

# Mayo mindfulness: Tips to tame stress

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Is stress making you frustrated and irritable? Stress relievers can help restore calm and serenity to your chaotic life. You don't have to invest a lot of time or thought into stress relievers. If your stress is getting out of control and you need quick relief, try one of these tips.

## Get active

Virtually any form of [physical activity](#) can act as a stress reliever. Even if you're not an athlete or you're out of shape, exercise can still be a good stress reliever.

Physical activity can pump up your feel-good endorphins and other natural neural chemicals that enhance your sense of well-being. Exercise can also refocus your mind on your body's movements, which can improve your mood and help the day's irritations fade away. Consider walking, jogging, gardening, housecleaning, biking, swimming, weightlifting or anything else that gets you active.

## Eat a healthy diet

Eating a [healthy diet](#) is an important part of taking care of yourself. Aim to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, and whole grains.

## Avoid unhealthy habits

Some people may deal with stress by drinking too much caffeine or alcohol, smoking, eating too much, or using illegal substances. These habits can harm your health.

## Meditate

During [meditation](#), you focus your attention and quiet the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. Meditation can instill a sense of calm, peace and balance that can benefit both your emotional well-being and your overall health.

Guided meditation, guided imagery, visualization and other forms of

meditation can be practiced anywhere at any time, whether you're out for a walk, riding the bus to work or waiting at the doctor's office. You can also try deep breathing anywhere.

## **Laugh more**

A good sense of humor can't cure all ailments, but it can help you feel better, even if you have to force a fake laugh through your grumpiness. When you laugh, it not only lightens your mental load but also causes positive physical changes in your body. Laughter fires up and then cools down your stress response. So read some jokes, tell some jokes, watch a comedy or hang out with your funny friends. Or give [laughter](#) yoga a try.

## **Connect with others**

When you're stressed and irritable, your instinct may be to isolate yourself. Instead, reach out to family and friends and make social connections.

Social contact is a good stress reliever because it can offer distraction, provide support and help you tolerate life's up and downs. So take a coffee break with a friend, email a relative or visit your place of worship.

Got more time? Consider volunteering for a charitable group and help yourself while helping others.

## **Assert yourself**

You might want to do it all, but you can't, at least not without paying a price. Learning to say no or being willing to delegate can help you manage your to-do list and your stress.

Saying yes may seem like an easy way to keep the peace, prevent conflicts and get the job done right. But it may actually cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family come second, which can lead to stress, anger, resentment and even the desire to exact revenge. And that's not a very calm and peaceful reaction.

## **Try yoga**

With its series of postures and controlled-breathing exercises, yoga is a popular stress reliever. Yoga brings together physical and mental disciplines which may help you achieve peacefulness of body and mind. Yoga can help you relax and manage stress and anxiety.

Try yoga on your own or find a class—you can find classes in most communities. Hatha yoga, in particular, is a good stress reliever because of its slower pace and easier movements.

## **Get enough sleep**

Stress can cause you to have trouble falling asleep. When you have too much to do—and too much to think about—your sleep can suffer. But sleep is the time when your brain and body recharge.

And the quality and amount of sleep you get can affect your mood, energy level, concentration and overall functioning. If you have sleep troubles, make sure that you have a quiet, relaxing bedtime routine, listen to soothing music, put clocks away, and stick to a consistent schedule.

## **Keep a journal**

Writing down your thoughts and feelings can be a good release for

otherwise pent-up emotions. Don't think about what to write—just let it happen. Write whatever comes to mind. No one else needs to read it, so don't strive for perfection in grammar or spelling.

Just let your thoughts flow on paper—or computer screen. Once you're done, you can toss out what you wrote or save it to reflect on later.

## **Get musical and be creative**

Listening to or playing music is a good stress reliever because it can provide a mental distraction, reduce muscle tension and decrease stress hormones. Crank up the volume and let your mind be absorbed by the music.

If music isn't one of your interests, turn your attention to another hobby you enjoy, such as gardening, sewing, sketching—anything that requires you to focus on what you're doing rather than what you think you should be doing.

## **Seek counseling**

If new stressors are challenging your ability to cope or if self-care measures just aren't relieving your stress, you may need to look for reinforcements in the form of therapy or counseling. Therapy also may be a good idea if you feel overwhelmed or trapped, if you worry excessively, or if you have trouble carrying out daily routines or meeting responsibilities at work, home or school.

Professional counselors or therapists can help you identify sources of your [stress](#) and learn new coping tools.

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