



Take a break



A few minutes of downtime can help relieve stress and boost productivity.

Our days are wall-to-wall. Between work and life responsibilities, we're feeling more pressure and a higher level of stress. And it's taking its toll on our health as a nation. So what can we do about it? Maybe, for a few minutes, we can take a break. Because a little down time — be it a five-minute timeout or a walk at lunchtime — can be a great way to recharge and reduce stress.

Ways to take a break for stress relief

Be present

Slow down. Take five minutes and focus on one behavior. For example, walking. Be mindful of how it sounds when your feet hit the ground. Feel the muscles moving to make each step.

Decompress

Place a warm heat wrap around your neck and shoulders for 10 minutes. Close your eyes and relax your face, neck, upper chest and back muscles.

Laugh out loud

A good belly laugh lowers cortisol, your body's stress hormone, and boosts endorphins, which help your mood. Lighten up by tuning in to your favorite comedy, reading a funny book or chatting with someone who makes you laugh.

Crank up the tunes

Research shows that listening to soothing music can lower blood pressure, heart rate and anxiety. Create a playlist of peaceful songs or nature sounds.

Meditate

Just a few minutes of meditation can help relieve anxiety and may even make you more resilient to stress. It's easy.

Get moving

All forms of exercise, from walking to cross-fit training, release feel-good chemicals in your brain that can help ease depression and anxiety.

Reach out

Talk to family and friends -- preferably face-to-face, or at least on the phone. Share what's going on.

Tune in to your body

Mentally scan your body to sense how stress affects it. Lie on your back or sit with your feet on the floor. Start at your toes and work your way up to your scalp, noticing how your body feels.

Be grateful

Keep a gratitude journal to help you remember the things that are good in your life. Celebrate all your everyday accomplishments.

Breathe deeply

Take a five-minute break and focus on your breathing. By practicing deep breathing, you can reduce the effects of stress by slowing your heart rate and lowering your blood pressure.



Sit up straight with both feet on the floor.



Close your eyes.



Sit up straight with your eyes closed, with a hand on your belly.



Slowly inhale through your nose, feeling your breath as it fills your abdomen and chest.



Note in the moment how you are feeling physically and emotionally. Pay attention to your thoughts without judging them as good or bad.



Reverse the process, as you exhale through your mouth.

Source: WebMD: 10 Relaxation Techniques That Zap Stress Fast (accessed January 2016): webmd.com/balance/guide/blissing-out-10-relaxation-techniques-reduce-stress-spot.

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