

52 Ways to Counter Stress

Walking Meditation:

Some days are like the conveyer belt in the *I Love Lucy* candy factory episode — relentless. Turn down the speed on your life with walking meditation. For 20 paces, walk as slowly as you can, feeling every inch of your feet as they move, hearing your breath flow through your lungs, and noticing all the smells and sounds around you. This simple practice helps you remember that every step we take is a little miracle.

Bring Out Your Inner Radiance:

According to Ayurveda, the ancient tradition of medicine from India, a facial massage promotes health and brings out your inner radiance. Using your middle fingers, rub these points on your face in a clockwise direction for 20-30 seconds each: middle of the chin, corners of the mouth, middle of the area between your upper lip and nose, outer edges of both nostrils, centre of the cheek bones, temples, and the space between the eyebrows.

Feel Rested Without a Nap:

Welcome summer with some conscious restoration: Find a quiet place to lie on the floor or in the grass with your eyes closed. Breathe slowly and feel your body sink into the ground as you let go of your tension. Concentrate on one part of your body at a time, making sure each muscle is limp and loose. Starting with the top of your head, work your way down through your body silently repeating, "the top of my head is relaxed," "my jaw is relaxed," "my neck is relaxed." Work all the way to your toes. When done, roll to your side and slowly come back up to sitting.

Swallow Truth Serum:

Declare your independence from hiding your true feelings by choosing one day this week to pretend that you've swallowed truth serum. The goal isn't to drop bombshells ("I've always hated you in black"), but to be honest in loving way. For example, "I'd love to meet for dinner this weekend, but I am tired and need to rest. Let's pick another time." It's incredibly liberating and is a quick way to reduce your stress levels.

Bless Their Hearts:

Hot temperatures got your temper flaring? Next time an aggressive driver cuts you off, or a co-worker sends a snippy email, or you trip over your teenager's skateboard, try saying this small phrase: bless their heart. It's a short and simple reminder that the person you're angry with is human and could probably stand a little forgiveness. It also benefits you by deflating your anger and boosting your compassion. Not bad for three little words, huh?

Spend Time with Someone Great:

Of all the things you do in a week, how many of them do you actually enjoy? This week, treat yourself to some time with someone you admire whose company makes you feel great. We all need real-life role models; spending time with yours can help you remember what's most important to you. If you can't see each other face to face, call them on the phone or write an old-fashioned letter.

Separating Clouds:

This poetically named move comes from qigong, the Chinese equivalent of yoga. Stand with your feet shoulder-distance apart, knees slightly bent, arms crossed at the wrists in front of your pelvis. As you inhale, straighten your legs and sweep your arms above your head. Exhale and open your arms out to your sides and back to the starting position. Repeat 5 times, then reverse the movement (opening out to the sides first) for 5 reps.

Bellows Breath:

This breath clears out your lungs and gets you inspired again (after all, “inspire” means “to fill with breath” in Latin). Sit cross-legged on the floor with your spine tall. Bend your elbows and bring your hands in front of your shoulders in loose fists. As you inhale, straighten your arms above your head and open your palms. Exhale strongly through your nose and bring your hands back to shoulder-height fists. Repeat for 20 breaths.

Finding a Balance Benchmark:

Keep tabs on your stress levels by setting a balance benchmark — one thing you do regularly that makes you feel great. It could be eating a home-cooked meal a day, reading the paper on Sunday afternoon, or taking a walk with a girlfriend once a week. When life starts interfering with your ability to do your balance benchmark, you'll know it's time to reshuffle your priorities so you don't end up burning yourself out.

Study Yourself:

Ask yourself the following questions, preferably on a daily basis, to develop objectivity on how stress is affecting your life: How did I sleep? What is my mood? How did I respond when something unexpected happened? How does my body feel? Did I have any time to myself? Taking stock in this way can help you see your relationship with stress more clearly, which helps you develop a stress-reduction plan that fits your unique needs.

Homemade Ginger Tea:

Ginger — a brown, knobby root that will never win any beauty awards — is a powerful antistress tool hailed by herbalists for its ability to soothe upset stomachs, alleviate headaches, and reduce inflammation. Create a relaxing ritual out of making fresh ginger tea: Peel 1 inch of fresh ginger root and cut it in to thin rounds. Cover

with 2-3 cups of water and boil for 10-20 minutes. Sweeten with honey for a deliciously spicy night-time soother.

Honey Mask:

Prepare your skin for winter and build a little relaxation time into your day by giving yourself a DIY moisturizing mask. The secret ingredient? Honey. The golden sweet stuff has natural antibiotic properties and leaves skin noticeably softer and moister. Apply about a tablespoon (avoiding the eye area) and rest for 10 minutes as it dries, then rinse with warm water. (Honey can also help blisters heal – use it as you would antibiotic ointment.)

Detox with a Twist:

Help your body recover from the eating extravaganza with a simple twist that encourages elimination. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the floor, and arms straight along the floor at shoulder level. Pick your feet up and drop your legs to the floor on your left. Look at your right hand, or, if this isn't comfortable on your neck, at the ceiling. Take 5 deep breaths, then switch sides.

Uncork a Bottle of Wine:

Talking about your problems can seem unproductive. But vocalizing your thoughts about things that are bothering you is actually a great stress release — it gets what's troubling you out of your head so you can stop dwelling and start moving forward. Make a date with a friend to take turns venting. When you're the listener, don't commiserate or offer advice. Just be an attentive audience. If you don't want to vent to someone else, write in your journal.

Celebrate the Small Stuff:

This year, take the emphasis off creating the “perfect” holiday by taking a moment to appreciate the many things you have to be grateful for. Make it real by writing down your list — the hot coffee you had with breakfast, the way your husband makes you laugh, the blue sky — nothing is too small or too big. Whatever we focus on magnifies; but choosing to highlight the positive you'll only invite more of it to grow.

Sea Salt Bath:

Recover from the holidays with an easy detox: Add a cup of sea salt to a warm bath and soak. The salt draws impurities out of the skin. To make it even more rejuvenating, sprinkle a few drops of your favorite essential oil in the water and light some candles. Be sure to turn off the phone, because having to jump out of the tub and run dripping across the room is definitely not relaxing.

Start Again:

“Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.” –Henry Ford By now, your New Year's resolve has probably started to wane. You certainly aren't the only one! Few self-directed changes happen immediately. Whenever you

find yourself straying from your goals, simply start again. No drama, no beating yourself up, and no guilt. Just get going. Whether you need to restart once or one thousand times, it only matters that you do it.

Stress-Busting Smoothie:

Magnesium is key to warding off the physical effects of stress. Unfortunately, it's also one of the first minerals to be depleted by stress. Replenish your stores and boost your body's ability to handle stressful situations with a smoothie made with raspberries, bananas, orange juice, and plain yogurt — all good sources of magnesium. To boost the relaxing effect, take 10 minutes to sit and sip your smoothie instead of guzzling it as you dash out the door.

Seek Inspiration:

After several months of cold temperatures and long nights, the winter blues can start settling in. Do something this week that inspires you, whether it's visiting a museum, starting a new craft project, visiting a friend who makes you feel great, or rereading a favorite book. It may not cross anything off your to-do list, but it will give you a little lift that will make the things you have to do more enjoyable.

Little Altars Everywhere:

Invite something new into your life — whether it's a relationship, friendship, job, or solution to a particularly vexing problem — by placing a representation of what you're hoping for in your sanctuary. It could be a baby rattle if you'd like another child, a fancy pen if you'd like a new job, or something heart-shaped if you'd like to find a new love. You'll be giving yourself a visible reminder of your dreams and inspiration to stay hopeful and open.

Comfort Yourself:

Know how a cranky child magically transforms into a little angel after a nap? Today, treat yourself to five minutes of rest. Gather two firm pillows, then sit on your heels on the floor. Keeping your toes together, open the knees wide and stack the pillows between your knees. Rest your torso on the pillows, head turned to one side. Breathe here, releasing tension with each exhale. After several breaths, turn your head to the other side.

Tennis Ball Massage:

This week during *Grey's Anatomy* reruns, treat yourself to a DIY massage. Lie back on the floor with your torso supported on your elbows, and place two tennis balls on either side of your spine just above your buttocks. Sink into the balls and breathe deeply, then roll the balls an inch higher. Repeat until you reach your neck, giving extra time to any place that feels especially tight — it should take 15-20 minutes and feel absolutely McDreamy.

Celebrate Yourself:

Remember when Mom used to make your favorite meal for your birthday, and how great it made you feel? Pretend it's your birthday this week and treat yourself to one of your very favorite things — whether it's homemade mac and cheese, a bouquet of fresh flowers, or even a nap. When you make it a point to treat yourself well, other people will be more likely to do the same.

Learn a Relaxing Yoga Move:

As much as we hear the word "relaxation," few people know how to actually achieve it (Sadly, watching TV doesn't count). This pose, called Legs Up the Wall, calms your nervous system and leaves you feeling truly relaxed and refreshed. Lie on your side in the fetal position with your feet a few inches away from a wall. Roll onto your back and swing your legs up against the wall. Straighten your legs and inch your buttocks in towards the wall. Lie quietly in this position, breathing deeply for as long as it feels good.

*If you're menstruating, wait until your period is over to try this pose.

Give Something Up:

In *Being Perfect*, Anna Quindlen wisely advises us to “give up the nonsensical and punishing quest for perfection that dogs too many of us through too much of our lives.” What's something on this week's list that you can just...not do? Maybe it's one load of laundry, or the belief that you should finish the book you're not really enjoying. When you let something go, you create space for something wonderful and unexpected to take its place.

Office Mini Massage:

Take the sting out of a stressful afternoon with this 30-second massage. Rest your elbows on your desk and place your thumbs under your eyebrows on either side of the bridge of your nose. Let the weight of your head rest on your thumbs for 10 seconds. Then pinch your eyebrows with your thumbs and index fingers. Hold for 1 second, then move your fingers a half-inch out. Repeat until you've covered the whole brow.

Treat Your Feet:

Here's something nice for your feet that revitalizes your entire body: Fill one large bowl with hot water, and one with cold. Submerge your feet in the hot water for as long as you can, then switch to the cold. Repeat several times. The process draws circulation down to your feet and gets blood pumping throughout your body. It's faster than a nap and better for you (and cheaper) than a fancy coffee drink

Follow Your Intuition:

Everyone has a gut instinct, but when our lives are fully scheduled, it doesn't get the space it needs to rise to the top. Taking a walk with no particular destination in mind can help you get in touch with this inner wisdom. At every corner, ask yourself which

way you should go, and follow whatever hunch you get. You might just be delighted with where you end up and what you experience along the way.

The Ultimate Multitask:

Turn tonight's household chores into meditation in motion. While cleaning up after dinner, feel the sensations in your body as you work, notice how your breath flows in and out, savour the way things feel. When your mind starts to wander, gently bring it back to your task. This practice keeps you rooted in the present moment, instead of reliving past events or anticipating the future. The result? A calmer, more attentive you.

Tree Time:

That quality of air that emanates from trees...wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit. —Robert Louis Stevenson. Spend time this week sitting under a tree. If you can, bring a blanket and settle in. But even if you only have 5 minutes on your next dog walk, do it. Taking a break from the beeps, rings, and honks of modern life to listen to the leaves rustling in the wind is soothing and uplifting (and free).

Belly Breathing:

Dreading another week? Counteract that feeling with deep breathing. Lying on the floor, rest your hands on your belly and feel them rise and fall with your breath. Begin breathing first into the belly, then the rib cage, and finally the chest. Exhale in the reverse order — chest, ribs, stomach. Continue for five minutes. You're flushing stale air and ushering in fresh oxygen — perfect for letting out old stresses and preparing for the week ahead.

Make a Date for Downtime:

Downtime has become a dirty word, but it's a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. As world famous yoga teacher Donna Farhi writes: *By not doing so much, we create natural pauses to reflect.* This week, find 10 minutes in your schedule to do nothing — sit outside and feel the breeze on your cheek, or lie on the floor and listen intently to your favorite song. No reading, no TV, no talking on the phone. Just be.

Eat Seasonally:

Eating foods that are in season is a great way to get more in tune with nature — a connection that helps lower stress levels and promotes feelings of well being. Browse a farmers' market for perfectly ripe tomatoes, peaches, cucumbers, peppers, and more. Choose as many different-colored foods as you can (since bright colors indicate high nutrient levels) and treat your family and yourself to a meal that feeds the senses as well as the stomach.

Practice Saying "No":

Now that summer's over, life is going to get busy again before you can say "back to school". Minimize your impending schedule overload by honing your ability to say no to things you just don't have time to do. The more you practice now, the easier it will

be to say no in a few weeks when work, school, and socializing are all back in full swing and clamouring for you to take on more and more.

Antioxidant Extravaganza:

Stress can suppress your immune system, making you more likely to get sick just when you need to be at your best. Keep your body strong in stressful times by eating foods that are rich in antioxidants — nutrients that bolster the immune system and protect the body against free radicals and the aging process. According to the USDA, the foods that offer the highest amount of antioxidants are beans, berries, artichokes, apples, pecans, cherries, plums, and potatoes.

Mindful Meals:

Instead of wolfing down your lunch while standing in the kitchen or sitting at your desk, take 10 minutes to eat mindfully. Smell your food before you begin and chew each bite several times, savouring the taste. Allowing your senses to rise to the surface gives your mind a much-needed break. And what better to focus on than delicious, sustaining food? It's much more fun than staring at a spreadsheet!

That One Thing:

Chances are there's one particular thing you've been avoiding because it's unpleasant, tedious, or just plain old boring. Whether it's calling a friend you've lost touch with, making a dentist's appointment for a tooth that's been bothering you, or taking that box in the garage to Goodwill, do "that one thing" this week. By taking care of it, you'll be able to stop spending your energy on dreading it and start focusing on more important things.

Mantra Meditation:

To Western ears, "mantra" is synonymous with "catchphrase" or "mission statement." But mantra is a tool that's been used for thousands of years to help cultivate peace of mind — something we could all use a little more of. This week, choose a word or phrase that is meaningful and melodious — such as "love," "peace," or "amen" (or whatever resonates with you) — and repeat it silently or audibly whenever you need a gentle reminder to savour the moment.

Chamomile Tea Bag Soak:

Treat your tired eyes to a treatment that's as relaxing as it is beautifying. Soak two chamomile tea bags in lightly warmed milk until soft. Place the tea bags over your closed eyes and rest in a quiet, comfortable spot for 10 minutes. The milk replenishes moisture in the delicate skin, and the scent of chamomile is soothing to frayed nerves. After 10 minutes, gently rinse with warm water and apply your favourite eye cream.

Do Less:

World-class travellers offer great advice: once you've finished packing, remove three things. You likely won't miss them, your remaining clothes will be less wrinkled, and you'll have room for souvenirs. This week, look at your to-do list cross three things off. Whether you move them to next week or decide they're not necessary, this exercise helps you keep enough time to accommodate the unexpected or spend an afternoon doing whatever you darn well please.

Make Resolutions You Can Keep:

This year, forget about resolving to do something you "should" do — whether it's losing weight, quitting smoking, or finding a new job — and instead make a commitment to do more of something you want to do. What's perking up your ears every time you hear it mentioned? What do you daydream about doing? The sooner you start heeding this internal call, the sooner you'll be immersed in pursuing something that makes you feel gratified and inspired.

Demi De-Clutter:

Getting completely organized can be an elusive — and overwhelming — goal. Instead, choose one small space that needs attention — the junk drawer in the kitchen, the stack of mail on the dining room table, or even the glove box of your car — and de-clutter it. Throw out or recycle anything you don't need, take care of anything that needs attention, and give the area a quick wipe-down. Ahhh. That's better. Now you've created a little space for something new to grow.

Shake It Off:

Although it's hibernating season, too much sluggishness can lead to the winter blues. Shake off lethargy, stress, and stagnant emotions and re-energize with this simple exercise: Stand with your knees bent slightly. Begin shaking your hands. Gradually add your forearms, upper arms, shoulders, and head. Allow your movements to grow into little jumps. Keep all your joints soft as you jump in a circle first to the right, then to the left. Feel better?

Loving Meditation:

Chocolate is great, but the gift that most honors the spirit of Valentine's Day is compassion. Strengthen your compassion muscles with this meditation: Sit quietly with eyes closed. Think of a loved one and silently repeat to yourself, "May this person be happy. May this person be healthy. May this person live a life of ease." Repeat with other people if you'd like, but don't forget to offer the same treatment to yourself.

Homemade Facial:

Starlets are busy beautifying for the Oscars this week — join the fun with this beauty treatment developed by L.A. spa Body Bistro. Make a paste of 1/2 teaspoon turmeric and 1 teaspoon plain yogurt. Apply, then let dry 10 minutes. Rinse with a warm,

damp washcloth and remove any residual turmeric with a gentle toner. The turmeric reduces inflammation, while the yogurt kills blemish-causing bacteria. For best results, do it the night before you want to look radiant.

Walk Slowly:

This week your mission is to breathe more mindfully. Try taking a full breath now — inhale deeply into your belly, then allow every last drop of air to release on the exhale. This simple action blocks the stress response and cues your body to relax, making you less likely to get riled and more able to think clearly. Breathe deeply before you respond to anything life throws your way this week, and notice how it changes your reactions.

Steam Things Up:

Although it gets a bad rap, sweating is a vital process — it flushes toxins, improves circulation, and is emotionally cathartic. This week, visit a steam room or sauna. Or, replicate the effects at home by sitting in a warm bath with a towel draped over your head, or by wrapping yourself in warmed towels and getting under the covers. If you're pregnant or have high blood pressure or heart disease, check with your doctor first.

Stroll Down Sensory Lane:

While a heart-pumping power walk can do wonders, this week your mission is to rediscover the lost art of the stroll. What can you smell when you slow down? A neighbour's barbecue? A flowering lilac bush? By giving yourself permission to walk slowly, you're inviting the overall pace of your life to decelerate so that you may savour moments—not race through them.

Find Your Inner Goddess:

Treat yourself to this soothing yoga pose whenever you need to stop the world; you'll emerge soothed and rejuvenated. Sit on the floor with a firm pillow one foot behind you. Bend your knees and bring the soles of your feet together, letting your legs fall to either side. Lie back on the cushion. Place your hands on your belly and breathe here for as long as it feels good. Roll to your right side and gently come back up to sitting. You've just completed the goddess pose.

Create a Sanctuary:

Every woman deserves a room of her own. This week, find a spot for your sanctuary and make it yours. If it's the bathroom, put a plant on the tub. If it's a corner of your living room, place a candle and comfy pillow there. Or, choose your car and hang a wind chime from the mirror. Now you'll know that wherever you go, there's a spot where you can decompress and prepare to face the world again.

Hold the Caffeine:

Instead of reaching for the caffeine to get you going tomorrow morning, wake your body up from the outside in by invigorating your biggest organ—your skin. With hands in loose fists, lightly tap your entire body—your heart, chest, armpits, arms, belly, thighs, shins, calves, and back. Open your hands when working on the back of your neck, head, and face. The resulting warm flush will be a sweet reward.

Take a Mental Vacation:

When you need to deflate stress, treat yourself to a vacation that's all in your head: Close your eyes and imagine a relaxing place, such as a beach, a mountain view, or a cozy room. Notice everything you can about your spot. What can you see and smell? The more vivid a picture you paint in your mind, the more your body will respond to the invitation to relax.