

Refrigerator
magnet here

Stress Relief Tips

These are some things we all need to do for ourselves but sometimes forget when we especially need them. None actually fixes bad feelings, but each may help keep you from feeling worse. Find some that appeal and give them a try when you need to feel better. If you you're agitated and inclined to do something you know really isn't good for you, HALT. Ask yourself, "Am I Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired?" and then pick something suitable from the list.

The absolute basics

Sleep. Homework and other stresses can lengthen the day, but you need your sleep. The mind rejuvenates at rest. Getting enough sleep helps you feel refreshed and relaxed.

Healthy eating. Trauma deregulates stress hormone levels, but you can help correct this through good eating habits and consistent exercise. Good food choices include high fiber low sugar fruit (raspberries, blueberries, strawberries), lean protein, vegetables and complex carbohydrates (spinach, salad, whole grain bread). Eat every few hours to keep your blood sugar balanced. Drink plenty of water. Perhaps, eat an egg before bed to keep blood sugar stable and stave off panic attacks. Take it easy on caffeine, sugar, nicotine, alcohol, sweets, salt.

Exercise. Reduce those stress hormones. Exercise—including hiking and dancing—will help your feel better while improving overall stamina and health. The right exercise can even be fun.

Do something fun or creative. Pick something you really enjoy, like:

| | | | | |
|---------|------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| art | crosswords | games | movies | reading fiction |
| cooking | dancing | gardening | needlework | woodworking |
| crafts | fishing | kite flying | photography | writing creatively |

Connections. Reach out to the people who matter most to you. Call a friend you could talk to or study with. Talk to counselors with whom you can discuss personal concerns.

When stress starts to build

Write for yourself. You do a lot of writing for school, but writing for yourself can actually help you feel better. A private journal is a good place to explore dreams and feelings with no one to criticize your effort. Writing about your experience can help you to safely process your emotions. It tells your mind that you are taking care of the situation and helps to relieve the difficult symptoms you may be experiencing.

Use your spiritual resources. Making use of spiritual resources varies from person to person. For some it means praying, going to church, or reaching out to a member of the clergy. For others it is meditating or reading uplifting material. It may include rituals and ceremonies—whatever feels right to you. Remember, you can be spiritual without being religious.

Do something ordinary. When you feel upset, it can help to take a shower, wash your hair, make yourself some health comfort food, call a friend or family member, or make your bed.

Refrigerator
magnet here

Wear something that makes you feel good. Everybody has certain clothes or jewelry that they enjoy wearing. These are the things to wear when you need to comfort yourself.

Get some little things done. Accomplishing something you tend to put off always helps to feel better, even easy things that don't take much time. Just keep it manageable.

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| clean out one drawer | put your clothes away | read one homework assignment |
| do a load of laundry | make a schedule | send someone a card |
| dust your room | organize your desk/backpack | set some priorities for today |

Learn something new. Think about a topic that you are interested in but have never explored. Gather information at the library, on the Internet, or from a class. Look at something in a new way. Read a favorite passage and see if you can find new meaning in it.

Do a reality check. If you find yourself having a strong reaction to something, considering what might really be going on can be helpful. For instance, if you come home and loud music is playing, you might think at first that the person is doing it just to annoy you. Rather than jump to conclusions and dump your anger, consider the likelihood that the person thought you wouldn't be in until later and took advantage of the opportunity to play it a bit louder.

Be present in the moment. This is often referred to as mindfulness. Many of us spend so much time focusing on the future or thinking about the past that we miss out on fully experiencing what is going on in the present. Making a conscious effort to pay full attention to what you are doing right now can help you feel better.

Stare at something that's pretty or has special meaning for you. Stop what you are doing and look closely at a flower or leaf, stars, clouds, work of art, picture of a loved one or yourself.

Play with children or pets. Romping in the grass with a dog, petting a kitten, reading a story to a child, rocking a baby, and similar activities have calming effects.

Do a relaxation exercise. Many good books or Internet sources describe relaxation exercises. Try some and practice the ones you prefer, daily. Use them whenever you need to help yourself feel better. Listening for 10 minutes to a relaxation tape can help you feel better.

Take a warm bath. This may sound too easy, but it helps. Warm water is relaxing and healing. If you have access to a Jacuzzi or hot tub, it's even better.

Smell something nice. Many people have discovered fragrances that help them feel good, whether from essential oils or cut flowers. Even the smell of fresh baked bread can help.

Listen to music. Feelings and hearing are closely associated in the brain, so pamper yourself with music you really enjoy. If music is important to you, make it part of every day.

Make music. Making music is also a good way to help yourself feel better. Even drums and other rhythmic instruments can relieve tension and increase well-being.

Sing. Singing fills your lungs with fresh air and makes you feel better. Sing along with favorite records, tapes, compact discs, or the radio at the top of your lungs when you are driving your car or taking a shower. Belt out your favorite songs from childhood.