Manage stress and improve wellbeing

Managing stress is all about taking charge: taking charge of your thoughts, your emotions, your schedule, your environment, and the way you deal with problems.

The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun—plus the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on.

Your body is your barometer - how do you respond to stress?

It's important to learn how to recognise when your stress levels are out of control. The most dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you. You get used to it. It starts to feel familiar, even normal. You don’t notice how much it's affecting you, even as it takes a heavy toll. Stress affects the mind, body, and behaviour in many ways, and everyone experiences stress differently.

Recognising stress is the first step in lessening its impact. Many of us spend so much time in a stressed state, we have forgotten what it feels like to be fully relaxed and alert. Being stressed out feels normal. What does it feel like to be calm and stress-free? In adulthood, being balanced means maintaining a calm state of energy, alertness, and focus. Calmness is more than just feeling relaxed; being alert is an equally important aspect of finding the balance needed to withstand stress.

- **Stop the inner conversations** that say ‘I’m fine”. Notice how you’re breathing has changed. Are your muscles tense? Awareness of your physical response to stress will help regulate the tension when it occurs.
- **Get in the habit** of paying attention to your body's clues. When you're tired, your eyes feel heavy and you might rest your head on your hand. When you're happy, you laugh easily. And when you are stressed, your body lets you know that too.
- **Notice your muscles and insides**. Are your muscles tight/sore? Is your stomach tight or sore? Are your hands clenched? What about your jaw and ears – how do they feel?
- **Feel your breath**. Is your breath shallow? Place one hand on your belly, the other on your chest. Watch your hands rise and fall with each breath. Notice when you breathe fully or when you "forget" to breathe.

The Sensual Way to Stress-free Success

The speediest way is by engaging one or more of your senses—your sense of sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, or movement—to rapidly calm and energise yourself. Learn what kind of sensory experience your mind and body responds to and you will find calm quickly. It's essential for self soothing and self-managing harmful stress.

To help yourself, when it comes to reducing stress quickly, it's important to be familiar with your specific response:

- **Overexcited stress response** – If you tend to become angry, agitated, or keyed up under stress, you will respond best to stress relief activities that quieten you down
- **Under excited stress response** – If you tend to become depressed, withdrawn, or spaced out under stress, you will respond best to stress relief activities that are stimulating and that energise your nervous system
- **Frozen (both overexcited and under excited)** – If you tend to freeze, speeding up in some ways while slowing down in others, identify stress relief activities that provide both safety and stimulation to help you “reboot” your system.
What types of stress-busting sensory experiences work quickly and effectively for you?

**Sights:** If you’re a visual person, try to relieve stress by surrounding yourself with soothing and uplifting images. You can also try closing your eyes and imagining soothing images. These may work as quick stress relievers:

- Look at a cherished photo or a favourite memento.
- Bring the outside indoors; buy a plant or some flowers to enliven your space.
- Enjoy the beauty of nature—a garden, the beach, a park, or your own backyard.
- Surround yourself with colours that lift your spirits.
- Close your eyes and picture a situation or place that feels peaceful and rejuvenating.

**Sound:** Are you sensitive to sounds and noises? Are you a music lover? If so, try:

- Sing or hum a favourite tune. Listen to uplifting music.
- Tune in to the soundtrack/close-by sounds of nature-crashing waves, the wind rustling the trees, birds singing.
- Buy a small fountain, so you can enjoy the soothing sound of running water in your home or office.
- Hang wind chimes near an open window.

**Smell & Scents:** If you tend to zone out, freeze or become overly agitated surround yourself with smells that are energising and invigorating:

- Light a scented candle or burn some incense.
- Lie down in sheets scented with lavender.
- Smell the roses-or another type of flower.
- Enjoy the clean, fresh air in the great outdoors.
- Spritz on your favourite perfume, cologne or aromatherapy spray.

**Touch:** Experiment with your sense of touch. Focus on things you can feel that are relaxing and renewing:

- Wrap yourself in a warm blanket.
- Pet a dog or cat.
- Hold a comforting object (a stuffed animal, a favourite memento).
- Soak in a hot bath.
- Give yourself a hand or neck massage/get a long massage regularly.
- Wear clothing that feels soft against your skin.

**Taste:** Slowly savouring a favourite treat can be very relaxing. Eat slowly, be mindful focusing on the feel of the food in your mouth and the taste on your tongue:

- Chew a piece of sugarless gum.
- Indulge in a small piece of dark chocolate.
- Sip a steaming cup of coffee or tea or a refreshing cold drink.
- Eat a perfectly ripe piece of fruit.
- Enjoy a healthy, crunchy snack (celery, carrots, or trail mix).

**Movement:** If you tend to shut down when you’re under stress, stress-relieving activities that get you moving may be particularly helpful. Anything that engages the muscles or gets you up and active can work:

- Run in place or jump up and down.
- Dance around or move free-form to music.
- Stretch or roll your head in circles.
• Go for a short walk.
• Squeeze a rubbery stress ball.

**Take a break from technology**

• Try tuning into relaxing music during your commute. Or try riding in silence.
• Instead of talking on your phone, take a moment to people watch. Pay attention to what you hear and see.
• Instead of checking e-mail while waiting, take a few deep breaths, look out the window, or sip some aromatic tea.
• While waiting for an appointment give yourself a hand massage.

**Meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi, Aromatherapy, Massage, Life Coaching – alternative ways to increase wellbeing**

• **Meditation** is about becoming quiet so that you can get more clarity. When you learn meditation you can learn to meditate on specific issues – the focus is on clearing mind chatter so that you can solve problems more creatively by creating inner spaciousness. Some meditations involve using postures, with experience you can use these to open up to your higher intelligence.

• **Yoga/Tai Chi** is great exercise and also very grounding. It creates space in the body, connects you to the here and now and teaches you how to hone your awareness – again the focus is on creating space and awareness in the body so that you can be more creative in day to day life.

• **Aromatherapy** uses scents and essential oils to soothe and heal. It’s simple and practical.

• **Massage** long flowing massage like Hawaiian Massage are the best for relaxation and stress relief.

• **Life Coaching** helps you to learn about your sources of stress, habits and patterns and supports you to take positive action and increase resilience and emotional intelligence, 4 – 6 sessions works wonders. See Tips 11 & 12 below.

**Quick acting stress-busting tips**

The best part of quick stress relief is the awareness that you have control over your surroundings. Even if you share a work area, you can personalise your space to serve as a “stress prevention zone”:

• Wear clothes that make you feel relaxed and confident instead of stiff and uncomfortable.
• Rub lotion into your hands then breathe in the scent.
• Brush your body with your hands or hairbrush in long, downward strokes. Imagine brushing off stress.
• Too stressed to snooze? Try using a white noise machine for background sound or a humidifier with a diffuser for a light scent in the air.
• If clutter is upsetting, spend 10 minutes each day to tidy and organise.
• Use colour – put your favourite calming colour around you.
• Let natural light in to your workspace whenever possible.
• During stressful sessions, stay connected to your breath. Massage the tips of your fingers. Wiggle your toes. Sip warm drinks.
• **On the phone:** inhale something energising, like lime, cinnamon, ginger, peppermint, flower scents or coffee. While talking, stand up or pace back and forth to burn off excess energy. Conduct phone business outside when possible.
• **On the computer:** work standing up. Do knee-bends in 10-minute intervals. Wrap a soft scarf around your neck. Suck on a mint/sweet, sip soothing herbal teas with cinnamon, orange.
• **Lunch breaks:** take a walk around the block or in the parking lot. Listen to soothing music while eating. Have a quick chat with someone you love.
• **Your workspace:** place family photos/holiday photo’s/places you’d like to go photo’s/images that make you feel happy on your desk to remind you of your life outside work, make or buy an aromatherapy room spray.
12 Steps to Develop New Habits

1: Recognise warning signs of excessive stress at work
2: Make you a priority by consciously taking better care of yourself
3: Get your body moving, find out what it likes to do and how to it likes to move. Try free form movement to music
4: Eat foods that nourish you and keep you going
5: Drink alcohol in moderation, stop smoking, add fresh juices to your diet daily
6: Get enough sleep, take up meditation and make the time to get regular, long massages
7: Prioritise and organise work tasks, get a mentor or experienced buddy to share burdens and ideas with
8: Design a creative, a balanced schedule and put it where you can see it to help form new habits
9: Don’t over-commit yourself and know when you are. Learn to say “NO” and feel OK about it
10: Plan regular breaks and do something you really like doing, no matter how short
11: Improve emotional intelligence - realise when you’re stressed, stay tuned in to your internal emotional experience
12: Commit to break bad habits - resist perfectionism, clean up your act, choose positive thinking, don’t try to control the things you know you can’t.

5 New Habits for Stress-free Success at Work

- **Take time away**: When stress is mounting at work, try to take a quick break and move away from the stressful situation. Take a stroll outside the workplace if possible, or spend a few minutes meditating in the break room. Physical movement or finding a quiet place to regain your balance can quickly reduce stress.
- **Talk it over with someone**: In some situations, simply sharing your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust can help reduce stress. Talking over a problem with someone who is both supportive and empathetic can be a great way to let off steam and relieve stress. Find a professional mentor who knows what you’re going through or a life coach
- **Connect with others at work**: Developing friendships with some of your co-workers can help buffer you from the negative effects of stress. Remember to listen to them and offer support when they are in need as well.
- **Look for humour in the situation**: When used appropriately, humour is a great way to diffuse stress in the workplace. When you or those around you start taking things too seriously, find a way to lighten the mood by sharing a joke or funny story.
- **Improve communication**: Share information with employees/colleagues to reduce uncertainty about their jobs and futures. Clearly define roles and responsibilities. Make communication friendly and efficient, not mean-spirited or petty. Cultivate a friendly social climate