

7 Ways to Beat Stress

If stress is starting to run you ragged, take heart. There are some easy ways to keep it from overtaking your day.

No. 1: Breathe Deeply

This simple strategy is a powerful stress fighter. It helps you:

- Lower stress hormones
- Lower your heart rate
- Bring down your blood pressure

Here's how to do it:

1. Sit quietly with one hand on your stomach, the other on your chest.
2. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, filling your lungs.
3. Hold your breath for a few seconds.
4. Breathe out slowly through your mouth until all the air is out of your lungs.
5. Repeat four more times.

No. 2: Meditate

This ancient practice relaxes your mind and the body. For several minutes each day, sit quietly and comfortably. While you do this, focus your mind on one of these things:

- Your breathing
- An object
- A specific word or phrase (mantra)

As thoughts and distractions intrude, gently push them away. Return to your focus. You can do meditation alone or with a group.

No. 3: Exercise

To get your heart rate up with an aerobic exercise:

- Walk
- Cycle
- Swim

Just 20 minutes a day will calm your mind and lower stress hormones. Exercise also boosts endorphins, brain chemicals that improve your mood. Even light exercise can relax you, though harder workouts offer greater health rewards.

No. 4: Practice Guided Imagery

This technique has the same relaxation benefits of deep breathing. Here's how it works:

- Sit somewhere quiet and picture yourself in a calm and peaceful place, such as a beach. Imagine walking through this place and taking in its sights, sounds, and smells.
- While your imagination is working, breathe slowly and deeply.

- Keep this up until you are fully relaxed.
- Ease back slowly into the real world.

To get started, you can search online for podcasts that will talk you through the process. Nurses, counselors, therapists, or other professionals can also help you learn how to do this on your own.

No. 5: Eat Well

Foods rich in vitamin C, like oranges and grapefruits, may help lower your stress hormones. Omega-3s, like those found in salmon and other fatty fish, as well nuts and seeds, may also be calming.

In general, fueling your body well with a balanced diet can help keep your body healthy and better able to handle stress. Part of eating well means focusing on getting whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.

Want something sweet? Dark chocolate may have a calming effect by lowering stress hormones.

No. 6: Talk Positively to Yourself

Being self-critical can add to your stress. So try the opposite approach. Help yourself relax by practicing positive self-talk.

Replace negative thoughts with positive ones. In other words, be the little engine that could. Tell yourself "I think I can" rather than "I know I can't."

No. 7: Sleep Well

Getting a good night's sleep can help you fight stress the next day. Go for at least 7 hours a night.

Try these tips if you're having trouble:

- Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day -- even on the weekends.
- Avoid caffeine after 3 p.m. and alcohol close to bedtime.
- If you take naps, do so early in the day rather than too close to bedtime.
- Exercise regularly.

SOURCES:

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