

1 2 K E Y S T O S T R E S S

R E D U C T I O N



IN THIS SECTION:

- Breath Deep and Exercise
- Eat Healthy
- Time Management
- Relax and Revive

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12 Keys to Stress Reduction

Stress, pressure, tension is a fact of everyday life for most of us. Remember that it puts you at risk for heart attack, stroke, insomnia, backache, headache, irritable bowel syndrome, sports injuries and infertility.



Stress can trigger serious illness like Graves' and fibromyalgia. Stress even makes us more susceptible to the common cold. With your health at stake, it is essential to use stress relievers.

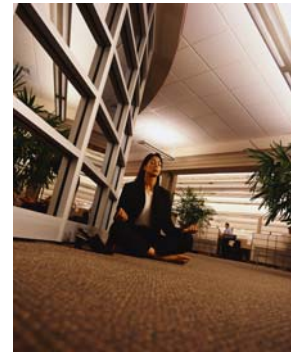
Also, it's important that you remember that stress is a physiological response. It isn't all in your head! You owe it to yourself to take the time to use stress-reducing techniques on a daily basis.

You need to have a wide range of coping skills to use at home, work and other places. Here are 12 keys to stress reduction to help you open the door to a more relaxing life. They contain dozens of helpful hints. Choose those best suited for you.

Breathe deeply. Relax your muscles, expanding your stomach and chest.

Exhale slowly. Repeat several times.

Follow your breath as it flows in and out. Do not try to control it. This is a good way to relax in the midst of any activity. This technique allows you to find a breathing pattern that is natural and relaxing to you.



Use this yoga technique: Inhale slowly, counting to eight. Exhale through your mouth, even more slowly, counting to sixteen. Make a sighing sound as you exhale, and feel tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.



Exercise regularly. Aerobic exercise, such as walking and swimming, produces brain chemicals that uplift your mood and mental well-being. Exercise also improves sleep and gives you time to think and focus on other things. Beware of compulsive exercise, however.

Yoga is an age-old system for stretching and strengthening the muscles. Take a class or learn at home with a good book or video. Neck and shoulder exercises are useful for the desk-bound and arthritis sufferers.

Neck roll: Look to the right, then roll your head forward, as if you are trying to touch your chin to your chest. Keep rolling until you are looking over your left shoulder. Repeat in the other direction.

Shoulder lift: Relieve tension in the neck by lifting the shoulders toward the ears, then dropping them as low as they will go. Repeat 10 times.

Eat healthy foods. You should never skip meals. Take time out for lunch no matter how busy you are.

Carry nutritious snacks to the office, or even the shopping mall. A nutritionally balanced diet is important. For example, researchers have found that even small deficiencies of thiamin, a B-complex vitamin, can cause anxiety symptoms.



Pantothenic acid, another B-complex vitamin, is critical during times of stress. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and large amounts of sweets, which can aggravate symptoms of stress.



Don't let others get you down. Choose positive friends who are not worriers. Friends who constantly put you down or talk gloomily about life will increase your anxiety. Ask a good friend to help you talk out a problem and get it off your chest.

A long-distance call to an old pal can be great therapy. Forgive others instead of holding grudges. Relax your standards – for yourself and others. Perfectionism is not the way to happiness. Become more flexible.


Communicate clearly with your co-workers and boss. Ask questions and repeat instructions that you are given. Clarifying directions at the start of a project can save hours later straightening out misunderstandings. Be truthful with others. Lies and deception lead to stress that always takes its toll.

Be optimistic. Count your blessings, especially when everything seems to go wrong. Believe that most people are doing the best that they can. Don't blow problems out of proportion. Live by a philosophy of life that whittles problems down to size. The maxim, "Live one day at a time," has helped millions.



Plan your time wisely, and realistically. For example, don't schedule back-to-back meetings with tight travel time. Remember to leave room for unanticipated events – both negative and positive. Be flexible about rearranging your agenda.

Get up 15 minutes early in the morning. Allow an extra 15 minutes to get to all appointments. Avoid procrastination. Whatever needs doing, do it now.





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anxiety and depression
spin out of control!




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You should schedule unpleasant tasks early, so that you won't have to worry about them for the rest of the day

Keep an appointment book. Don't rely on your memory. Do one thing at a time. Focus your attention on the person talking to you or the job at hand, instead of worrying about other things. This also reduces mistakes --- which lead to more anxiety.

Be prepared to wait. Carry a book to read in case of delays. Say "no" to requests that stretch you to the limits. Delegate, you don't have to do it all yourself. Break a job into separate tasks and assign them to people with the appropriate skills. Then leave them alone to do their work.

Prevent problems before they occur. This takes some planning.

If you are flying to another city for an important meeting, carry your presentation materials and dress suit on board the plane. Baggage does get lost.



Buy gas for the car before the tank is empty.

Get regular oil changes and checkups. Keep duplicate keys for home, car and office in secure locations.

Keep food staples on hand so you can fix a fast meal without going to the store.

Keep food, toilet paper and toiletries on hand so you never run out. The same goes for postage stamps, paper and envelopes.

Retreat to recharge your spirit, schedule private time every day. You deserve it. Unplug the telephone and enjoy a quiet evening alone or with your family, or even 15 uninterrupted minutes in the shower or bathtub.



You may want to spend a few minutes writing your feelings out in a journal. It can help you find a new perspective and relieve hidden conflicts.

Here are more spirit rechargers:

Wear earplugs for instant peace anytime, anyplace. Learn a meditation technique. Two methods: Observe your thoughts as they pass through your mind. Or, repeat a word or phrase with an uplifting meaning.

Practice progressive relaxation for 20 minutes twice a day to relieve high blood pressure and other physiological responses to stress. Tighten and release each muscle group in turn, starting with the soles of the feet and slowly working up to the scalp.

Plan a weekend activity that is a change of pace. If your week is heavily scheduled, relax and enjoy noncompetitive activities. If you are never able to finish anything during the week, choose a project that you can complete in a few hours on Saturday or Sunday.

Take time out for a diversion in the middle of your workday. When the pressures of completing a project are too great, your productivity can drop. Take a walk or stop for lunch.



Savor life's little delights. Give yourself some physical pleasure to help your stress slip away. Treat yourself to a professional massage, or trade massages with a loved one. Give yourself permission to enjoy a movie, watch a sports event, listen to music or read a book.

Savor a soothing cup of chamomile herb tea with a dollop of honey. Chamomile has long been used to relieve nervous tension.



Plan a day of beauty with a friend. Do each other's hair, or paint your nails and chat. Create a simple steam facial at home by boiling water. Remove the pan from the stove. Cover your head with a large towel so that it creates a tent over the pot.

Steam your face for five or 10 minutes. Add aromatic herbs to the water for a sensual touch. Focus completely on any of the senses – hearing, seeing, eating or body movements – for a few minutes. Even washing your hands can become a sensual experience.

Use visualization and affirmation techniques. You can inoculate yourself against a situation you fear by going over the event in your mind. Imagine the scene in vivid detail and picture the best possible outcome.

You can also shrink an imagined fear down to size by picturing the worst possible results. Imagine describing this worst case to your best friend the next day and the sympathy you receive. Imagine telling a group of friends the next month, who share their similar experiences. Finally, imagine joking about your unpleasant experience with a complete stranger a year later. If you carry this exercise through to the end, your stress will become something to laugh about.

Replace negative self-talk with affirmations. The chatterbox in your mind is filled with gloom: You're too fat. . . you're too old. . .you'll never amount to anything. Like the little engine that could, nourish your mind with a constant stream of "I know I can."

Get enough sleep. Determine how much sleep you require for optimum performance. Sleep deprivation aggravates the body's responses to stress. Consider setting an alarm clock to remind yourself that it is time to go to bed.

Strive for your dreams, plan ahead to meet your most cherished goals in life. Time management experts emphasize the importance of writing down your important goals.

Break big projects down into a series of small steps that you can work on every day. Want to change jobs? Make one phone call contact today. Is writing a book your dream? Commit to writing one page a day.



Knowing that you are striving toward your dreams relieves frustrations that mount when you feel stuck in a rut of endless responsibilities that seem to lead nowhere.

Even if you just use these last 12 keys to stress relief, you can become a happier, healthier person, a more efficient worker and a better friend to others.

Keep a notebook as new ideas come to you through your reading and your own creativity. The most important key is your decision to take time for yourself and to simplify your life whenever possible.



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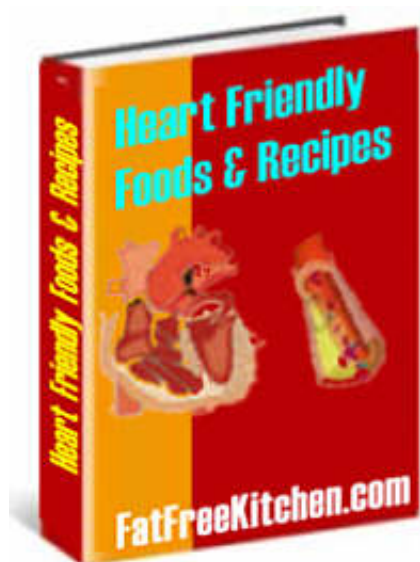
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