

## Manage Stress Now

# 25 Simple Ways to Reduce Your Stress

### 1. Take a Deep Breath

Take a deep breath and fill your lungs to full capacity right now. This illustrates just how shallow we tend to breathe when we don't make the conscious effort to breathe deeply. When we are under stress, we tend to take even more shallow, rapid breaths, which send less oxygen to our brain and muscles just when we need it the most.

Train yourself to get in the habit of taking a deep, cleansing breath in through the nose and slowly exhaling through the mouth. Take advantage of some computer technology and set an hourly alarm as you work to remind yourself to *breathe*. You could even use something that interrupts your focus - the ringing of a telephone, a commercial break during a TV program, getting stopped by a red light - as your reminder to take a deep breath.

### 2. Laughter *Is* the Best Medicine!

Studies show that laughing not only relieves stress, but it also boosts immunity. Treasure a friend with a perspective that makes everything seem funny. No funny friends? The comedy channel isn't hitting your funny bone? No problem! Try a laughter yoga class!

Did you know that the body cannot tell the difference between fake and real laughter? You'll get the same physiological and psychological benefits. Laughter Yoga combines unconditional laughter with yogic breathing (Pranayama). During a Laughter Yoga class, laughter is simulated but soon turns into real and contagious laughter. Check out [www.LaughterYoga.org](http://www.LaughterYoga.org) for a class or laughter club near you.

Be sure to mark May 3 on your calendar; it's International Laughter Day. But don't wait till then to laugh!

### 3. Connect with a Plant

A plant in your home or office lessens anxiety and feelings of fatigue and even lowers your blood pressure. A bouquet of fresh flowers placed next to your computer screen will brighten your desk and your spirits. Grow some healing herbs. A potted lavender plant allows you to exercise your green thumb (be careful not to over water) with the added benefit of relaxing aromatherapy. Lavender is among the best herbs for easing stress and boosting mood. Save the dried flower petals. Crushing them with your fingers releases the calming scent.

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#### 4. Allow Yourself to Be Guided

Based on the concept that body and mind are connected, guided imagery (sometimes called visualization) uses suggestions to guide your imagination toward a relaxed state. With the help of an instructor, CDs or MP3 recordings, or even scripts from a book you record yourself, your body will respond as though what you are imagining is quite real.

One of my favorite guided meditation CDs is *Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace: A Guided Imagery Meditation for Physical and Spiritual Wellness* by Susie Mantell. After a stressful day, putting on the headphones and listening to Susie's most soothing voice will carry you off to a more tranquil place. Or try some **free** sample guided imagery mediations at Leslie Davenport's website <http://www.lesliedavenport.com/audio>.

#### 5. Catch the Wave

Brain wave audio technology sends specific sound waves of different frequencies to your brain via stereo headphones. This can bring you into a consciousness state with balanced brain hemispheres and organized brain activity. Using the technology from Brain Sync, you can leverage the mind-body connection for optimal mental and physical performance. Try a **free** sample at <http://www.brainsync.com/relaxnow.asp>.

You can order CDs or download MP3 files for specific situations. For example, when you're feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, or completely worn out, *Deep Stress Relief* is one of the easiest ways to restore balance. Within minutes your muscles begin to relax and fears vanish. Alpha waves are woven into dreamy music that will transport you to untold depths of inner peace. As daily clutter is swept away, you'll feel a euphoric rush of positive energy revitalize the very core of your being.

#### 6. Have an Herbal Tea Party

Chamomile tea can soothe anxious nerves as well as calm the upset stomach that sometimes accompanies stress or anxiety. Tulsi (holy basil) tea eases stress as does lavender tea. Lemon balm makes a wonderful mood lifting tea. You can make tea with fresh or dried herbs. Brew your favorite tea with one of the most innovative inventions I've seen - the Health Tea Wand from <http://wisdomwands.com>. Simply pour hot water over 1 teaspoon dried herbs or 2 teaspoons fresh herbs in a teapot. Steep for 5-10 minutes and sip it through the straw. The straw has the added benefit of preventing tea stains on your teeth!

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#### 7. Have a Meal that Relaxes You (Literally!)

Vitamin B6, vitamin B12, folate, and magnesium are involved in the production of serotonin, which helps regulate mood and relieve stress. Make this delicious salad and get a good serving of all of these naturally relaxing nutrients. The salad contains chicken for vitamin B12, avocado for vitamin B6, orange juice and oranges for folate, and spinach and walnuts for magnesium.

##### INGREDIENTS (2 servings)

1/2 pound boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into thin strips  
3 teaspoons olive oil, divided  
1/4 teaspoon cornstarch  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/8 teaspoon pepper  
2 tablespoons white wine vinegar  
2 tablespoons orange juice  
3 cups torn fresh spinach  
1 medium navel orange, peeled and sectioned  
1/2 medium ripe avocado, peeled and sliced  
2 thin slices red onion, halved  
2 tablespoons chopped walnuts, toasted

##### DIRECTIONS

In a small skillet, sauté chicken in 1 teaspoon oil for 5 minutes or until no longer pink.

In a small bowl, combine the cornstarch, salt, pepper, vinegar, orange juice and remaining oil until smooth; stir into skillet. Bring to a boil; cook and stir for 1 minute or until thickened.

In a large serving bowl, combine the spinach, orange, onion and walnuts; add chicken mixture and toss. Serve immediately.

#### 8. Orange You Glad You Ate an Orange?

The smell of orange is a mood booster! While you *could* simply burn an orange scented candle, why not get a boost of vitamin C *and* improve your mood after a stressful situation. Make the effort of mindfully enjoying the orange with all of your senses. Appreciate the vibrant color of the skin, inhale the mist of fragrant spray when you peel it open, and savor the juicy taste.

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#### 9. Escape with a Good Book

A well-written novel has the power to pull you in and away from the stress of your day. A travel book filled with lovely photographs can help you imagine an exotic trip when the vacation budget is too pinched. A self-help book can redirect your mind from current events that you have no control over, focusing your mind back on circumstances you do have power to change.

Try an online book swapping service if you want a money-saving alternative to the public library. Some services have moderate fees and some utilize the bartering system. Books purchased on [BetterWorldBooks.com](http://BetterWorldBooks.com) help fund high-impact literacy projects in the United States and around the world - and they offer free shipping. Or check out [BookLender.com](http://BookLender.com) for a book renting approach modeled after Netflix. They stock a wide variety of titles and offer free shipping both ways.

#### 10. Bridge the Nature Gap

Most of us spend an enormous amount of time indoors; even our exercise often takes place on the fitness equipment in a gym. Author Richard Louv coined a phrase to describe the cultural shift in our society - Nature Deficit Disorder. He suggests forming Nature Clubs to arrange nature “play dates” on weekends when you have a bit more time for a longer excursion. Many parks offer guided hikes with a ranger who can explain the plants along the trail or help you learn about local wildlife.

To experience nature on a regular, daily basis, incorporate some of these suggestions into your routine. Try walking outdoors for a change of pace from your usual treadmill session. Pay attention to the birds you see during your walk. Consider purchasing a field guide so you can identify the birds. When was the last time you watched the sun set, the sun rise, or the moon rise? The complete sun and moon data is available at [http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/RS\\_OneDay.php](http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/RS_OneDay.php). Start a garden; even potted flowers on the patio connect you with the cycles of nature. Decorate your home or office with nature photographs or posters.

Be creative and think outside the box to bring more nature into your day. I enjoy the view from my dining room window. I often move my laptop to the dining area so I can face my backyard. As I write this article, I’m watching a clever Gila woodpecker who has figured out how to drink from my hummingbird feeder.



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#### **11. Make Time for Unscheduled Time**

Researchers have documented that people who don't allow themselves downtime may feel more stressed. To a rigidly scheduled person, downtime often is negatively viewed as unproductive time.

If your schedule is very hectic and tightly scheduled, ask yourself questions like this to assess your scheduling flexibility. Do you regularly read books for the simple pleasure of getting lost in the story? Do you make time to talk with a troubled friend even when it is inconvenient? Do you allow yourself to sit on the patio and just watch the birds in your yard? Do you occasionally take the long way home for a change of scenery? How often do you actually sit in a coffee shop to drink your beverage instead of taking it to go? Do you ever toss aside your Saturday To Do List aside and accept a spur-of-the-moment invitation instead? These are the sorts of "activities" we need in our stressful lives. And as an added benefit, these sorts of actions can result in truly synchronistic moments and encounters.

#### **12. Knit One, Purl Two**

Knitting is often compared to yoga for its soothing effect on the overstressed psyche. The repetitive action of needle work actually produces a meditative state of mind. Knitting offers you the opportunity to engage a different part of the brain, to create something, and to simply slow down and do something very mindfully. And if you are knitting a gift for someone, you will most likely reflect on the recipient and the happiness your gift will bring. It's a natural mood booster! Yarn stores offer beginner knitting classes, and don't think of it as a strictly female hobby. My knitting teacher was a man!

#### **13. Stop Your Endless Searching**

Too many choices actually create indecisiveness and cause second guessing. This adds to your stress level as you agonize over making the perfect selection. After trying on 30 pairs of jeans at five different stores, you find one pair you love. However, you hold off on purchasing them. Instead you decide to go to one more store because the lure of more choices is irresistible to you. Reduce your stress by making it a personal rule to make a purchase decision after visiting just two stores or three websites. Once you purchase your item, stop looking! Continuing the search after you bought something intrudes on the enjoyment of your purchase.

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#### 14. R & R for Your To Do List

When you review your lengthy list of chores and tasks to complete, look at it with a discerning eye. What can you *reschedule* or *reduce*?

Reschedule - When you are already under excess stress, this is not the ideal time to take on a daunting task like painting a room or redesigning your website. Reschedule certain tasks for a time when you have fewer other high-priority obligations or can find someone to help you.

Reduce - Give yourself permission to follow the 80/20 rule. It really is okay to do something less than 100%. If you feel you need six articles for your small business's online newsletter, allow yourself to publish it with only four. If your list has ten home chores to do this Saturday, tell yourself you are finished for the day when you complete eight tasks.

Take a deep breath and tell yourself it is absolutely good enough!

#### 15. Be on Time

Is being on time almost impossible for you? If so, you are adding enormous amounts of unnecessary stress into your life. It's easy to *underestimate* the amount of time you need to get somewhere. Try working backwards from your appointment time to more accurately determine exactly when you need to leave.

For example...Let's say my flight leaves at 11 a.m. on a Monday morning. I want to be checked in and at the gate an hour early (10:00) so I can browse the bookstore and get a snack. This also gives me a good cushion in case of a problem. I'll estimate that the check in line will take me 15 minutes (9:45). The security line is about 30 minutes (9:15). I'm going to allow 15 minutes to park and take the shuttle to the airport (9:00). Traffic at 9:00 might still be a bit heavy, so I will allow 30 minutes to the airport (8:30). It takes me about an hour to get myself ready and out the door. I set my alarm for 7:15 and I plan to be on the road no later than 8:30.

Pinpointing the amount of time needed for each specific step of getting yourself somewhere on time helps you keep an eye on the clock to ensure you are where you are supposed to be in order to get to your final destination on time.



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#### 16. Mind Your Multi-Tasking

You may *think* you are getting more accomplished by multi-tasking. Switching back and forth between tasks *seems* effortless; however, the brain must process the new information it needs and determine what it no longer needs to keep track of. Loading, unloading, and reloading the data repeatedly causes the brain to work harder.

Sometimes we multi-task to distract ourselves from an unappealing project. Play a mind game with yourself. Before your day begins, contemplate on what you most do NOT want to do today. Schedule a time to work on this task. If you realize you are trying to procrastinate by looking for something (*anything*) else to do, take a deep breath, resist the distraction, and return your focus to the task at hand.

Sometimes we multi-task because technology creates incessant demands for our immediate attention via text messages, cell phones, instant messages, and emails. We can become addicted to the adrenaline rush that these “urgent” interruptions generate, and they especially disrupt a creative flow. Change your routine! Schedule blocks of time in your day when you decide to be uninterruptible. Turn off the phone ringers, activate the “do not disturb” feature on your instant messaging system, and shut down your email program. Blocking out chunks of focused time to concentrate on project work like this will make you more productive.

#### 17. If You Snooze, You Do NOT Lose!

A midday rest has a very positive impact on your body, especially when you are feeling stressed. A nap triggers your body to produce hormones that balance the stress-generated cortisol your body produced. Since stress generally causes sleep issues, even a 30-minute nap helps counter the effects of sleep loss. Find a quiet place to rest in the afternoon rather than reaching for a cup of coffee and feel more alert with a sharper mind.

Pssst, napping can even help you lose weight by changing your metabolism and producing chemicals that affect appetite

If you still need more reasons to nap, excuses to nap, or ways to nap, check out a delightful book, [Change Your Life Without Getting Out of Bed: The Ultimate Nap Book](#), by SARK.



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#### 18. Take a Staycation

When you have time to take off but your travel fund was swallowed up by unexpected expenses, don't add to your stress level by taking a vacation you cannot truly afford. The word *staycation* emerged as a new buzz word during these strange economic times. It's another way of saying *stay-home-instead-of-going-away-for-a-vacation*.

A staycation does NOT mean you take a week off and catch up on all the chores and tasks you haven't found time to do over the past six months. During a staycation, you follow the same rules that you follow when you actually leave town. Allow yourself to really take a break from all of the routines of your life.

Do a bit of research to discover what sights you can visit in (or near) your own home town. We tend to overlook our own local tourist attractions. This is your opportunity to see your city from a different perspective. Pick up a guide book to your own city and plan some outings to museums, nature attractions, or theaters. Perhaps you'd like to learn something new; take a class that sounds interesting. If you enjoy pampering yourself during vacations, be sure to check out the spa specials at nearby resorts. If the prices there are still too prohibitive, consider a service from a nearby massage school or beauty school.

On a beach vacation or a cruise, your location makes you somewhat inaccessible to the rest of the world. Here is the most important guideline for a successful staycation: Be just as unavailable during your staycation. Forward your home phone directly to voice mail or turn off the ringer. Check your messages only as often as you would during a vacation in an exotic locale. Put your mail on hold during your time off via the US Postal Service's website (<https://holdmail.usps.com/holdmail/>). Put an "away" message on your email...and...put away your computer! Unplug it, put it in a closet, do something to make it inconvenient to check just one quick thing.



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#### **19. Get Moving**

When you experience stress, your body releases chemical hormones to prepare you for a flight-or-fight response with an elevated heart rate, increased respiration, blood directed to our arms and legs and diverted from digestion and cellular repair. This response worked extremely well for ancestors who were fighting (or running) for their lives.

Today we have different sources of stress rather than beasts trying to eat us. Perhaps you are under incredible pressure to complete a project at work. Maybe you have racked up high credit card bills trying to pay for an unexpected vet bill for a sick pet. Possibly your tire goes flat as you leave for an important appointment. While most of the stressful situations we encounter are not literally life or death circumstances, our bodies do not know the difference and continue to pump out the stress-related hormones at every anxious moment.

Exercising during stressful times burns off those chemicals, removing them out of your bloodstream. Simultaneously, exercise causes your body to release endorphins, our body's natural mood-elevating chemicals.

When you feel too overburdened to exercise, that's a clear signal that physical activity is essential to your well being. If you have a normal exercise routine, do not vary from it in times of stress. If you have not yet established a schedule, you will benefit from even small chunks of activity. Call a neighbor and go for a walk around the block. Get out of your office cubicle and go up and down some stairs. Reacquaint yourself with your treadmill or gym!

#### **20. Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude**

Create a daily practice where you list things you are grateful for. On a great day, the list flows easily. Finding things after a stressful, horrid day can be much more challenging. Stick to it even if you do not feel like doing it; the result can be a much improved perspective or outlook. You can use a special blank book devoted to your daily list. Rereading it when you feel the lack in your life can remind you of how abundant your life really is.

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#### 21. Take Five

A cluttered, disorganized environment produces stress when you can't find something important. It can make you feel like your entire life is out of control. It generates some very negative self talk. It keeps you from enjoying your home or office and constantly drains your energy, whether you are aware of it or not.

Deciding to eliminate all the clutter around you is a very overwhelming task. Instead of tackling an entire room or closet at once (especially if you are facing pressure from other situations), begin a daily practice of removing five things. Discard five ratty towels in your linen closet. Throw away five pieces of junk mail. Bag up five articles of clothing that no longer fit and drop them off at a donation box on your way to work. Take five old magazines with you to the gym and leave them on the reading table.

If you stick with this plan, in one year you will have removed over 1,800 items from your home! It will most likely be more than 1,800 items because the momentum of finding five things to remove may inspire you to keep decluttering for a bit longer.

#### 22. Enjoy the Drive

A long commute is a enormous source of frustration and stress for many workers. On average, Americans spend over *100 hours a year* on their commute to work. Unless your job allows telecommuting, you can't control the amount of time spent traveling to and from your office. You *can* make it less stressful.

A major source of commuting stress involves traffic delays. If you consistently run into traffic jams and arrive late to work, reevaluate your departure time and leave 15 minutes earlier. You'll arrive at work much less frazzled, without stress-related hormones coursing through your body. (See [Be on Time](#) in this report for help with this)

Discover the joy of audio books. The average audio book is about 5 hours long; you can "read" a book a week while driving to work. Browse the audio section of your bookstore to consider the enormous variety of available books (novels, self-help, business, history). Visit your local library to try an audio book to see how pleasant it is to have someone "tell you a story" once again. If you find yourself becoming an ardent audio book fan, perhaps you'd like to rent audio books Netflix style (monthly subscription fee, free shipping) from a source such as [Simply Audiobooks](#) or [Audible](#) where you can download digital audio books.

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#### 23. Write Away

Take a pen in hand and get your thoughts out of your head and onto paper. Journaling releases feelings of anxiety, confusion, and turbulence. Writing engages a different part of the brain, and you can tap into your own knowledge for clarification about situations. Your mind will be relieved of the need to focus on the *problem* and can instead begin to focus on the *solution*.

Ask yourself a question to get your started in a journaling session. Here are a few examples...Why am I anxious? What brings a smile to my face? If time was not a factor, what would I do? Am I happy? If money was no object, where would I go? What do I love most about my partner? What do I wish I could change in my daily routine?

Use your journal as a communication tool with your own inner voice. After you have finished writing, take some time to read what you have written. Then take a few moments to reflect on what message your journal entry has for you. Write a little summary of your insights. You may hear a cry for help (*I can't get everything done on time*). You may realize something is missing in your life (*I don't remember the last time I laughed*). You may get a different perspective on a situation (*I don't have enough money to do that, but I could do this instead*).

If you experience journaling writer's block, find some ideas to jumpstart your session at <https://daringtolivefully.com/journal-prompts>.

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#### 24. Emerge from Your Cocoon - Be a Social Butterfly

As Robert Louis Stevenson said, “A friend is a gift you give yourself”. Take a moment to consider how much of your week you allocate for activities with friends. When we feel pressured and short on time, it’s easy to allow friendship time to diminish. We might find ourselves skipping our coffee break with a friend, avoiding a neighbor so we don’t have to chitchat, or saying no to activities with our hiking club.

Interacting with other people helps stimulate a different part of the brain, allowing you to relax and take a much needed breather, especially during difficult times. Knowing that you aren’t alone helps to eliminate a good deal of anxiety.

Be sure to not hide behind the remote nature of social networking on the computer and actually go *do* something with another human being! If you have been a bit isolated and don’t have many friends to get together with, start cultivating some new friendships. It takes a bit of courage, but most of us feel somewhat disconnected these days.

Ask a friend to lunch and suggest that she bring another friend along too. If you exchange pleasantries with a neighbor, take the next step and invite them to walk around the block with you some evening. Visit [meetup.com](http://meetup.com). Meetup makes it easy for anyone to organize a local group or find one of the thousands already meeting up face-to-face. Type in the area where you live and some of your interests, and you are sure to find others with similar interests. There are meetups for crafters, for hikers, for singles, for dog lovers, for movie fans...the list is endless.

#### 25. Scout’s Honor - Being Prepared Relieves Stress

*Before* a stressful day is upon you, at a moment when you are feeling at peace with the world, take a little time and make a list of 10 things that always make you feel better (and perhaps add some of the new ideas you learned in this article).

Look over your list and see what steps you could take *now* that can make de-stressing more effortless when you most need it. Is a pampering pedicure on your list? Go to the spa and buy yourself a gift certificate to be used in the future when your stress level is elevated. If a warm bath never fails to relax you, be sure to tuck away some brand new scented candles and special bath salts.