

# Focus on stress relief

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Over the years, many researchers have looked at how stress and anxiety can negatively affect health and well-being.

While you may not be able to eliminate all stress from your life, researchers continue to discover ways to help manage it, including:

**Progressive muscle relaxation.** This practice involves directing your attention to your body and its sensations, while tightening and releasing muscles in different areas.

- Spend some time in nature. Research from 2017 suggests that being around trees and green things can help people feel good naturally.
- Take a cardio break. Research from 2013 suggests that doing 20 to 30 minutes of cardio can help with stress.
- Even a 10-minute walk can make a huge difference. Even better, take that walk in nature.

**Yoga:** Practicing this type of exercise can lessen stress and anxiety. According to a 2011 study, yoga interrupts stress by producing an effect that's opposite to the flight-or-fight response.

**Meditate.** This may reduce blood pressure, anxiety, depression, and insomnia.

**Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR).** This practice may help you focus and remain present.

- Take slow, deep breaths. Deep breathing can help lower blood pressure and heart rate.
- Snuggle your pet. Pets could be beneficial for your mental well-being, decreasing stress and anxiety and increasing levels of feel-good hormones like serotonin and oxytocin.
- Artistic expression. Some people manage depression and anxiety by expressing themselves through art, writing, or music.
- Chat with friends and loved ones. According to a 2001 research review, studies say that socializing is associated with mental wellness.
- Laugh. Laughing to relieve stress may sound like a joke, but there is science behind it.

## Unleash the power of sleep

There's a reason we refer to someone in a bad mood as having gotten up "on the wrong side of the bed." Sleep can have a strong effect on how you feel, in both the short and long term.

Without enough sleep, the brain can't function properly. Most adults need about 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) Trusted Source.

However, sleep quality matters, too. Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep — the deepest stage of sleep — is when dreaming occurs, and getting enough of it helps

your brain process emotional information.

If you're sleep deficient, you may have trouble:

- making decisions
- solving problems
- coping with change
- controlling your emotions and behavior

The NHLBI offers adults these tips for a better night's sleep:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Try to keep the same sleep schedule on weeknights and weekends. Limit the difference to no more than about an hour.
- Use the hour before bed for quiet time. During this time, avoid strenuous exercise and bright artificial light, such as from a TV or computer screen.
- Avoid eating heavy or large meals within a few hours of bedtime.
- Spend time outside every day and be physically active.
- Limit naps during the day to no more than 20 minutes.
- Make bedtime "me" time by developing an enjoyable, calming bedtime routine. For example, take a hot bath before bed.

### **Manage your aches and pains**

Body aches and pains can become routine. Taking steps to manage them may help improve your quality of life.

Progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, exercise, and a healthy diet are an important basis for pain management.

If you have regular aches and pains, speak with a healthcare professional about how to manage them.

### **Consider Remedial Massages**

Science has proven that using therapeutic oil is an effective way to improve the mood.

Studies on massage have focused on several areas, including anxiety, pain management, and sleep

### **Find your flow**

"Flow" is a term scientists have coined to describe the feeling of deep enjoyment you get when you're fully focused on and immersed in an activity. Think of it as being in the zone.

To achieve flow, you need to be doing something that requires focus and challenges you just the right amount. Like a professional athlete or dancer, you have a goal to meet, but you concentrate more on the process as it happens rather than the end result.

Exercise routines, crafts like knitting or woodworking, strategy games, and any activity that requires concentration can result in flow. Choose an activity you enjoy and dive in.