



6 SIMPLE SOLUTIONS TO EASE STRESS

by B. Kay Sugg

Stress is a good thing when it helps your body respond to danger or a threat. When your brain senses danger, your body releases the hormones adrenaline and cortisol, which prompt a faster heartbeat, higher blood pressure and pulse rate, a surge of glucose in the blood stream, and rapid breathing—the fight-or-flight response that we need in threatening situations. When the threat ends, your body returns to normal. However, chronic stress is different. Chronic stress not only has a negative effect on your body, it can also kill you.



Signs of Stress

According to the American Institute of Stress, “Repeated episodes of acute stress can cause inflammation in the coronary arteries (that can lead to a heart attack).” There are more than 50 symptoms of chronic stress—from headaches and jaw clenching, to feeling overloaded or overwhelmed, experiencing frequent allergy attacks, heartburn, stomach pain, nausea, forgetfulness, disorganization, confusion and reduced work productivity—among 45 others. Many of us feel stress from expectations at work, social pressure, and obligations we have at home and with our families. If that stress is not relieved in some way, its negative effects will take a toll on our bodies.

Relieving Stress

You can fight everyday stress with exercise, whether in a gym or biking, swimming, yoga, dancing, running or other activities. However, many times stress is accompanied by depression, and the feeling that you just can’t do one more thing. If exercise isn’t a stress relief option for you—whether you’re just not up to it or feel that you don’t have the time, there are some other options that require less effort on your part.

Try some of these simple stress relievers:



1 Aromatherapy

Experts say that inhaling the smells provided by aromatherapy stimulates the limbic system in the brain which releases chemicals promoting feelings of relaxation, calmness, love, and excitement. Lavender, rosemary, and cypress are popular oils that relieve stress and mental fatigue. Not an oils person? Try burning a scented candle, which can have the same effect.

2 Give Your Ears a Massage

Parts of your ears have reflex points that relax specific areas of your body. Using your thumb and index finger, rub your earlobes then squeeze the outside edges of your ears from top to bottom. It only takes a few seconds, and you can do this when you are feeling stress at work.

3 Smile and Laugh (Often)

Nothing relaxes your body and relieves stress better than a hearty laugh. Norman Cousins wrote a best-selling book (which later became a television movie) titled *Anatomy of an Illness* in which he detailed how his discovery of laugh therapy helped cure him of a disease from which he had only a one in 500 chance of recovering. There have been many studies since then on the health benefits of laughter and humor.

Laugh therapy uses humor to help relieve pain and stress and improve a person’s sense of well-being. Laughter causes our bodies to produce endorphins (natural painkillers). It boosts mood, strengthens the immune system, and protects from the damaging effects of chronic stress.

Source: *The American Institute of Stress*, <https://www.stress.org>

4 Sleep

Sleep is the most natural stress reducer. Too little sleep makes you grumpy and irritable, and too much makes you sluggish and depressed. Try to achieve a balance that will leave you well-rested and ready for the next day. Promote better sleep by setting bedtime routines that signal your brain that it’s time to sleep—take a warm bath, no light (especially blue light emitted from devices) or low light in the bedroom and avoid exercise or eating a meal close to bedtime.

5 Get Out in Nature

Walk in the park, take your dog for a walk, or walk with a neighbor. Just talking and sharing the day’s concerns with a friend is good therapy and helps to relieve stress. Even a very short walk alone around your neighborhood where you can focus on trees, flowers, and neighborhood animals or wildlife can have a very calming effect. Find a bench, sit down, close your eyes for a few minutes and relax.

6 Massage

Used by the Chinese to open blocked energy channels and improve health, a massage relaxes tight muscles, improves circulation, reduces pain, and has a calming effect on the body and mind. Not in your budget? Ask a family member to massage your neck and shoulders. There are also electric massagers available to ease muscle tension.

Instead of focusing on the day’s problems, think about all the things for which you are grateful—having a job, your family, a compliment paid to you, or a milestone you have achieved. Cultivating a positive attitude can go a long way toward relieving stress and promoting a sense of well-being.

Did you know that drinking water can help reduce anxiety and stress?

Water plays an important role in how our body functions, and our internal organs rely on water to work properly. When the body becomes dehydrated, it is operating under strain, and we can become stressed and on edge. Several recent studies - by Tufts University as well as The British Journal of Nutrition - have found that dehydration can influence mood, energy levels, and the ability to think clearly.



Blueberry-Almond Overnight Oatmeal

Need an easy, no-cook breakfast for fall? You'll find it in this delicious and satisfying overnight oatmeal. Prepared the night before, simply re-heat the oats in the morning, and top with berries, almonds and maple syrup. You're ready for the day!

Ingredients

- ½ cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup blueberries
- Pinch of salt
- 1 tablespoon toasted almonds
- 2 teaspoons pure maple syrup

...and low-stress!

GLUTEN-FREE
HEART HEALTHY
HIGH FIBER
LOW-CALORIE
LOW SODIUM
VEGETARIAN

Instructions

Combine oats, water and salt in a jar or bowl. Cover and refrigerate overnight. In the morning, heat (if desired), and top with blueberries, almonds and syrup.

You can also add yogurt to add a creamy consistency to the oats, while also providing additional protein.