

## 10 Tips for Tackling Stress

by Jeanne Faulkner, Contributor

Feeling the pressure? Try these ideas for managing stress right now—and preventing it down the road.



What's so bad about stress? When it's appropriate, it can be a healthy coping mechanism that keeps you safe, focused and aware. It's your body's emergency action plan so you can go, go, go. However, living in a state of constant emergency can be hazardous to your health.

When stress levels are too high, your body sends signals telling you to take a break. If you don't listen, your body makes you pay attention with pesky symptoms like headaches, irritability, fatigue, confusion, high blood pressure and skin problems. If this goes on too long, it causes serious damage like cardiac disease, cancer and depression.

When you're stressed, stressed, stressed, you need a plan. We've got 10 tips for tackling stress right now--and preventing it down the road.

### 4 Tips for Fast Stress Relief

1. **Take a walk:** When you notice you're stressed--say, you're snapping pencils and getting snippy with your coworker--get up and walk out the door. Any type of exercise will do, but walking is usually immediately available. Studies show it only takes 25 minutes of exercise for your body to recover from a "stress attack." Exercise lowers cortisol and blood pressure and releases endorphins. Regular exercise builds up your stress immunity.
2. **Take a breath:** Deep breathing really works. It increases blood-to-brain oxygen and helps you calm down. Sit at the edge of your chair with your spine straight and shoulders back. Drop your hands onto your lap, and relax your belly--really let it bulge. Now breathe. Take 10 full, deep breaths. Once you're breathing deeply, you might want to go ahead and try meditation.

3. **Make a call:** Phone your friend, family member, significant other or an office buddy and vent. Verbalizing problems instantly relieves pressure. It's like taking the lid off your steaming pot of stress and letting some go. Don't abuse this, though, or friends will avoid your calls.
4. **Take a stand:** Or, as the song says, "Tell me what you want, what you really, really want." Don't just say what you think you can get. Once you actually say, "I want a new job and a day off," you'll likely be more focused. Knowing--and clearly stating--what you want can be an effective way to find solutions. You'll feel better just putting it out there.

## 6 Tips for Long-Term Stress-Busting Strategies

Missy Gerber, president of Organizers Northwest, has a motto: Less Mess. Less Stress. Better Life. "Clutter and disorganization cause stress [and] waste time and money," she says. "With a little focus and simple techniques, you'll create more time and space in your life."

1. **Minimize multitasking:** Gerber says: "We don't really multitask at all; we just switch rapidly from one activity to another. Our brain takes about 15 minutes to switch gears, so what we're working on takes longer, often with more errors." If you're focused for only 20 percent of an eight hour day, that's 96 minutes spent switching gears. Think what you could accomplish with 96 minutes of focused thinking.
2. **De-clutter:** According to Gerber, "Clutter happens because we put something down where it doesn't belong, just for now. Don't put it down--put it away. Work on reducing your clutter daily for 15 focused minutes. Don't know where it goes? Make a thoughtful decision on where it should live and label the space.
3. **Structure sets you free:** It may seem like to-do lists would add more stress to your life. Not so, says Gerber: "Checklists, processes and routines create new habits." Those habits will help you free up time to relax.
  - Piggyback onto habits you already have. For example, brush your teeth, and then do a quick sweep of your bedroom to put things where they really belong.
  - Create a filing system for incoming paper. Hanging files work best. At the end of each quarter, sort, toss and update your files. Come tax time, your information is in order.
4. **Just say no:** Stop adding more activities, obligations and commitments to your schedule. Instead:
  - Evaluate what you do and why you do it.
  - Weed out time-wasters and events you really don't need to attend.
  - Don't underestimate the time you spend surfing the Internet (hello, Facebook).
  - Fill in free time with exercise and fun activities that reduce stress rather than

adding to it.

5. **Understand Your Brain:** Try cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to see why you react to stress the way you do. According to Travis Osborne, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist at the Anxiety and Stress Reduction Center of Seattle, CBT involves practicing strategies to manage stress reactions, including relaxation exercises, prioritizing tasks, effective time management, identifying and challenging unhelpful thought patterns and changing behavioral patterns that cause chronic stress.
6. **Take Small Steps:** Procrastination provides temporary stress relief, but it makes things even worse later. Instead, Osborne advises approaching uncomfortable situations through a process called exposure, a step-by-step method for tackling stress triggers that makes them feel more doable. "Start with tasks that generate low levels of stress and work up to confronting more challenging ones," he says.

Other stress-busting ideas? It depends on what works for you. For many people, it helps to listen to music, dance, develop hobbies and hang out with friends. Make stress-management a priority before it becomes a serious problem for your happiness--and your health.

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