

WHAT TO DO WHEN STRESS BUILDS UP



What do you do when you feel like the stress is building up? When your mind is racing and you just don't know what to do with yourself, where can you turn? Stress can get so bad at times that it seems like there's nothing left to be done about it. The good news for all of us stressed-out people, however, is that there are many things we can try to help reduce stress levels immediately.

Here are some tips that I have found useful on what to do when the stress builds up. Now I cannot guarantee that they will completely alleviate stress in a situation completely, but they certainly help reduce its effects. Well that is my experience anyway.

1. Breathe!

I recommend deep breathing. I know, it sounds simple and stupid but many people don't breathe properly. Proper breathing is very important for reducing stress. The best thing about breathing exercises is that you can do them anywhere; they also cost nothing and take almost no time (just a little bit of your time).

Start by taking a long breath in through the nose and hold it for four seconds. Then hold your breath for a count of four seconds followed by slowly breathing out through your mouth – again for a count of four. Wait for four seconds before repeating the whole process for five times. This should help relax both your mind and body.

2. Try some relaxation techniques

There are many different ways to reduce stress with relaxation techniques, some more effective than others, some more time-consuming than others, some more complex than others. The important thing is that you do whatever works for you and whatever fits your lifestyle the best.

A few relaxation techniques are mindfulness, meditation yoga or tai chi, listening to music, taking a walk or playing with a pet.

3. Meditate

Meditation is great to do when you feel stress building because it lowers your heart rate and slows down your breathing. This helps you to relax and destress. To meditate, sit on a chair in a comfortable position with your back straight. Relax your shoulders.

Close your eyes and focus on the darkness behind them as well as the feeling of air moving in and out of your nose or mouth. If it helps, you can also focus on counting each breath. Start over again at one when you reach ten so all of those outside distractions don't interrupt what you're trying to do. When thoughts come into your head, gently push them away by continuing to count. If they become too heavy for this exercise just open your eyes and stare at something in front of you for a couple seconds before closing them again as you refocus yourself inwardly.

4. Playing with a pet

Pet owners have lower levels of cortisol and say they feel more relaxed after petting their animals. This is due to increased oxytocin release after spending time with pets. Generally speaking, it has been scientifically proven that spending time with animals can be beneficial for stress relief [\(1\)](#). Although any animal can be beneficial for stress reduction, studies show that certain animals are more effective than others. Dogs offer the most benefits to their owners when it comes to stress relief because they emit oxytocin (the cuddle hormone) and make people feel relaxed and safe.

5. Relax your muscles

This relaxation technique can be very effective. Start with the top of your head and work your way down feeling each muscle relax as it becomes looser. Picture any tension or stress draining out through the soles of your feet, for example, with each breath that you take.

6. Stop and take a look around

This is actually quite important when you're overwhelmed with the speed of life. See anything new? Spot an animal on your commute to work? This may not be possible all the time, but if it's an option for you, then stop for a moment to appreciate what's going on around you. I often sit and look at nature. Be aware of the flowers - concentrate on the petals, smell the scent of them. Or even just a blade of grass. Nature is amazing and appreciating it can be a great stress-buster. This process is called mindfulness and is a very well-known stress buster!

7. Walking in nature

Linking in with #6 a walk-in nature is very good for you when you feel yourself getting stressed. Trees, plants and flowing water enhance our well-being by giving off negative ions. These health giving molecules help more oxygen get to the brain and boost happy hormones such as serotonin. [\(2\)](#) The best way to benefit from negative ions is during a heavy rain storm, especially after thunder. Or a walk on a beach with the waves crashing on the shore. The benefits of negative ions are so great that there are appliances that you can buy for your home that circulate them into the air. [\(3\)](#) Just to reiterate the benefits of nature, the NHS in the UK are now advocating green social prescribing. This is following the steep rise in stress, anxiety and depression during the Covid pandemic. [\(4\)](#)

So why not try hugging a tree? Even though it may sound a little crazy, getting up close with trees is extremely beneficial to your well-being and is proven to decrease stress and blood pressure [\(5\)](#). And trees do so much good on the earth I think they deserve a hug.

8. List your accomplishments

It doesn't matter how minor or inconsequential they are. Keep this list somewhere visible (like taped to your bathroom mirror) so that every morning when you wake up, you begin your day by reminding yourself of all you've been able to do.

Another way of looking at this is writing out what you are grateful for. Gratitude is amazing at making you feel better about what you have (6). How about even looking at the situation that is making you stressed, such as a job, and being grateful for that. Not everyone has a job, or money from a job. Often just this awareness of how lucky you are can make you feel less stressed, instantly.

9. Enjoy life's simple pleasures

Why not read a good book, eat something you like, or watch an old movie or comedy show that always makes you laugh? Laughing releases endorphins and is a great way to relax at the end of a stressful day. (7)

10. Go exercise

This can be extremely effective. The endorphin rush alone feels amazing and helps take our minds off of whatever stress we may be experiencing in the moment (or has been building up since we were last able to get some time away from our stressful work/home lives). The best part about exercising is that it can just as easily be done in the comfort of your own home – no gym required! And it doesn't have to be for ages – 10 or 15 minutes will do.

You now have several tactics you can use if you feel stress building. Which one will you choose?

References

1. Stress reduction benefits from petting dogs, cats

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/07/190715114302.htm>

2. Negative Ions Create Positive Vibes

<https://www.webmd.com/balance/features/negative-ions-create-positive-vibes>

3. Negative Air Ions and Their Effects on Human Health and Air Quality Improvement <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6213340/>

4. Green social prescribing

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/green-social-prescribing/>

5. What is Forest Therapy?

<https://www.natureandforesttherapy.org/forest-bathing>

6. Use Gratitude to Counter Stress and Uncertainty

<https://hbr.org/2020/10/use-gratitude-to-counter-stress-and-uncertainty>

Stress relief from laughter? It's no joke

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>