

Relaxation Techniques to Reduce Stress

Between the demands of work and the obligations of home, stress can easily take a toll. Use the below techniques to banish stress and lead a happier, healthier life.

Meditate: Any repetitive action, such walking, biking, or swimming, can be a form of meditation. When you catch yourself thinking about your job, your relationship or your lifelong to-do list, experts say to simply let the thought escape, and bring your mind back the repetition of the activity. Try it for just 5 to 10 minutes a day.

Picture Yourself Relaxed: Try creating a peaceful visualization, or "dreamscape." To start, simply visualize anything that keeps your thoughts away from current tensions. It could be a favorite vacation spot, a fantasy island, or something "touchable," like the feel of your favorite silk robe or cozy sweater.

Breathe Deeply: Try this: Let out a big sigh, dropping your chest, and exhaling through gently pursed lips. Now imagine your low belly, as a deep, powerful place. Feel your breath coming and going as your mind stays focused there. Inhale, feeling your entire belly, sides and lower back expand. Exhale, sighing again as you drop your chest, and feeling your belly, back and sides contract. Repeat 10 times, relaxing more fully each time.

Mindfulness: Mindfulness means focusing on one activity at a time, so forget multi-tasking! Staying in the present-tense can help promote relaxation and provide a buffer against anxiety and depression. Practice it by focusing on your immediate surroundings.

Drink Hot Tea: Studies indicate that drinking tea may help reduce stress by helping to lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

Show Some Love: Induce the relaxation response by cuddling your pet, giving an unexpected hug to a friend or family member, snuggling with your spouse, or talking to a friend about the good things in your lives.

Try Self-Massage:

- ◆ Place both hands on your shoulders and neck.
- ◆ Squeeze with your fingers and palms.
- ◆ Rub vigorously, keeping shoulders relaxed.
- ◆ Wrap one hand around the other forearm.
- ◆ Squeeze the muscles with thumb and fingers.
- ◆ Move up and down from your elbow to fingertips and back again.
- ◆ Repeat with other arm.

Take a Time-Out: find a quiet place to sit or lie down and put the stressful situation on hold. Take a few deep breaths and concentrate on releasing tension and calming your heartbeat. Quiet your mind and remember: Time is always on your side, so relax. The stress can wait.

Try a Musical Detour: Music can calm the heartbeat and soothe the soul, the experts say. So, when the going gets rough, take a musical stress detour by aligning your heartbeat with the slow tempo of a relaxing song. And you might want to make that a classical tune. Research shows that listening to 30 minutes of classical music may produce calming effects equivalent to taking 10 mg of Valium.

Take an Attitude Break: Thirty seconds is enough time to shift your heart's rhythm from stressed to relaxed. The way to do that: Engage your heart and your mind in positive thinking. Start by envisioning anything that triggers a positive feeling -- a vision of your child or spouse, the image of your pet, that great piece of jewelry you're saving up to buy, a memento from a vacation -- whatever it is, conjuring up the thought will help slow breathing, relax tense muscles and put a smile on your face. Creating a positive emotional attitude can also calm and steady your heart rhythm, contributing to feelings of relaxation and peace.



Adapted from the WebMD article "Blissing Out: 10 Relaxation Techniques To Reduce Stress On-the-Spot" by Jenny Stamos Kovacs. Created by AmeriCorps Member Amy Houser.

