LEARN HOW TO TAME STRESS

10 RELAXATION TECHNIQUES THAT ZAP STRESS FAST

Relax. You deserve it, it’s good for you, and it takes less time than you think.

You don’t need a spa weekend or a retreat. Each of these stress-relieving tips can get you from “OMG!” to “om” in less than 15 minutes.

1. **Meditate**
   A few minutes of practice per day can help ease anxiety. “Research suggests that daily meditation may alter the brain’s neural pathways, making you more resilient to stress,” says psychologist Robbie Maller Hartman, PhD, a Chicago health and wellness coach.

   It's simple. Sit up straight with both feet on the floor. Close your eyes. Focus your attention on reciting – out loud or silently – a positive mantra such as “I feel at peace” or “I love myself.” Place one hand on your belly to sync the mantra with your breaths. Let any distracting thoughts float by like clouds.

2. **Breathe Deeply**
   Take a 5-minute break and focus on your breathing. Sit up straight, eyes closed, with a hand on your belly. Slowly inhale through your nose, feeling the breath start in your abdomen and work its way to the top of your head. Reverse the process as you exhale through your mouth.

   “Deep breathing counters the effects of stress by slowing the heart rate and lowering blood pressure,” psychologist Judith Tutin, PhD, says. She's a certified life coach in Rome, Georgia.
3. **Be Present**  
   Slow down.

   “Take 5 minutes and focus on only one behavior with awareness,” Tutin says. Notice how the air feels on your face when you’re walking and how your feet feel hitting the ground. Enjoy the texture and taste of each bite of food.

   When you spend time in the moment and focus on your senses, you should feel less tense.

4. **Reach Out**  
   Your social network is one of your best tools for handling stress. Talk to others – preferably face to face, or at least on the phone. Share what's going on. You can get a fresh perspective while keeping your connection strong.

5. **Tune In to Your Body**  
   Mentally scan your body to get a sense of how stress affects it each day. Lie on your back, or sit with your feet on the floor. Start at your toes and work your way up to your scalp, noticing how your body feels.

   “Simply be aware of places you feel tight or loose without trying to change anything,” Tutin says. For 1 to 2 minutes, imagine each deep breath flowing to that body part. Repeat this process as you move your focus up your body, paying close attention to sensations you feel in each body part.

6. **Decompress**  
   Place a warm heat wrap around your neck and shoulders for 10 minutes. Close your eyes and relax your face, neck, upper chest, and back muscles. Remove the wrap, and use a tennis ball or foam roller to massage away tension.

   “Place the ball between your back and the wall. Lean into the ball, and hold gentle pressure for up to 15 seconds. Then move the ball to another spot, and apply pressure,” says Cathy Benninger, a nurse practitioner and assistant professor at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center in Columbus.
7. **Laugh Out Loud**
   A good belly laugh doesn’t just lighten the load mentally. It lowers cortisol, your body’s stress hormone, and boosts brain chemicals called endorphins, which help your mood. Lighten up by tuning in to your favorite sitcom or video, reading the comics, or chatting with someone who makes you smile.

8. **Crank Up the Tunes**
   Research shows that listening to soothing music can lower blood pressure, heart rate, and anxiety. “Create a playlist of songs or nature sounds (the ocean, a bubbling brook, birds chirping), and allow your mind to focus on the different melodies, instruments, or singers in the piece,” Benninger says. You also can blow off steam by rocking out to more upbeat tunes – or singing at the top of your lungs!

9. **Get Moving**
   You don’t have to run to get a runner’s high. All forms of exercise, including yoga and walking, can ease depression and anxiety by helping the brain release feel-good chemicals and by giving your body a chance to practice dealing with stress. You can go for a quick walk around the block, take the stairs up and down a few flights, or do some stretching exercises like head rolls and shoulder shrugs.

10. **Be Grateful**
   Keep a gratitude journal or several (one by your bed, one in your purse, and one at work) to help you remember all the things that are good in your life.

   “Being grateful for your blessings cancels out negative thoughts and worries,” says Joni Emmerling, a wellness coach in Greenville, North Carolina.

   Use these journals to savor good experiences like a child’s smile, a sunshine-filled day, and good health. Don’t forget to celebrate accomplishments like mastering a new task at work or a new hobby.

   When you start feeling stressed, spend a few minutes looking through your notes to remind yourself what really matters.

*Source: WebMD*
RELAXATION TECHNIQUES: TRY THESE STEPS TO REDUCE STRESS

Relaxation techniques can reduce stress symptoms and help you enjoy a better quality of life, especially if you have an illness. Explore relaxation techniques you can do by yourself.

Relaxation techniques are a great way to help with stress management. Relaxation isn't only about peace of mind or enjoying a hobby. Relaxation is a process that decreases the effects of stress on your mind and body. Relaxation techniques can help you cope with everyday stress and with stress related to various health problems, such as heart disease and pain.

Whether your stress is spiraling out of control or you've already got it tamed, you can benefit from learning relaxation techniques. Learning basic relaxation techniques is easy. Relaxation techniques also are often free or low cost, pose little risk, and can be done nearly anywhere.

Explore these simple relaxation techniques and get started on de-stressing your life and improving your health.

The benefits of relaxation techniques
When faced with numerous responsibilities and tasks or the demands of an illness, relaxation techniques may not be a priority in your life. But that means you might miss out on the health benefits of relaxation.
Practicing relaxation techniques can have many benefits, including:

+ Slowing heart rate
+ Lowering blood pressure
+ Slowing your breathing rate
+ Improving digestion
+ Maintaining normal blood sugar levels
+ Reducing activity of stress hormones
+ Increasing blood flow to major muscles
+ Reducing muscle tension and chronic pain
+ Improving concentration and mood
+ Improving sleep quality
+ Lowering fatigue
+ Reducing anger and frustration
+ Boosting confidence to handle problems

To get the most benefit, use relaxation techniques along with other positive coping methods, such as thinking positively, finding humor, problem-solving, managing time, exercising, getting enough sleep, and reaching out to supportive family and friends.

**Types of relaxation techniques**

Health professionals such as complementary health practitioners, doctors and psychotherapists can teach various relaxation techniques. But if you prefer, you can also learn some relaxation techniques on your own.

In general, relaxation techniques involve refocusing your attention on something calming and increasing awareness of your body. It doesn't matter which relaxation technique you choose. What matters is that you try to practice relaxation regularly to reap its benefits.
Types of relaxation techniques include:

+ **Autogenic relaxation.** Autogenic means something that comes from within you. In this relaxation technique, you use both visual imagery and body awareness to reduce stress.

  You repeat words or suggestions in your mind that may help you relax and reduce muscle tension. For example, you may imagine a peaceful setting and then focus on controlled, relaxing breathing, slowing your heart rate, or feeling different physical sensations, such as relaxing each arm or leg one by one.

+ **Progressive muscle relaxation.** In this relaxation technique, you focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group. This can help you focus on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation. You can become more aware of physical sensations.

  In one method of progressive muscle relaxation, you start by tensing and relaxing the muscles in your toes and progressively working your way up to your neck and head. You can also start with your head and neck and work down to your toes. Tense your muscles for about five seconds and then relax for 30 seconds, and repeat.

+ **Visualization.** In this relaxation technique, you may form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation.

  To relax using visualization, try to incorporate as many senses as you can, including smell, sight, sound and touch. If you imagine relaxing at the ocean, for instance, think about the smell of salt water, the sound of crashing waves and the warmth of the sun on your body.

  You may want to close your eyes, sit in a quiet spot, loosen any tight clothing, and concentrate on your breathing. Aim to focus on the present and think positive thoughts.

Other relaxation techniques may include:

+ Deep breathing
+ Massage
+ Meditation
Tai chi
Yoga
Biofeedback
Music and art therapy
Aromatherapy
Hydrotherapy

Relaxation techniques take practice
As you learn relaxation techniques, you can become more aware of muscle tension and other physical sensations of stress. Once you know what the stress response feels like, you can make a conscious effort to practice a relaxation technique the moment you start to feel stress symptoms. This can prevent stress from spiraling out of control.

Remember that relaxation techniques are skills. As with any skill, your ability to relax improves with practice. Be patient with yourself. Don't let your effort to practice relaxation techniques become yet another stressor.

If one relaxation technique doesn't work for you, try another technique. If none of your efforts at stress reduction seems to work, talk to your doctor about other options.

Also, bear in mind that some people, especially those with serious psychological issues and a history of abuse, may experience feelings of emotional discomfort during some relaxation techniques. Although this is rare, if you experience emotional discomfort during relaxation techniques, stop what you're doing and consider talking to your doctor or mental health provider.

Source: Mayo Clinic