

# Ways to Relieve Stress

The best way to manage your stress is to learn healthy coping strategies. You can start practicing these tips right away. Try one or two until you find a few that work for you. Practice these techniques until they become habits you turn to when you feel stress.

Stress-relief techniques focus on relaxing your mind and your body.

## Ways to relax your mind

- **Write.** It may help to write about things that are bothering you. Write for 10 to 15 minutes a day about stressful events and how they made you feel. Or think about tracking your stress. This helps you find out what is causing your stress and how much stress you feel. After you collect that information, you can find better ways to cope.
- **Let your feelings out.** Talk, laugh, cry, and express anger when you need to. Talking with friends, family, a counselor, or a member of the clergy about your feelings is a healthy way to relieve stress.
- **Do something you enjoy.** You may feel that you're too busy to do these things. But making time to do something you enjoy can help you relax. It might also help you get more done in other areas of your life. Try:
  - A hobby, such as gardening.
  - A creative activity, such as writing, crafts, or art.
  - Playing with and caring for pets.
  - Volunteer work.
- **Focus on the present.** Meditation and guided imagery are two ways to focus and relax your mind.
  - **Meditate.** When you meditate, you focus your attention on things that are happening right now. Paying attention to your breathing is one way to focus. Mindfulness-based stress reduction is one form of meditation that is very helpful with managing stress and learning how to better cope with it.
  - **Use guided imagery.** With guided imagery, you imagine yourself in any setting that helps you feel calm and relaxed. You can use audiotapes, books, or a teacher to guide you.

## Ways to relax your body

- **Exercise.** Regular exercise is one of the best ways to manage stress. Walking is a great way to get started. Even everyday activities such as housecleaning or yard work can reduce stress. Stretching relieves muscle tension.
- **Try techniques to relax.** Breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, and yoga can help relieve stress.
  - **Breathing exercises.** These include roll breathing, a type of deep breathing.
  - **Progressive muscle relaxation.** This technique reduces muscle tension. You do it by relaxing separate groups of muscles one by one.
  - **Yoga, tai chi, and qi gong.** These techniques combine exercise and meditation. You may need some training at first to learn them. Books and videos are also helpful. You can do all of these techniques at home.

You might like to try a combination of these techniques.

In addition to practicing these skills, you might also try some other techniques to reduce stress, such as massage or music therapy. There are many options. It is important to experiment and find the strategies that work best for you.

Use the chart on the next page to identify your coping strategies and track which ones work best for you.

## How Do You Cope With Stress?

There are many ways to deal with stress. The table below lists some positive strategies. Place a checkmark in the column indicating how frequently you use each strategy. If some of your stress reduction strategies are not on this list, add them.

	Often	Rarely	Not at All	Is it Effective?
Listen to music				
Watch television				
Read a magazine or book				
Spend time in nature				
Write or journal				
Attend a play or concert				
Go for a walk or drive				
Exercise (swim, bike, jog)				
Do an activity you enjoy				
Play with a pet				
Take a nap				
Practice deep breathing				
Meditate				
Do yoga or stretching				
Tidy your desk or office				
Take a bath or shower				
Do physical labor (garden, paint)				
Complete home repairs				
Attend an athletic event				
Play a game (chess, cards)				
Pray, go to church				
Talk with a trusted friend				
Go to a movie				
Visit with a friend				