



## Relax your stress away

### 12 ways to de-stress

Stress is the wear and tear your body experiences as it reacts to changes in your environment. With the death of a loved one, the birth of a child, a job promotion, a change of residence, or even the thrill of a new relationship, you can go through many psychological and physiological changes that result in stress.

Too much stress can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression, which in turn can lead to health problems such as headaches, rashes, insomnia, ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

As emphasized in many ancient cultures, centering yourself holistically through relaxation is a key element in managing stress and building a greater quality of life.

The next time you're feeling stressed out, try a few of the following suggestions to help get yourself back into the groove of things.

#### Relax your body

- 1. Deep breathing** Repeat ten times any time you feel tense. While sitting, standing or lying down, close your eyes and inhale deeply. Exhale slowly over a count of 5–10 seconds.
- 2. Stretching** Simple stretches, such as the “neck stretch”, can help relieve physical tension. Starting on one side, gently roll your head in a half circle, and then drop your chin to your chest. Repeat in reverse.
- 3. Exercise** Physical activity helps reduce both physical and emotional stress. Walk, run, jump, bike, bowl, do yoga, etc., whenever you can.
- 4. Take a bath** Take conscious steps every day to deal with the stress in your life. Allow yourself at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted time in the tub to melt that stress away.
- 5. Get a massage** A massage is a wonderful way to get rid of physical tension. A professional massage generally takes 30 minutes to an hour and can target specific areas of tension, such as the lower back or the neck.
- 6. Eat well** A well-balanced diet will help reduce overall stress. Reduce your alcohol and caffeine intake. Caffeine is found in foods and drinks such as coffee, black tea, soft drinks and chocolate.

Nearly 75 percent of Americans are concerned about the level of stress in their everyday lives. An American Psychological Association (APA) survey found that Americans are mostly stressed about money, work and the economy.

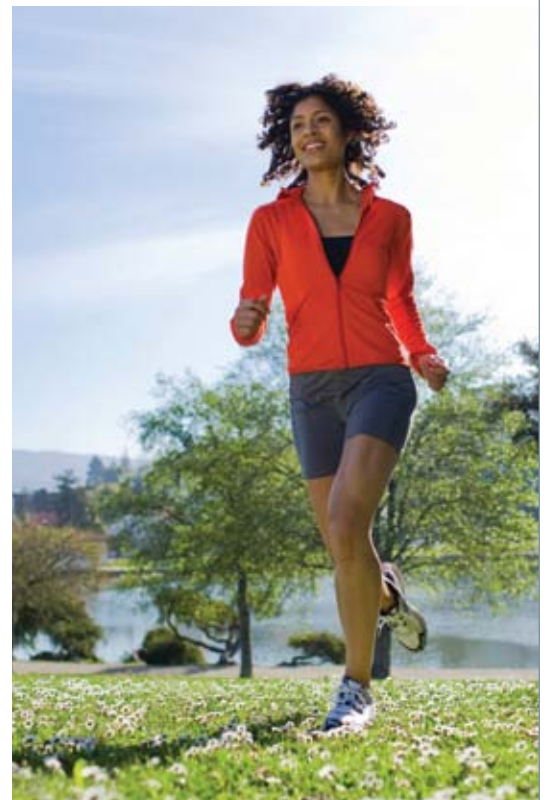
Sources: “Stress in America” conducted online by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychological Association. <http://www.apapractice.org>, Nov. 2010.

The most common forms of stress-related illnesses are cardiovascular diseases.

## Relax your mind

- 7. Talk** Take the time to talk with a friend and express feelings you might have been holding in. Listen carefully to your partner. Walking in a quiet neighborhood or a park can limit distractions.
- 8. Laugh** Go to a comedy club, watch a funny movie or spend time with a friend who makes you laugh.
- 9. Cry** Studies show that stress-related hormones are released in tears. If you haven't cried in a long time, try listening to sad music, watching a sad movie or writing about a sad experience.
- 10. Read** A good book can be a great escape. Reading both tearjerkers and comedies can help release pent-up emotions.
- 11. Meditate** Take a moment to commune with a higher power, with nature or even with yourself.
- 12. Do something you love** When you enjoy yourself, whether it's gardening, going to church or seeing friends, you relieve physical stress and relax your emotions.

If you find that you are unable to manage your stress alone seek the support of a mental health professional.



### Create your own stress reducers

You don't need to use drugs or alcohol to relax. Feel free to create your own healthy stress reducers based on your hobbies and interests. The more fun you have, the more stress you'll release.



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