

Stress-busting tips

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(HealthDay)—Lying around your home watching TV isn't always the best way to unwind. Police dramas, the news—even sports programming—can be stress-inducing. Plus, it's a passive activity, and mildly addictive, and nowhere near as relaxing as many other options you can choose.

Here are five ways to relax at home that are truly therapeutic:

1. Listen more than you talk. "Feel good" chemicals like dopamine and oxytocin are released in the brain when you really connect with another human being. And when you really listen, your blood pressure actually goes down, according to Dr. James Lynch, an expert in mind/body medicine and a retired professor of psychiatry at the University of Maryland.
2. Take three deep breaths. Dr. Herbert Benson, professor of mind/body medicine at Harvard Medical School and co-author of *The Relaxation Response*, says deep breathing is a great way to deactivate the stress response.
3. Meditate. New research out of Harvard shows that just eight weeks of regular meditation shrinks a tiny section of the brain known as the amygdala, where the [stress response](#) is activated. "The smaller the amygdala became, the less stress subjects reported having," according to psychologist Sara Lazar.
4. Call up an old friend. According to the American Psychological Association, "emotional support is an important protective factor for dealing with life's difficulties." In addition: "Loneliness has been associated with a wide variety of health problems, including high [blood pressure](#), diminished immunity, cardiovascular disease and cognitive decline." So calling up a friend isn't only relaxing, it's good for your health.
5. Take an [afternoon nap](#). The Mayo Clinic says a short nap in mid-afternoon can promote relaxation, reduce fatigue and increase alertness.

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