation, you can then muster support if you need it to go forward. You may feel you need the situation to be serious to justify asking for help. You are allowed to ask for help even to handle inconveniences. You might get more help if you do NOT catastrophize because others won't feel overwhelmed by your 'crisis'.
6. Reduce too much activity. You may be productive in impressive ways but may not realize your constant motion comes with the price of imposing pressure on family or friends. They may want and *need* time to be quiet and regroup. Part of the Keep Calm and Carry On involves the calm part. If you like being busy, try switching out some of your busy productivity for a little play time with your family.
7. Control worry. Oftentimes and surprisingly, worry is a mistaken effort to get rid of an anxious feeling. When you don't know what is going on or what to do about it you start in

on "What if..." thinking. When you are 'a worrier' and you feel nervous, your "What if..." thinking raises your anxiety. If you do not need your worry, then do a "Stop and Swap" maneuver. Figure out what pleasant or productive thought you want to dwell on (instead of your worry) and then when the worry pops up tell yourself, "Stop!" and swap in the pleasant thought you chose for yourself. But do this *every time* the worry pops up or you won't achieve the mental calm you need.

8. Learn how to plan and not re-plan your plans. This is the heart and soul of "Carry on!" Real problems can be solved by making plans with achievable goals and a list of small steps that move you in the direction of achieving the goal. If you don't know how to formulate a plan, google it! Then create plans. And don't re-plan them until you have completed the action steps.
9. Listen to your inner dialogue and write a new script. When people feel unable to carry on, they are often undermining their confidence with negative 'self-talk' - statements about being afraid or incompetent. Listen to your negative inner dialogue and oppose it a new script of positives such as, "I may not know how but I can learn." "Just because I made a mistake it did not ruin everything." It makes a world of difference carrying on successfully to encourage yourself.
10. Prepare yourself for challenges. When you know things are going to be rough, get ready. Whether you have to take a test, meet new people, face a medical challenge, get information. Preparation is the key to success. The old saying goes, "Luck is what happens at the intersection of preparation and opportunity." Ask about what will be covered on a test, what kinds of questions will be asked and study. Think about what kinds of people you will be meeting (as in a networking meeting or an interview) and plan ahead what kinds of questions you can ask. If you have a limited time in a medical consultation, do your homework on what things you need to know and prepare a written list of questions.

In all situations that require us to "Keep Calm and Carry On," you can develop these skills to calm your body and mind and to face up to difficulty so that you are always prepared to feel and do your best.

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