

# 10 relaxation techniques to reduce stress on-the-spot

## 1. Meditate

Any repetitive action can be a source of meditation. Meditation includes walking, swimming, painting, knitting, and colouring - any activity that helps keep your attention calmly in the present moment.

If you catch yourself thinking about your school work, your relationships or your list of things to do, simply let the thought escape, and bring your mind back to the repetition of the activity. Try it for just five to 10 minutes a day and watch stress levels drop.

## 2. Picture yourself relaxed

Is your mind too talkative to meditate? Try creating a peaceful visualisation, or 'dreamscape'. To start simply visualise anything that keeps your thoughts away from current tensions. It could be a favourite holiday spot, a fantasy island or something 'touchable' such as the feel of your favourite cosy jumper or stroking your cat.

The idea is to take your mind off your stress, and replace it with an image that evokes a sense of calm. The more realistic your daydream (in terms of colours, sights, sounds, even touch and feel) the more relaxation you'll experience.

## 3. Breathe deeply

Feeling stressed evokes tense, shallow breathing, while calm is associated with relaxed breathing. So to turn tension into relaxation, he says, change the way you breathe.

## 4. Look around you

'Mindfulness is the here-and-now approach to living that makes daily life richer and more meaningful. Mindfulness means focusing on one activity at a time, so forget multitasking! Staying in the present tense can help promote relaxation and provide a buffer against anxiety and depression.

Practise it by focusing on your immediate surroundings. If you're outdoors, enjoy the shape and colours of flowers, hear a bird's call or consider a tree. In the shopping centre look at the details of a dress in the window, examine a piece of jewellery and focus on how it's made, or window-shop for furniture, checking out every detail of pattern and style. As long as you can keep your mind focused on something in the present, stress will take a back seat.

## 5. Drink tea

If you're a coffee guzzler, consider going green. Coffee raises levels of the notorious stress hormone, cortisol, while green tea offers health.

Chamomile tea is a traditional favourite for calming the mind and reducing stress. Black tea may be a stress fighter, too. People who drank regular black tea displayed lower levels of cortisol, and reported feeling calmer during six weeks of stressful situations than those who drank a placebo with the same amount of caffeine.

## **6. Show some love**

Induce the relaxation response by cuddling your pet, giving an unexpected hug to a friend or family member or talking to a friend about the good things in your lives. When you do you'll be reducing your stress levels.

Why? Experts say social interaction helps your brain think better, encouraging you to see new solutions to situations that once seemed impossible, she says. Studies have also shown that physical contact (such as stroking your dog or cat) may actually help lower blood pressure and decrease stress hormones.

## **7. Try self-massage**

When your muscles are tense, try this simple self-massage technique.

- Place both hands on your shoulders and neck.
- Squeeze with your fingers and palms.
- Rub vigorously, keeping shoulders relaxed.
- Wrap one hand around the other forearm.
- Squeeze the muscles with thumb and fingers.
- Move up and down from your elbow to fingertips and back again.
- Repeat with other arm.

## **8. Take a break**

When you sense your temper is about to erupt, Dr Jeff Brantley, author of *Five Good Minutes In the Evening*, suggests finding a quiet place to sit or lie down and put the stressful situation on hold. Take a few deep breaths and concentrate on releasing tension and calming your heartbeat. Quiet your mind and remember: time is always on your side, so relax. The stress can wait.

## **9. Try a musical detour**

Music can calm the heartbeat and soothe the soul, the experts say. So, when things get stressful, take a musical stress detour by aligning your heartbeat with the slow tempo of a relaxing song. Plus, you might think about listening to a classical tune. Research shows that listening to 30 minutes of classical music may produce calming effects equivalent to taking 10 milligrams of diazepam.

## **10. Take an attitude break**

Thirty seconds is enough time to shift your heart's rhythm from stressed to relaxed, Rozman says. The way to do that: engage your heart and your mind in positive thinking. Start by envisioning anything that triggers a positive feeling - a vision of your child or spouse, the image of your pet, that great piece of jewellery you're saving up to buy, a memento from a holiday - whatever it is, conjuring up the thought will help slow breathing, relax tense muscles and put a smile on your face. Rozman says that creating a positive emotional attitude can also calm and steady your heart rhythm, contributing to feelings of relaxation and peace.