

De-Stress

Stress is a normal reaction to situations perceived as challenges, changes, threats, or even opportunities. It is our reaction to events rather than the events themselves that cause stress.

De-Stress or the **Relaxation Response** is meant to counter the stress (“flight or flight”) response. It is a physical state of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional responses to stress.

- Metabolism decreases
- Heart rate decreases
- Muscles relax
- Breathing becomes slower
- Blood pressure decreases



Common Stress Symptoms

Three common ways people respond to stress:

1. **Angry or agitated.** You may feel heated, overly emotional, and unable to sit still.
2. **Withdrawn or depressed.** You may shut down, space out, or show very little energy or emotion.
3. **Tense and frozen.** You may freeze under pressure, look paralyzed, but under the surface feel extremely agitated.

Benefits of Relaxation

Heart Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Decreases heart rate▪ Decreases blood pressure
Muscles and Pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Reduces tension▪ Increases blood flow to major muscles▪ Tip: tense, then release each muscle group.
Emotional Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Improves concentration▪ Boosts confidence to handle problems▪ Reduces anger and frustration▪ Reduces risk of depression
Immune System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Fights off illness and disease▪ Prevents frequent times of stress

Eliciting the Relaxation Response

2 Main Steps:

1. Repeat a word, sound, phrase, prayer, or muscular activity.
2. Passively disregard everyday thoughts during the repetition.

Put it into Action

- A) Pick a focus word, short phrase, or prayer.
- B) Sit quietly in a comfortable position.



- C) Close your eyes.
- D) Relax your muscles from your head to your toes.
- E) Breathe slowly and naturally. As you exhale, say the repeating word or phrase.
- F) Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you are doing but just return to your repetition.
- G) Continue for 10-20 minutes.
- H) Do not stand immediately. Continue sitting quietly, allowing other thoughts to return.
- I) Practice the routine once or twice daily. Try before breakfast and before dinner.

Other techniques to elicit relaxation response:

- Imagery
- Mindfulness meditation
- Breath focus
- Repetitive prayer

Relieving Stress: Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being more present in our own lives – being in the moment.

Use the sensation of breathing as your **anchor** for awareness in the present moment.

- Bring as much attention to the direct sensation of the breath.
- Do not try to control the breath.
- It's okay if thoughts come into your mind – just notice it is there and return your focus to breathing.
- Stay in the moment as long as you can. Aim for five minutes.
- Notice repeating thoughts, let them pass by, and return your attention to breathing.



After awhile, widen the focus to include all that is present – what you are hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, touching, or thinking.

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is a convenient and simple de-stressor technique that involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety.



1. Get into a comfortable position (cross-legged or in a comfy chair). Close your eyes, breathe in feelings of peace and breathe out feelings of stress.
2. Begin to envision yourself in the midst of the most relaxing environment you can imagine (tropical beach, sitting by a fire).
3. Try to involve all your senses. What does it feel like on your skin? What scents are involved? What do you hear?
4. Stay here for as long as you like. When you're ready to come back to reality, count back from 10 or 20 and when you get to 1, you will feel more calm and refreshed.

De-Stress in a Hurry

When you are in these situations ...

- Stuck in traffic
- Put on hold during a phone call
- Doctor's waiting room
- Upset at someone's comment
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Standing in line
- In pain



Try doing this ...

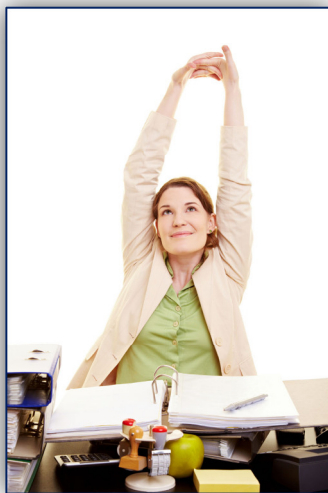
- Put your hand on your navel.
- Take a deep breath in and out – feel your stomach rising and falling about an inch.

Or try this ...

- Count slowly from 10 to zero, one number for each breath.
- With the first breath say 10, with the next breath say 9, and so on.
- Do you feel more relaxed? If not, try again.

De-Stress at Work

Complete these quick de-stressors three times a day at work.



Feet and Legs (With legs outstretched)

- Alternate curling and stretching the toes.
- Alternate flexing and extending the ankle.

Shoulders (Sitting or standing)

- Alternate bending your wrist up and down.
- Exhale and roll your shoulders up; inhale and roll down.

Head and Neck

- Drop chin to chest and hold for 10 sec.
- Look as far as you can over your right shoulder and hold for 10 sec. Repeat on left shoulder.
- Drop your right ear to right shoulder and hold for 10 sec. Repeat on left shoulder.

16 Ways to De-Stress

As you awaken in the morning, bring your attention to your breathing.	Slow down and enjoy something special about the morning – a flower that bloomed, the wind in the trees.	Eat healthful foods following Canada's Food Guide	Listening to music can soothe and relax you. Singing can also really lift your mood!
When you arrive at your destination, take a few moments to breathe consciously and calmly - relax your body, then begin.	When sitting at your desk or keyboard, become aware of the subtle signs of the physical tension and take a break or walk around.	Use the repetitive events of the day (the ringing telephone, a knock at the door) as cues for a mini-relaxation.	Walk mindfully to your car or bus. Take time to observe your surroundings and don't rush.
Consciously make the transition from work into your home by giving yourself a few minutes alone after greeting them.	Have a hot cup of herbal tea: chamomile or mint tea can be especially calming.	Write your thoughts and feelings in a daily journal. This can lower levels of stress hormones, increase the ability to handle adversity and adjust to change.	As you go to sleep, let go of today and tomorrow. Take some slow, mindful, deep breaths.
Watch a funny movie, read a funny book, or laugh with your friends.	Spend time in nature: Research says that even gazing out the window or looking at a photo of a natural setting can reduce stress.	Cultivate a hobby: try gardening, stamp-collecting, reading, cooking, or any physical activity.	Accept the moment as it is: See what is actually happening instead of what you worry about or would like to see happen.

Resources: <http://www.massgeneral.org/>, <http://www.health.harvard.edu/>, <http://www.de-stress.ca/>, <http://www.livestrong.com/>