



Nine tips for a healthier, happier you

Work can be stressful We've listed nine quick and easy tips to help you de-stress and relax.

1. Just Breathe... and Smile. Taking 30 to 60 seconds to breathe can be calming and relaxing. When taking a breath, take 2 to 5 seconds for the inhalation, and twice that time to exhale. This method will help decrease your heart rate and allow you to focus on the breath itself, giving your head space to relax and reset. Additionally, multiple scientific studies have found that smiling releases endorphins, which help you relax, feel better, and can lower stress levels.

2. Meditation and Mindfulness. When you're stressed, your mind is in 'fight or flight' mode. Practicing mindfulness helps shift your perspective from 'doing' to 'being' and 'reactive' to 'reflective'. It also helps you become more aware of your thoughts and environment, allowing you to focus on solving problems in a more relaxed and centered frame of mind.

3. Exercise. Numerous studies have shown that exercise helps improve mental health. You don't have to join a cross-fit gym, but yoga, stretching, or working out for 15 to 30 minutes a day, three times a week can dramatically improve your mental health by lowering stress levels and your resting heart rate. Importantly, exercise releases endorphins that can help you feel calm, relaxed and sometimes even a little euphoric.

4. Eat Healthy. What you put in your body gets digested and used to produce, well... you. The food you eat is directly converted into nutrients that makes the cells of your body and help it function. There are a couple small changes that can make a large impact on your diet. 1. Increasing your daily intake of water. Dehydration can lead to difficulty concentrating, fatigue and other changes in mood. 2. Eat fruits and vegetables. These foods are high in antioxidants which help break down toxic chemicals and prevent cell damage. Foods high in saturated fats can make you feel mentally and physically tired and slow because your body is using most of its energy for digestion. Eat better and feel smarter.

5. Find a Positive, Creative Outlet. One great outlet to consider is journaling. Studies have shown that journaling helps clarify thoughts and feelings, shifting your mind from a reactive to reflective state. Writing about issues also helps you to think them through by calming the intensity of your emotions and allowing to identify potential solutions. Other positive outlets including painting or drawing, dancing, volunteering, or even DIY projects, etc. Building or doing something productive creates value and gives your stressed mind the space it needs to feel better. Make a list of the things you need to get done and start with the fastest and easiest. Track your progress as you accomplish tasks. Nothing feels better than crossing items off your list.

6. Take a Walk and Listen to Music. Take some space from whatever is causing stress and get some exercise. Listening to music, especially classical, has been shown to lower heart rate, reduce blood pressure, and help people relax. When you get back to whatever you were doing, you can approach it with a clearer and more relaxed mind.

7. Get Some Sun... Sunlight sends signals to your brain to produce serotonin, a neurotransmitter involved in regulating mood. Depression and related disorders can often rear their ugly heads in the winter because of shorter days and less sunlight. Another option to combat those seasonal-related blues is to purchase (or even build) a light box, which can help act as a sun-substitute during the cloudy days.

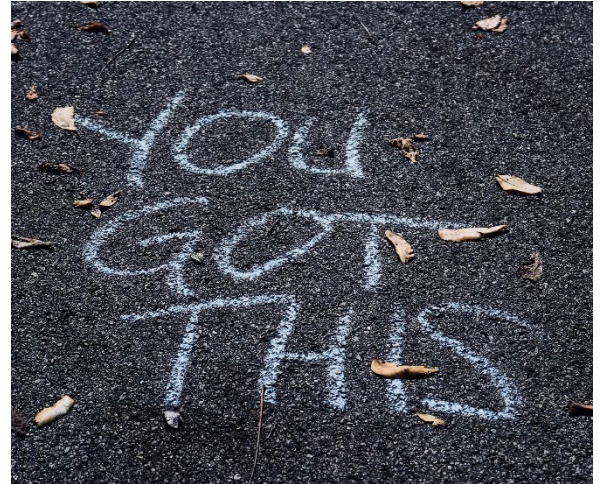
8. Take a Long, Hot Bath. In Chinese medicine, practitioners employ hot water herbal foot soaks/baths as a weekly ritual to warm the body, enhance circulation, and relieve aches. People hold their stress in different parts of their bodies, such as the neck, stomach or head. When stressed, these places are usually tight and tense. A hot bath will increase blood flow throughout your body, warming and loosening those muscles. Take some deep breaths and soak in silence or put on some classical music like Mozart, Beethoven, Schobert or my personal favorite - Satie. Some research even suggests that hot baths may be better for mental health than physical exercise!



9. Talk to Someone. Imagine stress as a liquid that fills up your body. Not enough and you feel a bit bored and empty, and too much and you feel like you might explode. Humans are social animals so when you feel overwhelmed by stress, it can help to talk and connect with someone. Feeling stressed is normal, even when there may not be anything significant causing it. You are not alone - everyone feels that way sometimes. The important thing is to act and do something about it so you can get back to feeling like a healthier, happier you.

Thinking Differently About Stress:

Stress is not just a negative response. Your body also produces stress hormones in response to new positive experiences and expectations. That is why you may feel excited and slightly euphoric when thinking or looking forward to something fun. When your expectations are not met, you feel a sense of disappointment, frustration and possibly some fatigue. That reaction is your body coming down from the 'high' produced by 'stress'. Next time you feel stressed, try to take a step back and think differently about the stress itself. Now take a deep breath, let go of those feelings, and do something great.



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