

De-stress: You Have the Power to Reset

By Kay Trotter, PhD

Your stomach clenches, your heart races, and you can't catch your breath — all tell-tale signs you are getting anxious or overwhelmed. But while a slight from a co-worker or bad news from a family member can raise your blood pressure, you have the power to reset and focus on de-stressing.

Flight or Flight

When you're stressed, your body instinctively reacts with the "fight or flight response," which, in the pre-civilization world, helped us escape from predators and dangerous situations.

But today, our bodies can't tell the difference between an approaching grizzly bear or a difficult boss. So, our stress response is triggered when there's no imminent danger. And, instead of helping us to escape, it can contribute to chronic conditions like hypertension and headaches, as well as mental health issues like depression and anxiety disorders.

The good news? Just as you have a stress response, you also have a "relaxation response," during which you can slow down your breathing, decrease your blood pressure and use less oxygen.

Go For A 10-Minute Walk

While just about any walk will help to clear your head and boost endorphins, consider walking in a park or other green space, which can actually put your body into a state of meditation.

Breathe Deeply

Breathing exercises – or even just taking a few deep breaths – provide an extra boost of oxygen and help reduce tension and relieve stress. Best of all, deep breathes will help you calm down.

Visualize

A short visualization is an easy way to get back to center.

Simply make yourself comfortable (at your desk, on a park bench – wherever!) and then try to picture a peaceful scene: a future vacation, your favorite beach. You can even visualize yourself accomplishing a goal or maybe picture yourself in an elevator, happily sandwiched between two hot actors of your choice!

Eat A Snack

Stress-eating does not have to be bad. Pick a healthy snack that will fill you up – half an avocado, a handful of nuts, a hard boiled egg. Then take your snack away from your computer and go sit someplace peaceful. Focus on your food: its texture, the way it tastes, how it makes you feel. Voila! You've turned your snack into a meditation.

Step Away From The Screen

Uninterrupted computer use has been associated with stress, lost sleep and depression. Make sure to take frequent breaks from computer use during your day – and try to shut offline at least an hour before bedtime.

Or, On The Other Hand, Plug In

While screens can stress you out, you can turn to the Internet to get a little stress relief. Do a search for a web-based stress management program, like guided meditation, or watch a viral video that will make you laugh. Laughter is a great de-stressor because it first activates your stress response and then deactivates it, creating a kind of “rollercoaster” that leads to a feeling of relaxation.

Hang Up, Then Turn Off Your Phone

Cell phones stress you out, there’s no question about that. Smartphones, in particular, can make you feel pressure to respond to messages at all times and talking can even raise your blood pressure. So, consider shutting off your phone for an hour or so.

Put On Some Music

While classical music slows heart rate and lowers blood pressure, any music that you love will flood your brain with feel-good neurochemicals like dopamine. So, crank it up on the drive home!

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