

There are several different versions. Try this one for about 20 minutes daily:

- Sit or lie in a relaxed position with eyes closed; breathe naturally.
- Clench fists hard so arms feel tense. Ease the tension slowly as you breathe out, like slackening taut elastic. Say 'relax' to yourself.
- Do the same in turn with lower legs, thighs, trunk, stomach, back and head.
- After doing this a few times, move onto the next phase: don't tense first, just relax. Let each part of you in turn feel heavy and relaxed. Associate each 'out' breath with the word 'relax.'
- Add a little imagination: imagine a peaceful scene (a quiet place on the beach) and imagine yourself there, at peace. Stay in this imaginary place for a while—imagine each detail in turn.

Exercise

Many people find physical activity or exercise is the best way to manage stress. It has the added advantage of improving general health.

You do not need to exercise vigorously to gain benefits. Any physical activity, such as walking or mowing the lawn, can help.

If you wish to take up more strenuous activity and you are not use to exercise or are more than 40 years old, have a medical check-up first and discuss exercise plans with your family doctor.

Contact the National Heart Foundation for more information on exercise and physical activity.

Coping with Stress

Employee Assistance Program
Educational Series



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Stress is a response to change, threat or long-term frustration. Some stress is actually good for you, helping to mobilize your mind and body to be at your best. However, too much stress, especially prolonged, increases the risk of a number of diseases including heart disease, asthma and duodenal ulcers. It can also put pressure on relationships at work and at home.

Age is no barrier to stress. It can affect a child starting school, a student facing exams, an adult who loses a job or starts a new one, parents coping with family difficulties and seniors nearing retirement. While it may not be possible nor worthwhile to get rid of stress completely, there are approaches and new living habits you can develop to help manage stress.

Symptoms

- Impatience
- Argumentative
- Excessive worrying
- Over-eating
- Under-eating
- Restlessness
- Disturbed sleep
- Apathy
- Withdrawal
- Constant headache
- Constant backache
- Excessive drinking
- Chain-smoking
- Use of drugs

Stress Prevention

- Resist taking on too many commitments
- Having a balanced lifestyle between work and play
- Avoid being too busy
- Avoid putting off holidays and breaks
- Put aside some time each week for doing something you really enjoy
- Don't let little things become big issues
- Talk things over before they start getting you down
- Keep a diary or journal of your thoughts and feelings
- Don't let yourself be persuaded into taking on more than you wish to handle
- Talk over things that concern you with your partner or a close friend and let him/her know how you feel
- Organize finances and household tasks so they are shared and you feel on top of things
- Take part in a regular activity or exercise
- Eat a balanced diet
- Make time to be with friends or members of your family, either individually or together
- Break difficult jobs into stages and look at each stage separately
- Learn relaxation techniques

Coping with Difficult Situations

- Avoid letting minor difficulties take your focus away from what is important to you

- Have realistic expectations of yourself and others
- Look at the positive side of the situation

Create a Plan of Action

- Write down a problem that triggers your stress—at home, at work, with your relationships, etc. Be specific—for example, don't just write 'Marriage.' A better description is 'Too many arguments over money and doing the house work'
- Write down all the things that you could do to solve the problem and ask other people what they would do
- Choose the option you think has the best chance of succeeding in the long-term as well as the short-term
- Work out how you can put the chosen solution into practice

Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation breathing

Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes if you wish. Concentrate on your breathing—in through the nose, out through the mouth. Imagine the air you breathe spreading energy—giving oxygen to every muscle in your body.

As you breathe out, say the word 'relax.' Concentrate on the 'floating' feeling in your legs and arms. Yoga and meditation are other beneficial relaxation techniques that incorporate relaxation breathing.

Progressive muscular relaxation

This method involves consciously relaxing the large muscles of your body. The theory is that a relaxed body means a relaxed mind.