

Part of [How Stress Impacts Your Health Guide](#) ✓

18 Effective Stress Relief Strategies

How to Relieve Stress Now and in the Future

By Elizabeth Scott, PhD | Updated on September 13, 2023

✓ Medically reviewed by Rachel Goldman, PhD, FTOS

From minor challenges to major crises, stress is part of life. And while you can't always control your circumstances, you can control how you respond to them. When stress becomes overwhelming or chronic, it can affect your well-being. That's why it's essential to have effective stress relievers that can calm your mind and body.

Some effective stress management techniques include:

- Guided imagery
- Meditation
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Deep breathing
- Going for a walk
- Hugs
- Aromatherapy
- Creativity
- Healthy diet
- Stress relief supplements
- Leisure activities
- Positive self-talk
- Yoga
- Gratitude
- Exercise
- Evaluating priorities
- Social support
- Eliminating stressors

There isn't a one-size-fits-all option when it comes to stress relief, however. What works for one person might not work for another.

And what works for you at home might not be an option when you're at work or in the community (dancing around your living room might be helpful but dancing in the grocery store might not be).

So it's important to have a variety of stress relief tools at your disposal. Then, you'll be able to pick a strategy that works best for your current circumstances.

Fast-Acting Stress Relief Strategies

What strategies can relieve stress fast? A number of helpful techniques, such as deep breathing and meditation, are fast-acting tools that you can do anywhere, anytime.

Whether you're about to be interviewed for a job or you're feeling overwhelmed by your child's behavior at the playground, it's important to have some stress reduction tools that can lower your stress right now.

The best short-term strategies:

- Can be performed anywhere
- Take very little practice to master
- Are free
- Provide immediate relief

Try Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is like taking a short vacation in your mind. It can involve imagining yourself being in your "happy place"—maybe picturing yourself sitting on a beach, listening to the waves, smelling the ocean, and feeling the warm sand underneath you.


Guided imagery can be done with a recording where you listen to someone walk you through a peaceful scene. Or, once you know how to do it yourself, you can practice guided imagery on your own.

Simply close your eyes for a minute and walk yourself through a peaceful scene. Think about all the sensory experiences you engage in and allow yourself to feel like you're really there. After a few minutes, open your eyes and return to the present moment.

Meditate

Meditation brings short-term stress relief as well as lasting stress management benefits. There are many different forms of meditation to try—each one is unique and brings its own appeal.

You might develop a mantra that you repeat in your mind as you take slow deep breaths. Or, you might take a few minutes to practice mindfulness, which involves being in the moment. Simply pay attention to what you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell.



When you're focused on the here-and-now, you won't be able to ruminate about something that already happened and you can't worry about something in the future. Meditation and mindfulness take practice, but it can make a big difference in your overall stress level as it brings you back to the present.

Practice Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation involves relaxing all the muscles in your body, group by group. To practice, you can start with a few deep breaths.

Then, practice tightening and relaxing each muscle group, starting with your forehead and moving down to your toes.

With practice, you'll learn to recognize tension and tightness in your muscles and you'll be able to relax more easily. Each time you practice, however, you should experience a feeling of relaxation sweeping through your body.

Focus on Breathing

Just focusing on your breath or changing the way you breathe can make a big difference to your overall stress level. Breathing techniques can calm your body and your brain in just a few minutes.

The best news is that no one around you will know you're doing them. So whether you're in a stressful meeting or you're sitting in a crowded theater, breathing exercises could be key to reducing your stress.

While there are many different breathing exercises, like karate breathing, a few simple ones include:

1. Breathe in through your nose and watch your belly fill with air. Count slowly to three as you inhale. Hold for one second, and then slowly breathe out through your nose as you count to three again.
2. Breathe in through your nose and imagine that you're inhaling peaceful, calm air. Imagine that air spreading throughout your body. As you exhale, imagine that you're breathing out stress and tension.

Take a Walk

Exercise is a fantastic stress reliever that can work in minutes. Taking a walk allows you to enjoy a change of scenery, which can get you into a different frame of mind, and brings the benefits of exercise as well.

So whether you just need to take a stroll around the office to get a break from a frustrating task or you decide to go for a long walk in the park after work, walking is a simple but effective way to rejuvenate your mind and body.

Get a Hug From a Loved One

Physical touch can do a lot to relieve your stress. Hugging a loved one can be especially beneficial.

When you hug someone, oxytocin (also known as the "cuddle hormone") is released. Oxytocin is associated with higher levels of happiness and lower levels of stress.

Oxytocin also causes a reduction in blood pressure. It reduces the stress hormone norepinephrine and can produce a sense of relaxation.

So don't be afraid to ask a loved one for a hug if you need it. It's good for both of you and it can be one of the simplest forms of stress relief available.

Enjoy Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy has real benefits for stress relief—it can help you to feel energized, more relaxed, or more present in the moment.

Emerging research suggests certain scents can alter brain wave activity and decrease stress hormones in the body.

So whether you enjoy candles, diffusers, or body products, consider incorporating some aromatherapy into your day.

Create Artwork

Getting in touch with your creative side may have been easy for you during childhood, but it's not too late to pick it up again if you've lost touch with your penchant for artwork.

If you aren't into drawing or painting, consider coloring in a coloring book. Adult coloring books have risen in popularity, and for good reason—coloring can be a great stress reliever.

Research consistently shows that coloring can have a meditative effect. One study found that anxiety levels decline in people who were coloring complex geometric patterns, making it a perfect outlet for stress reduction.

Long-Term Stress Relief Strategies

What can you do to calm mental stress over the long term? Certain habits can promote resilience to stress and increase overall wellness. For example, those who exercise or meditate regularly tend to become less stressed in the face of a difficult challenge.

So it's important to create a lifestyle that will help you ward off stress and deal with challenges in a healthy way.

Eat a Balanced Diet

A poor diet can bring greater reactivity toward stress. Emotional eating and reaching for high-fat, high-sugar foods can provide a temporary sense of relief that adds to your long-term stress.

Refined carbs, like cookies and potato chips, can cause a spike in blood sugar. When your blood sugar crashes, you might experience more stress and anxiety.

Consuming a healthy diet can help you combat stress over the long haul. Foods like eggs, avocado, and walnuts support mood regulation and energy balance.

Try Stress Relief Supplements

Some vitamins and supplements may have benefits for stress relief. What vitamins help with stress? A daily multivitamin may help address nutritional deficits and ensure you get the necessary vitamins and minerals to feel your best. Other supplements that may help relieve stress include:

- **Melatonin:** This natural hormone can help regulate your body's circadian rhythm. Improving sleep can help you feel less stressed.
- **Ashwagandha:** This adaptogenic herb is thought to help improve the body's resilience to mental and physical stress.
- **L-theanine:** This amino acid has been shown to help reduce stress, promote relaxation, and improve sleep quality.
- **B vitamins:** Some research indicates that B vitamins may help lower homocysteine levels, reduce stress, and improve mood.

Make Time for Leisure Activities


Leisure activities can be a wonderful way to relieve stress. Yet, many people feel as though their lives are too busy for hobbies, games, or extra fun.

But building time for leisure into your schedule could be key to helping you feel your best. And when you feel better, you'll perform better, which means leisure time may make your work time more efficient.

Whether you find joy in caring for a garden or you like making quilts, hobbies and leisure are key to living your best life.

Develop a Positive Self-Talk Habit

The way you talk to yourself matters. Harsh self-criticism, self-doubt, and catastrophic predictions aren't helpful. If you're constantly thinking things like, "I don't have time for this," and "I can't stand this," you'll stress yourself out.



It's important to learn to talk to yourself in a more realistic, compassionate manner. When you call yourself names or doubt your ability to succeed, reply with a kinder



inner dialogue.

Positive self-talk can help you develop a healthier outlook. And an optimistic and compassionate conversation can help you manage your emotions and take positive action.

Practice Yoga

Yoga combines physical movement, meditation, light exercise, and controlled breathing—all of which provide excellent stress relief.


And while you're likely to reap immediate benefits from a single yoga session, you're likely to receive long-term benefits if you incorporate it into your life in a consistent way.

Yoga offers a variety of physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits. To get started, you might take a class, enroll in an online program, or use an app to help you begin practicing.

Express Gratitude

Gratitude helps you recognize all the things you have to be thankful for. Whether you're grateful for a sunny day or thankful you arrived at work safely, think about all the good things you have in life.

Gratitude also reminds you of all of the resources you have to cope with stress, which can be quite empowering.



Studies also show grateful people enjoy better mental health, lower stress, and a better quality of life.

So whether you decide to make it a habit to identify what you're grateful for as you sit around the dinner table or you decide to write down three things you're grateful for in a gratitude journal every day, make gratitude a regular habit.

Prioritize Exercise

Physical activity is key to managing stress and improving mental health. And the best news is, there are many different kinds of activities that can reduce your stress.

Join a gym, take a class, or exercise outside. Keep in mind that there are many different ways to get more physical activity in your day too.

Walking, strength training, kayaking, hiking, and spin class are just a few different examples of ways you can get stress relief.

Problem-Focused Coping Stress Relief.

Most stress relievers focus on changing your emotions. But sometimes, you won't necessarily get relief until you change the environment.

This is referred to as problem-focused coping (as opposed to emotion-focused coping). Problem-focused coping involves taking steps to remove the stressor from your life (as opposed to changing how you feel about the stressor).

Reassess Your To-Do Lists

If you're trying to squeeze 20 hours worth of work into 16 hours, you're going to feel stressed. Reducing your workload could be key to helping you get through the day feeling better.

Whether that means stepping away from a committee you joined or it involves hiring someone to complete some of your household chores for you,

Honing your time management skills can allow you to minimize the stressors that you experience, and better manage the ones you can't avoid.

When you are able to complete everything on your "to do" list without the stress of rushing or forgetting, your whole life feels easier.

Obtain Social Support

Having supportive people in your life is the key to stress management. If you lack emotional support and friendship, it's important to get it.

That may mean reaching out to your existing network. Perhaps confiding in a family member or distant friend can help you become closer and it may give you the social support you need.

You may also need to expand your network. Join an organization, attend a support group, or get professional help if you lack supportive people in your life.

Cut out Things That Add to Your Stress

Sometimes, the best way to reduce your stress is to cut something out of your life. Get rid of the things that are adding to your stress so you can experience more peace.

Watching the news, being constantly connected to your digital devices, drinking alcohol, and consuming too much caffeine are just a few of the things that may add more stress to your life. Making some changes to your daily habits could be instrumental in helping you feel better.

A Word From Verywell

Finding the best stress relief strategies may take some experimenting. Some strategies may take practice too.

But it's important to keep looking for the tools that will help you manage life's inevitable ups and downs in a healthy way. Keeping stress at a manageable level is important for your overall well-being.

17 Sources

Verywell Mind uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

1. Jallo N, Ruiz RJ, Elswick RK, French E. Guided imagery for stress and symptom management in pregnant African American women. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med*. 2014;2014:840923. doi:10.1155/2014/840923
2. Burke A, Lam CN, Stussman B, Yang H. Prevalence and patterns of use of mantra, mindfulness and spiritual meditation among adults in the United States. *BMC Complement Altern Med*. 2017;17(1):316. doi:10.1186/s12906-017-1827-8
3. Novais PG, Batista Kde M, Grazziano Eda S, Amorim MH. The effects of progressive muscular relaxation as a nursing procedure used for those who suffer from stress due to multiple sclerosis. *Rev Lat Am Enfermagem*. 2016;24:e2789. doi:10.1590/1518-8345.1257.2789

4. Russo MA, Santarelli DM, O'rourke D. The physiological effects of slow breathing in the healthy human. *Breathe (Sheff)*. 2017;13(4):298-309. doi:10.1183/20734735.009817
5. Ma X, Yue ZQ, Gong ZQ, et al. The effect of diaphragmatic breathing on attention, negative affect and stress in healthy adults. *Front Psychol*. 2017;8:874. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00874
6. Sharma A, Madaan V, Petty FD. Exercise for mental health. *Prim Care Companion J Clin Psychiatry*. 2006;8(2):106.
7. Uvnäs-moberg K, Handlin L, Petersson M. Self-soothing behaviors with particular reference to oxytocin release induced by non-noxious sensory stimulation. *Front Psychol*. 2014;5:1529. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01529
8. Sowndhararajan K, Kim S. Influence of Fragrances on Human Psychophysiological Activity: With Special Reference to Human Electroencephalographic Response. *Sci Pharm*. 2016;84(4):724-751. doi:10.3390/scipharm84040724
9. Burke A, Lam CN, Stussman B, Yang H. Prevalence and patterns of use of mantra, mindfulness and spiritual meditation among adults in the United States. *BMC Complement Altern Med*. 2017;17(1):316. doi:10.1186/s12906-017-1827-8
10. Nguyen-rodriguez ST, Unger JB, Spruijt-metz D. Psychological determinants of emotional eating in adolescence. *Eat Disord*. 2009;17(3):211-24. doi:10.1080/10640260902848543
11. Sanford LD, Suchecki D, Meerlo P. Stress, arousal, and sleep. *Curr Top Behav Neurosci*. 2015;25:379-410. doi:10.1007/7854_2014_314
12. Lopresti AL, Smith SJ, Malvi H, Kodgule R. An investigation into the stress-relieving and pharmacological actions of an ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) extract: A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2019;98(37):e17186. doi:10.1097/MD.00000000000017186
13. Baba Y, Inagaki S, Nakagawa S, Kaneko T, Kobayashi M, Takihara T. Effects of l-theanine on cognitive function in middle-aged and older subjects: A randomized placebo-controlled study. *J Med Food*. 2021;24(4):333-341. doi:10.1089/jmf.2020.4803
14. Young LM, Pipingas A, White DJ, Gauci S, Scholey A. A systematic review and meta-analysis of B vitamin supplementation on depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress: Effects on healthy and 'at-risk' individuals. *Nutrients*. 2019;11(9):2232. doi:10.3390/nu11092232
15. Qian XL, Yarnal CM, Almeida DM. Does leisure time moderate or mediate the effect of daily stress on positive affect? An examination using eight-day diary data. *J Leis Res*. 2014;46(1):106-124.
16. Francis AL, Beemer RC. How does yoga reduce stress? Embodied cognition and emotion highlight the influence of the musculoskeletal system. *Complement Ther Med*. 2019;43:170-175. doi:10.1016/j.ctim.2019.01.024

17. Wunsch K, Wurst R, Von dawans B, Strahler J, Kasten N, Fuchs R. Habitual and acute exercise effects on salivary biomarkers in response to psychosocial stress. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*. 2019;106:216-225. doi:10.1016/j.psyneuen.2019.03.015

Additional Reading

- Armstrong K, Dixon S, May S, Patricolo GE. Anxiety reduction in patients undergoing cardiac catheterization following massage and guided imagery. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*. 2014;20(4):334-338.
- Lee M-K, Lim S, Song J-A, Kim M-E, Hur M-H. The effects of aromatherapy essential oil inhalation on stress, sleep quality and immunity in healthy adults: Randomized controlled trial. *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*. 2017;12:79-86.
- Light KC, Grewen KM, Amico JA. More frequent partner hugs and higher oxytocin levels are linked to lower blood pressure and heart rate in premenopausal women. *Biological Psychology*. 2005;69(1):5-21.
- Nakata A, Takahashi M, Irie M, Ray T, Swanson NG. Job Satisfaction, Common Cold, and Sickness Absence among White-collar Employees: A Cross-sectional Survey. *Industrial Health*, September 2010.
- Wilson C. Neurons linking breathing and stress found. *New Scientist*. 2017;234(3120):16.