

Exercise options that double as stress-busters

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(HealthDay)—Exercise is a known stress buster, and different disciplines relax and tone you in a variety of ways. So, you can pick and choose from many types of exercise to go beyond physical fitness to better mental health.

Exercise's mind-body boosts:

- Improves your mood by releasing natural feel-good chemicals.
- Decreases tension in your muscles.
- Leads to deeper, more restorative sleep.

Now for the specifics. Studies show that a cardio workout is not only good for the heart, but also for the mind, decreasing stress. Whether you work out in one daily 30-minute session or three separate 10-minute sessions, moderate-intensity activities like walking, dancing, using the elliptical or pedaling on a [stationary bike](#) do the trick.

Yoga gets the top nod for its mind-body balance—the combination of deep [breathing](#) and

stretching enhances flexibility and mood. Just remember that yoga isn't a substitute for cardio because it typically doesn't raise your heart rate. So think of it as an add-on.

Chinese traditions are at the heart of tai chi, a combination of martial arts and meditation. For the biggest benefit, the American College of Sports Medicine recommends learning from a qualified teacher and practicing on your own between classes.

Head-to-toe stretching is important for flexibility and, like yoga, it draws on breathing and focus, making it a relaxing way to end every workout. If you carry tension in your neck and shoulders, be sure to target these areas.

The common thread of all these exercises is [deep breathing](#), slowly filling your belly as you inhale and flattening it as you exhale. This increases the amount of oxygen in your blood, which in turn supplies energy to your muscles. And that's an [exercise](#) you can practice any time.

More information: The Anxiety and Depression Association of America has detailed information on [how exercise can help ease stress](#) and boost mental fitness for everyone.

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