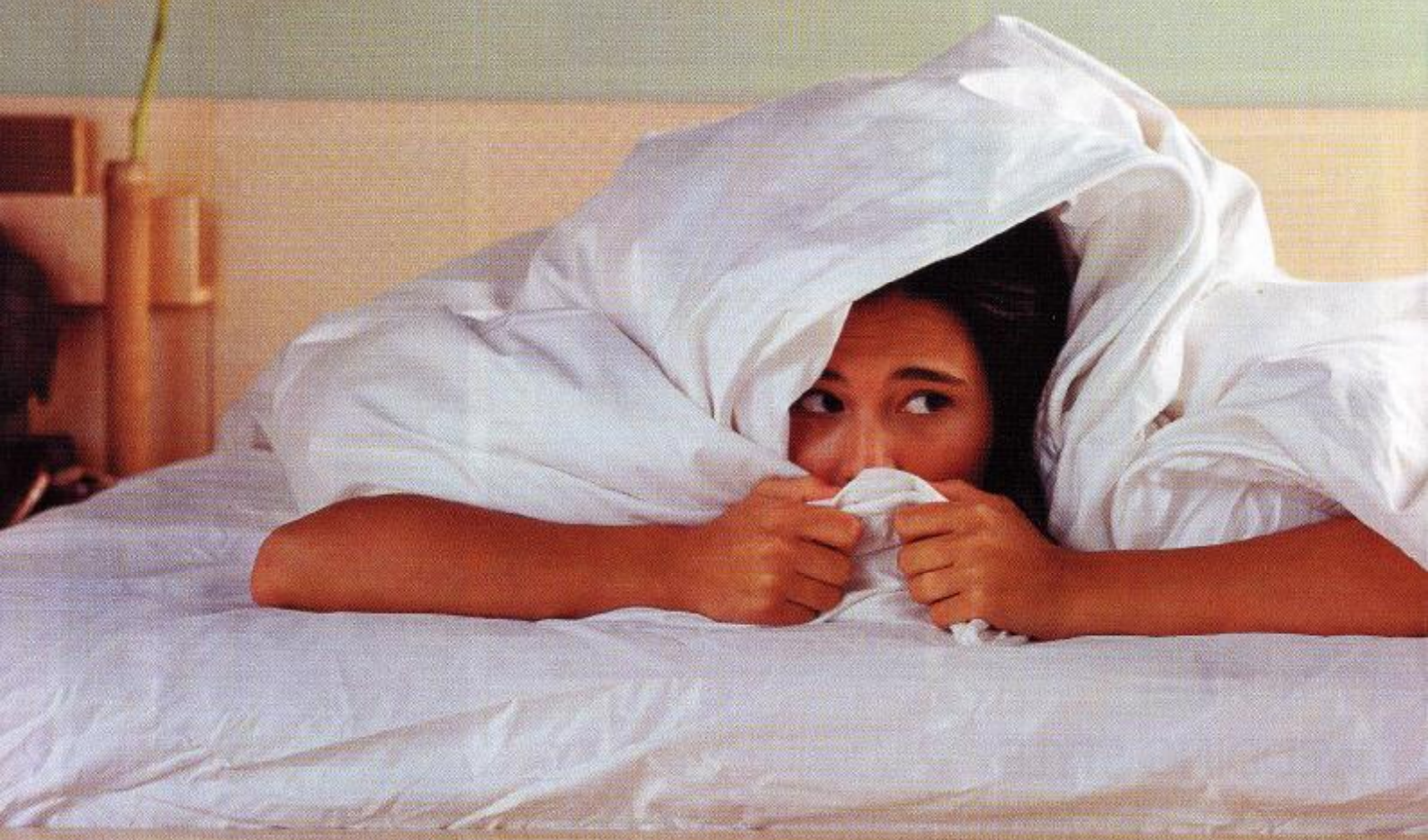


The
WEDDING
STRESS
survival plan



You can come out
now ... If you learn to
control your stress, it
can't control you.

We're not going to tell you to stop worrying about your wedding because chances are, you won't listen. What we *can* tell you is how to manage your stress so it doesn't ruin your life. Step one: sit down and relax, then read on

Stress is a big part of getting married, as any bride will tell you, but before you fly into a blind panic and turn into the fiancée from hell, take a deep breath and remember that although wedding stress is inevitable, how you deal with it is up to you.

"There will be stress, you can count on it, it can't be avoided," Myrna Ruskin, a certified stress management counsellor, told usabride.com. "There are so many decisions to be made, details to be worked out and others who want to influence you. Try to respond to the problems rather than react to them. It will make a big difference," she advises. It's not as hard as it sounds. You just need to be armed with the right tools before you go into battle.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

If you gather supportive and helpful people around you, you stand a much better chance of waking up on your wedding day feeling happy and relaxed. This rule applies to everyone, from your bridesmaids to the person you ask to do your flowers.

"Think about what you need from a bridesmaid. If you need someone who has the time to help you and your best friend is always away on business trips, she may not be your best bet," says Christie Amadio from The Wedding Agency. "Give her a reading

to do and ask another friend instead, one you can trust to be there to help."

It is just as important that you trust the people who are providing wedding services for you. "You'll meet plenty of different florists before you decide which one to use. The important thing is to make sure you click with them, that they know what you want and that you trust they can deliver it. Having confidence in the professionals helping you with your wedding will make it much less stressful," Amadio advises.

LEARN TO DELEGATE

It can be hard to let go when it comes to planning your wedding, after all it's your day and you know what it is that you want. But with most of us so time-poor, who has those extra hours in the day to do all the research needed for such a major event? Here's the news: rather than try to do everything, it's easier to learn how to delegate.

"Delegating is fantastic for relieving stress and pressure, just make sure you're delegating anything important to someone you trust and then you can simply forget about it," says success coach Simon Little. If one of your bridesmaids is into shoes, send her out on a fact-finding mission, then she can report back on the shops worth visiting. Do the same with the flowers and cake. Soon you'll be wondering how you lived without your newfound skill and yes, of course, you still get the final say. ►

IT'S OUT OF YOUR CONTROL

Unfortunately, no matter how much planning you do, there are always going to be things that you can't control. The weather is an obvious one – no one knows if it's going to rain on your big day. You can't prepare for a spilt drink on your wedding dress either, or for one of your bridesmaids freaking out halfway down the aisle.

"There are some things no one can control. All you can do is have a contingency plan and be prepared for the little mishaps, because they will happen," says Christie Amadio. If you plan well leading up to the day, you've done all you can. "I've seen brides have panic attacks at the slightest thing going wrong. It just makes things worse, so relax and enjoy your day and no one will notice."

BE LEADER OF THE PACK

You need help planning your wedding but you also need to make it clear that you're the one calling the shots. So give those who want to help specific jobs to do from the outset and also give them clear instructions, says David Holmsen, author of *Tying the Knot* (angusrobertson.com.au). "Be consistent and clear and don't give out mixed messages. Agree with your partner on important matters before you speak to anyone else. If you appear unified, this will give others less opportunity to wrest control from you."

GET SOME SLEEP

It might sound obvious, but sleep is one of the best stressbusters around. And it seems that women need more than men. "Sleep deprivation leads to irritability, lethargy and ultimately the feeling that you can't cope," says Sue Radd, director of the Nutrition and Wellbeing Clinic in Sydney.

It will also leave you looking haggard and unrested for your big day, which is never a great look. For the month before your wedding, make sure you're getting a good eight hours a night. Finding it hard to switch off? "Sip on some chamomile tea and avoid any over-the-counter sleep remedies. They can make you feel sluggish and disorientated the next day," advises Radd.

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

If you're tossing and turning at night worrying about your big day, you need to stop. Worry is one of the most pointless

things we do and we can all get better at managing it. Happily, there are a few simple tricks that can help.

"Mental filing is the key," says Simon Little. "Worrying achieves nothing. You need to work out if the problem can be solved and write down a plan of action. If there's nothing you can do about it, put it in your mental filing cabinet under 'Forget'."

One good rule to keep in mind: will this matter in five years' time? If the answer's no – and it probably will be – think (rather than worry) about something else.

MOVE YOURSELF

We all know exercise is good for us, but how many of us actually do it regularly? The lead-up to your wedding is a great time to get into a routine, especially if you want to look your healthiest as well as be super-

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relaxed. "To look your best you really need to give yourself six months on an effective, regular plan," says personal trainer Jason Quelch. "Work out what your goals are: do you want to lose weight, tone up or just feel better about yourself?"

You don't need to kill yourself either, just half an hour of walking every day will improve fitness and muscle strength, not to mention get those stressbusting endorphins buzzing around your body.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Believe it or not, what you eat can have a huge impact on your stress levels. First of all there are some no-nos when it comes to reducing stress. Number one is coffee – it causes the release of adrenaline, which, if it is not used, leads to an increase in stress levels. Also, keep alcohol to a minimum, as too much can leave you feeling tired and unable to cope. And as tempting as it may be to gorge on chips and chocolate, don't – the quick-release energy levels in these foods will leave you feeling even more lethargic and fed up once they dump your blood sugar levels down to the floor.

Next, think about what you can add. "Eat plenty of nuts and seeds, which are high in B vitamins and magnesium. Both

appear to support the body in times of stress. Carbohydrates are also important, as they can actually induce a feeling of calm, but make sure they're the slow-release ones like oats, wholegrain rice and pasta or wholegrain bread," recommends Radd.

DON'T SKIP YOUR BREAKFAST

Breakfast really *is* the most important meal of the day when it comes to reducing stress levels. A recent study from Cardiff University in Wales showed that those who ate breakfast every day – especially a wholegrain cereal – had lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol in their systems.

Although the scientists conducting the study were unsure exactly why their findings were so conclusive, there are plenty of theories. "Whole grains are digested more slowly, keeping blood sugar even, meaning that your moods and energy levels won't fluctuate," Radd notes. "But it could also be something as simple as sitting down to eat instead of rushing around from the moment you get out of bed."

DEALING WITH YOUR FAMILY

The number-one cause of wedding stress is, yes, you've got it, family. It may sound simple enough to say "butt out mum/sis/

KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

Have you got all your sights on your wedding day and none on your relationship? Don't forget that your wedding is all about your future marriage, warns Anne Hollonds. "Planning a wedding is often one of the first big tests for couples and it's important that you stay connected to each other through the process. A strong partnership can give you a huge amount of support during a stressful time, so don't let disagreements on wedding arrangements come between you." If your relationship has become all about your wedding day, take some time out together, go away for a weekend or for a picnic on the beach, anything that you both enjoy. There's just one rule – you're not allowed to mention the W-word.