Ways to Reduce Stress

**Exercise**
Exercise is one of the most important things you can do to combat stress. It might seem contradictory, but putting physical stress on your body through exercise can relieve mental stress. The benefits are strongest when you exercise regularly. People who exercise regularly are less likely to experience anxiety than those who don't exercise.

**Reduce Your Caffeine Intake**
Caffeine is a stimulant found in coffee, tea, chocolate and energy drinks. High doses can increase anxiety. People have different thresholds for how much caffeine they can tolerate. If you notice that caffeine makes you jittery or anxious, consider cutting back. Although many studies show that coffee can be healthy in moderation, it's not for everyone. In general, five or fewer cups per day is considered a moderate amount.

**Write it Down**
One way to handle stress is to write things down. While recording what you're stressed about is one approach, another is jotting down what you're grateful for. Gratitude may help relieve stress and anxiety by focusing your thoughts on what's positive in your life. Shop for journals online.

**Chew Gum**
For a super easy and quick stress reliever, try chewing a stick of gum. One study showed that people who chewed gum had a greater sense of wellbeing and lower stress. One possible explanation is that chewing gum causes brain waves similar to those of relaxed people. Another is that chewing gum promotes blood flow to your brain.

**Spend Time With Friends and Family**
Social support from friends and family can help you get through stressful times. Being part of a friend network gives you a sense of belonging and self-worth, which can help you in tough times. One study found that for women in particular, spending time with friends and children helps release oxytocin, a natural stress reliever. This effect is called "tend and befriend," and is the opposite of the fight-or-flight response. Keep in mind that both men and women benefit from friendship.
Light a Candle
Using essential oils or burning a scented candle may help reduce your feelings of stress and anxiety. Some scents are especially soothing. Here are some of the most calming scents: Lavender, Rose, Bergamot, Chamomile, Sandalwood, Orange or orange blossom, Geranium, and Peppermint. Using scents to treat your mood is called aromatherapy. Several studies show that aromatherapy can decrease anxiety and improve sleep.

Laugh
It's hard to feel anxious when you're laughing. It's good for your health, and there are a few ways it may help relieve stress: Relieving your stress response and relieving tension by relaxing your muscles. In the long term, laughter can also help improve your immune system and mood. Try watching a funny TV show or hanging out with friends who make you laugh.

Learn to Say No
Not all stressors are within your control, but some are. Take control over the parts of your life that you can change and are causing you stress. One way to do this may be to say "no" more often. This is especially true if you find yourself taking on more than you can handle, as juggling many responsibilities can leave you feeling overwhelmed. Being selective about what you take on — and saying no to things that will unnecessarily add to your load — can reduce your stress levels.

Learn to Avoid Procrastination
Another way to take control of your stress is to stay on top of your priorities and stop procrastinating. Procrastination can lead you to act reactively, leaving you scrambling to catch up. This can cause stress, which negatively affects your health and sleep quality. Get in the habit of making a to-do list organized by priority. Give yourself realistic deadlines and work your way down the list. Work on the things that need to get done today and give yourself chunks of uninterrupted time, as switching between tasks or multitasking can be stressful itself.

Practice Mindfulness
Mindfulness describes practices that anchor you to the present moment. It can help combat the anxiety-inducing effects of negative thinking. There are several methods for increasing mindfulness, including mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, yoga and meditation.
Take a Yoga Class
Yoga has become a popular method of stress relief and exercise among all age groups. While yoga styles differ, most share a common goal — to join your body and mind. Yoga primarily does this by increasing body and breath awareness. Some studies have examined yoga's effect on mental health. Overall, research has found that yoga can enhance mood and may even be as effective as antidepressant drugs at treating depression and anxiety. In general, the benefit of yoga for stress and anxiety seems to be related to its effect on your nervous system and stress response. It may help lower cortisol levels, blood pressure and heart rate and increase gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a neurotransmitter that is lowered in mood disorders.

Listen to Soothing Music
Listening to music can have a very relaxing effect on the body. Slow-paced instrumental music can induce the relaxation response by helping lower blood pressure and heart rate as well as stress hormones. Some types of classical, Celtic, Native American and Indian music can be particularly soothing, but simply listening to the music you enjoy is effective too. Nature sounds can also be very calming. This is why they're often incorporated into relaxation and meditation music.

Deep Breathing
Mental stress activates your sympathetic nervous system, signaling your body to go into "fight-or-flight" mode. During this reaction, stress hormones are released and you experience physical symptoms such as a faster heartbeat, quicker breathing and constricted blood vessels. Deep breathing exercises can help activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which controls the relaxation response. There are several types of deep breathing exercises, including diaphragmatic breathing, abdominal breathing, belly breathing and paced respiration. The goal of deep breathing is to focus your awareness on your breath, making it slower and deeper. When you breathe in deeply through your nose, your lungs fully expand and your belly rises. This helps slow your heart rate, allowing you to feel more peaceful.

Spend Time with Your Pet
Having a pet may help reduce stress and improve your mood. Interacting with pets may help release oxytocin, a brain chemical that promotes a positive mood. Having a pet may also help relieve stress by giving you purpose, keeping you active and providing companionship — all qualities that help reduce anxiety.

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