

GO WITH THE FLOW

Stressed with wedding plans? Nervous about the day running smoothly? Stay calm by taking care of yourself – inside and out. Stand back bridezilla, bridechilla is here!

When her uncle Kevin got carried away and made an impromptu speech at her wedding reception guaranteed to make most brides blush, Alison simply laughed along with everyone else. And when a catering crisis delayed the wedding breakfast, she didn't rush to the kitchen to demand an explanation but calmly asked for another glass of bubbly and suggested her guests do the same. What was the secret to her serenity?

'In the months before the wedding, I did everything I could to ensure it went like clockwork,' the 32-year-old graphic designer recalls. 'But I also realised that no matter how much planning I did, it was possible things could still go wrong.'

Instead of worrying about things she couldn't control, Alison made a conscious decision not to let anything spoil her happiness on the day.

'That made me feel prepared when things did go a bit astray. I saw them as minor hitches, rather than crisis material, and just enjoyed myself.'

One of the most exciting days of your life can also be one of the most stressful. The endless decisions and details, sticking to your budget while holding on to your dreams, and juggling other peoples'





expectations are just some of the things that can sabotage your peace of mind. Add the pressure of organising this major life event on top of your already busy existence, maintaining a happy relationship with your fiancé and putting your own heightened emotions into the mix, and the risk of losing your cool becomes very real.

Taking care not only of the external stuff but of what's on the inside is key to staying calm before your wedding, and to being relaxed and radiant on the day.

FREE YOUR MIND

There are few times in a woman's life when she has more on her mind than in the lead-up to her wedding day. As the weeks fly by and the to-do list keeps getting longer, you can be bursting with excitement one minute, and strangely anxious the next – especially when there are challenges you may not have counted on, such as feelings stirred up by the life-changing decision you've made. You might suddenly have doubts about your partner, for example, or old family issues may resurface. Welcome to the bridal emotional roller coaster – from joy to despair in 60 seconds.

Yet feeling stressed is all in the mind, says Glenn Harrold, author of *De-stress Your Life: In Seven Easy Steps* (Hachette, \$36.99). 'When you feel stressed, you are reacting to a situation. When you learn to temper the way you react, you will have more control of your stress levels.'

The good news is the following simple tricks will keep you calm while you prepare for the wedding, and on the day itself:

- All of us have an endless life commentary running in our heads but most of us aren't aware of the messages we are giving ourselves. What you think influences how you feel. Listen to what you are telling yourself. When a negative thought, such as, 'I'll never get everything done in time!' arises, stop it in its tracks and think about something else.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. If you want candles at the reception but the venue won't allow it, ask yourself if it really matters. 'Think back to things that stressed you in the past month and you'll find that most of them were insignificant and caused you no lasting problem,' says Glenn. 'It's often the way we react that exacerbates the stress we feel.' You'll stay calmer if you keep a sense of perspective, accept what you can't change. Move on.
- Pick a phrase you find soothing, such as, 'Everything will be all right.' When you start to feel overwhelmed, repeat it to yourself until you feel better.

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- Keep a journal. It's natural to experience all kinds of thoughts and feelings at this time. If difficult emotions come up, don't try to suppress them – release them by putting them down on paper.
- Ask for support when you need it. Talk to a close friend about how you're feeling, and get friends and family to help if you are snowed under. Delegate responsibility for tasks that need to be done on the wedding day so you don't have to think about them.
- Plan for things that could go wrong – pack spare stockings in case yours ladder, for example – but accept that you can't control everything on the day. Make a promise to yourself that you won't let anything dampen your mood.
- Don't create stress by chasing the dream of the mythical 'perfect' day. Focus instead on creating a fun, memorable occasion.

NURTURE YOUR BODY

Take care of your body now by eating well, exercising regularly, and getting plenty of rest and it will repay you many times over when you walk down the aisle. You'll be brimming with confidence because you look younger and feel good about yourself. Your energy levels are high as is your mood. Your hair is naturally shiny, your skin and eyes are clear, your figure is trim and toned. To top it all off, you have a wonderful sense of calm. There's something special about a bride who radiates serenity and a healthy glow, something that strict diets and expensive creams can't buy.

Fitness expert Nalisha Patel, from Auckland's HealthMastery Mobile Fitness Specialists, agrees there are many mental as well as physical benefits to pre-wedding exercise. 'As stress levels rise, exercise acts as a buffer to help ease tension and burn off stress hormones in the body. Exercise releases endorphins, which make you feel happier and relaxed. Exercise and healthy eating will help you keep things in perspective as your big day draws near.' Here's how:

- Formulate a realistic exercise plan as early as possible to avoid unnecessary panic. Allow six to eight weeks to start seeing mental and physical changes.



■ Aim for two or three workouts with weights plus about three brisk 40 minute walks each week. But any activity is better than none, so do what you can every day. Wearing a pedometer helps you judge your levels of activity. Nalisha says, 'I believe that what you measure, you manage, so aim for 10,000 steps each day and make it a game so you always strive to do better.'

■ Fit your workout into your day by scheduling it in your diary, just as you would a meeting. Treat every workout as an important appointment you must keep.

■ Create a mental picture of how you want to look on your wedding day. Every time you feel like skipping a workout, remind yourself that exercise will help make that goal a reality. Team up with one of your bridesmaids and go to the gym together, or see a personal trainer and split the cost.

■ Stretching is relaxing. Sign up for a yoga course to help you wind down – you'll tone up too.

■ Make healthy eating part of your life. Aim to eat five small meals daily, about three hours apart, to keep your blood sugar levels balanced and energy high. Eat quality protein such as tuna or lean red meat, along with complex carbohydrates like pasta or fruit. Plus introduce good fat (saturated), such as olive oil and avocado at each meal. This keeps you full longer and helps you avoid stress-related cravings or binges.

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Drink about 10 glasses of water and aim for three cups of vegies a day. On the wedding day, eat before you leave for the ceremony, even if you're not hungry.

■ Have one day off a week and eat what you like. When you crave your favourite chocolate, tell yourself that you can have some on your day off.

■ Plan the next week's meals in advance – if you fail to plan, you're planning to fail!

■ Cut down on coffee, sugar and salt as these can make you nervous and jumpy. Salt helps your body retain water which can make you feel bloated.

■ Get enough sleep and don't work out nor drink alcohol or coffee within three hours of bedtime.

■ Avoid black and white thinking, where one slip up means failure. Just start again and keep going. 'Aim for healthy rather than thin,' Nalisha explains. 'Be kind to yourself and your body and ultimately you will look and feel fantastic.'

SOOTHE YOUR SOUL

Your soul is the essence of who you are – your personality, your nature, your values.

No matter what your beliefs, the soul is simply what makes each of us unique.

Soothing the soul is all about staying calm at the deepest level, and the key to that is our life force – the breath.

■ Today meditation is used by everyone from business executives to busy mums to manage their stress levels. If there isn't a course in your area, you can find meditation exercises on the internet or even teach yourself. Queenstown-based yoga and meditation teacher, Kara-Leah Masina, says you'll soon see a difference. 'When I committed to a daily 30-minute meditation, I felt calmer, I had more clarity and I felt strong – like I could cope with anything the world was going to throw at me. If you're just starting a meditation practice, I recommend five minutes a day to begin.'

■ The easiest meditation is simply a breath meditation. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, bring your awareness to your breath. Breathe right down into your belly, inhaling and exhaling through the nose. This calms the body and the mind instantly. Breathe slowly, remaining focused on your breathing, for at least five minutes. That's it. 'There's nothing magical or hard about meditating,' says Kara-Leah. 'You don't need to stop your thoughts from happening. In fact, it's almost impossible to stop thoughts. All you need to do is witness the thought arising – "I'll never fit into my wedding dress!" – and let it go.'

■ When you have learned to calm yourself with meditation, techniques such as visualisation can be very effective. If you feel nervous about any aspect of the wedding day, such as saying your vows in front of your nearest and dearest, picture the scene in your mind. Watch it like a movie where everything goes well. Do this until you believe that is what will happen on the day – if you believe it, it will!

■ Amid the flurry of wedding preparations, don't forget that the joining together of two souls – the essence of who you are, and of who he is – is what your wedding day is really all about.

BY SUSANNAH WALKER

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

■ See www.healthmastery.co.nz for more of Nalisha's tips on healthy eating, exercise and getting motivated.

■ For further advice from Kara-Leah on yoga and meditation, visit www.klmasina.co.nz.