

# Stress Busters



**There is good reason to find ways to cope with chronic stress** Left unchecked, stress can make you more tired, irritable and prone to illnesses such as depression, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

**Breathe and relax** Breathing patterns change under stress, becoming more rapid and shallow. To slow things down, find a comfortable position and close your eyes. Focus only on your breathing. Each time you breathe out, relax your body. Continue for a few minutes until you feel calm and relaxed.



**Find the Funny.** A good belly laugh can uplift and relax you just as exercise does. So pop a comedy into the DVD player after work, sign up to receive a joke-of-the-day email, or try laughter yoga. Make your own humour first-aid kit, recommends stress and wellness specialist in Little Britain, Ont. Put cartoons, funny photos and email jokes in a file or on your computer, and pull them up when you need a boost.

**Get outdoors for a brief break.** Our grandparents were right about the healing power of fresh air. Don't be deterred by foul weather or a full schedule. Even five minutes on a balcony or terrace can be rejuvenating.



**Drink plenty of water and eat small, nutritious snacks.** Hunger and dehydration, even before you're aware of them, can provoke aggressiveness and exacerbate feelings of anxiety and stress.



**Make over Your Arguing Style** Being the strong silent type, instead of speaking up, can be harmful to your health, say experts. In contrast, if a husband or wife has a hostile arguing style, it increases the woman's risk of cardiovascular disease more than smoking or cholesterol levels would, say University of Utah researchers. A warm arguing style by either spouse, on the other hand, lowers the wife's risk of heart disease, says psychologist and lead researcher Tim Smith. "Try to say several positive things for every negative comment you make."

**Clear your space and your mind** Disorganized spaces make us feel tense, so spend two minutes re-ordering your desk before you dash off for lunch or leave at the end of the day, suggests Marcia Ramsland, author of *Simplify Your Space: Create Order and Reduce Stress*. Worried that you'll forget what you're working on if you file it all away? "Before you leave, jot down the first three things you need to do when you return to your desk," she says.





**Aerobic Activity.** Such as vigorous walking is, in my opinion, the best way to reduce stress and improve overall quality of life; walk or do whatever type of exercise you feel comfortable with. You may prefer to join a health club; if you do join a health club, go often and make it your special time. Do not concern yourself with your family while you are working out; this is your time and do not let anyone interfere.

**Do a quick posture check.** Hold your head and shoulders upright and avoid stooping or slumping. Bad posture can lead to muscle tension, pain, and increased stress. If you're stuck at a desk most of the day, avoid repetitive strain injuries and sore muscles by making sure your workstation reflects good ergonomic design principles.

**Be a "Kid" again.** What did you enjoy when you were a child? Draw; paint; be creative. Play with Play-Doh, dance or read. Play music, allow yourself freedom to express yourself without worry that you are not keeping up the image of who you are "supposed" to be. Just relax and enjoy yourself. We all have a little child in us and it is a good idea to allow expression of the child within from time to time.



**Say NO.** You do not have to do everything your family, friends and others ask; of course you can help others, but first make sure you have done what is necessary to take care of yourself. Make time for yourself, your number one priority. Once your own needs are met, you will find you have more time for others. And you may find more pleasure in helping others when you don't feel that you must always put others needs before your own.

Watch aquarium fish  
Take a walk with a friend  
Sing along with music  
Set up a home spa  
Cut down on some of your commitments  
Walk your dog  
Dance to your favourite music  
Take a mini-vacation  
Play music while you cook something wonderful  
Take a nap  
Go bowling



**Plan something rewarding for the end of your stressful day,** even if only a relaxing bath or half an hour with a good book. Put aside work, housekeeping or family concerns for a brief period before bedtime and allow yourself to fully relax. Don't spend this time planning tomorrow's schedule or doing chores you didn't get around to during the day. Remember that you need time to recharge and energize yourself. You'll be much better prepared to face another stressful day.

*Relax*

**Steal a Yoga move** As little as 10 minutes in Shava-asana, the relaxation pose that is typically used at the end of yoga practice, slashes stress-induced blood pressure levels by 31 percent, according to a recent study in the *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies*. To do this pose, lie on your back with your arms at your sides and your palms up. Close your eyes and breathe deeply, consciously relaxing any tight or tense body parts as you move deeper into a relaxed state. Maintain the pose for five to 15 minutes

