

Stress Relief Tips

These are some things we all need to do for ourselves but sometimes forget when we especially need them. Find some that appeal to you and give them a try when you're feeling tense or nervous. If you feel the pull to do something you know isn't good for you, **HALT**. Ask yourself, "Am I **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely, or **T**ired?" and pick something suitable from the list.

The Absolute Basics

Sleep. Homework and other stresses can lengthen the day, but you need your sleep. The mind rejuvenates at rest. Getting enough sleep helps you feel refreshed and relaxed.

Eat healthy. Trauma deregulates stress hormone levels, but you can help restore order through consistent exercise and good eating habits. Good food choices include high-fiber, low-sugar fruit (raspberries, blueberries, strawberries); lean protein; vegetables; and complex carbohydrates (spinach, salad, whole-grain bread). Eat every few hours to keep your blood sugar balanced. Drink plenty of water. Limit your intake of caffeine, sugar, nicotine, alcohol, and salt. Eat an egg before bed to keep your blood sugar stable and promote sleep.

Exercise. Reduce stress hormone levels. Exercise—including hiking and dancing—will help you feel better while improving overall stamina and health. The right exercise even can be fun.

Do something fun or creative. Pick something you enjoy, such as:

Art	Crosswords	Games	Movies	Reading fiction
Cooking	Dancing	Gardening	Needlework	Woodworking
Crafts	Fishing	Kite flying	Photography	Writing creatively

Make connections. Reach out to the people who matter most to you. Call a friend you can talk to or study with. Talk to counselors with whom you can discuss personal concerns.

When Stress Starts to Build

Write for yourself. You do a lot of writing for school, but writing for yourself can help you feel better. A private journal is a good place to explore dreams and feelings with no one to criticize your efforts. Writing about your experience can help you to safely process your emotions. It tells your mind that you are taking care of the situation and helps to relieve the difficult symptoms you may be experiencing.

Use your spiritual resources. Making use of spiritual resources varies from person to person. For some it means praying, going to church, or reaching out to a member of the clergy. For others, it means meditating or reading uplifting material. Using spiritual resources may include rituals and ceremonies—whatever feels right to you. Remember, you can be spiritual without being religious.

Do something ordinary. When you feel upset, it can help to take a shower, wash your hair, make yourself some healthy comfort food, call a friend or family member, or make your bed.

Wear something that makes you feel good. We all have certain clothes or jewelry that we enjoy wearing. These are the things to wear when you need to comfort yourself.

Get some little things done. Accomplishing something you tend to put off always helps you feel better, even easy things that don't take much time. Just keep it manageable. Examples include the following:

Clean out one drawer	Put your clothes away	Read one homework assignment
Do a load of laundry	Make a schedule	Send someone a card
Dust your room	Organize your desk or backpack	Set some priorities for today

Learn something new. Think about a topic that you are interested in but have never explored. Gather information about it at the library, on the Internet, or from a class. Look at something in a new way. Reread a favorite passage and see if you can find new meaning in it.

Do a reality check. If you find yourself having a strong reaction to something, considering what really might be going on can be helpful. For instance, if you come home and loud music is playing, you might think that the person is doing it just to annoy you. Rather than jumping to conclusions and dumping your anger, consider the likelihood that the person thought you wouldn't be in until later and took advantage of the opportunity to play the music a bit louder.

Be present in the moment. This state often is referred to as mindfulness. Many of us spend so much time focusing on the future or thinking about the past that we miss out on fully experiencing what is going on in the present. Making a conscious effort to pay full attention to what you are doing right now can help you feel better.

Stare at something that's pretty or has special meaning for you. Stop what you are doing and look at a flower or leaf, stars, clouds, a work of art, or a picture of a loved one.

Play with children or pets. Romping in the grass with a dog, petting a kitten, reading a story to a child, rocking a baby, and similar activities have calming effects.

Do a relaxation exercise. Many good books or Internet sources describe relaxation exercises. Try some and practice the ones you prefer daily. Use them whenever you need to feel better. Listening for 10 minutes to a relaxation recording can help you feel better.

Take a warm bath. Warm water is relaxing and healing.

Smell something nice. Many people have discovered fragrances that help them feel good, whether from essential oils or cut flowers. Even the smell of freshly baked bread can help.

Listen to music. Feelings and hearing are closely associated in the brain, so pamper yourself with music you enjoy. If music is important to you, make it part of every day.

Make music. Making music also is a good way to help yourself feel better. Even drums and other rhythmic instruments can relieve tension and increase well-being.

Sing. Singing fills your lungs with fresh air and raises the spirits. Sing along with favorite music at the top of your lungs when you are driving your car or taking a shower. Belt out your favorite songs from childhood.