

# TIPS TO Ease Tension

**Work on your attitude.** How you react to stress is determined by how you perceive a particular event. Reframe your response by acknowledging that the stress event is outside of you. You are the center and controller of your response.

**Think about something else.** Distract yourself to break whatever chain of thought is producing the stress.

**Think positively.** Think about a success or past achievement.

**Take a mental vacation.** Visualize or gaze at a postcard or poster of somewhere you would like to be and feel safe.

**Recite an anti-stress litany.** “This too shall pass.” “Tomorrow is another day.”

**Use affirmations.** “I can handle this.” “Everyone makes mistakes.” “We are all human.” “Staying calm helps me solve problems.”

**Count to 10.** Use the pause to breathe and relax. It will allow a more relaxed response and lower tension in muscles.

**Look away.** Focus on something at least 20 feet away to let eye muscles change tension.

**Get up and leave.** If appropriate, leave the stressful situation for a little while. Go out to lunch. Walk around the block. The exercise and space gives you time to recover from the stress response.

**Take several deep breaths.** Stress and tension tighten muscles. Breathe by pushing out with stomach muscles to bring oxygen and energy into your body. Exhale and let go of the stress.

**Yell or cry.** If the environment is private and safe, emotional release can be healing.

**Stretch.** Stretching muscles reduces the sensation of stress even when we can’t do anything about the source of the stress.

**Massage your target muscles.** Recognize which muscle groups you tense up when feeling stress. Massage those muscles to break the stress-tension cycle.

**Press on your temples.** Ancient application of acupressure using your fingertips moving in small circles over your temples relaxes muscles elsewhere in your neck.

**Drop your jaw and roll it left and right.** Notice if you clench your teeth when feeling stress. Yawning and jaw stretches release tension.

**Stretch your chest for better breathing.** Press your shoulder blades together expanding your chest as you inhale. Relax as you exhale. Repeat 4-5 times.

**Relax all over.** Use progress relaxation techniques to start with your feet and move progressively to your head (feet, legs, chest, arms, neck, head) relaxing each major muscle group one at a time.

**Listen to relaxation tapes** (natural sounds) or music. Both can promote relaxation and be inspiring.

**Give someone a compliment or thank-you.**

**Share a joke** with someone.

**Smile** at someone or even yourself.

**Take a minute** to gaze at the photo of a loved one on your desk, wall or in your wallet.

**Comb your hair.**

**Get a drink of water.**

**Review an item from your happy file**—this is a file where you put birthday cards, thank you notes, letters of appreciation, photos, etc.



# TIME Management

The following four steps can help individuals manage their time.

## KEEPING A LOG

Analyze how you spend your time. Keep a log of your major daily activities for several days. Note any delays or interruptions. It can be eye opening to see where your time goes.

## DELEGATING

Are there tasks you currently do that someone else could handle? Ask your children to help out or find a co-worker who wants a new challenge. Remember, how you ask can be as important as what you ask.

## PRIORITIZING

Make two lists:

- Make a list of **activities** that need to be done and how much time you normally spend on each activity—it could be a daily or weekly list. For example:
  - meetings, 1 hour
  - shopping, 45 minutes
  - phone calls, 30 minutes
  - paper work, 3 hours
- Make a second list of **values** that are most important to you along with the amount of time you spend on each. For example:
  - faith/spiritual, 5 hours per week
  - marriage, 5 hours per week
  - children, 4 hours per day
  - entertainment, 2 hours per week
  - physical activity, 20 minutes per day
  - hobbies, 1 hour per week
  - work, 8 hours per day

## PLAYING

Be sure to make time for play. Schedule breaks, down-time, or play-time in your day. Taking time for yourself can help relieve stress and refresh you so you can accomplish more.

1. Whitney, E., Hamilton, E. 1984. *Understanding Nutrition*. 183-191.

2. Quick, J.C. and Quick, J.D. 1984. "Preventing Distress Through Better Working Relationships." *Management Review*. 30(4).



# Let Go THE STRESS

## **RELAXATION RESPONSE**

The following is a simple, brief activity that can be used to allow the physical changes of a stress reaction to subside and return to a non-stress state.

1. Sit (or lie) in a comfortable position in a quiet environment with eyes closed.
2. Begin with your feet and relax each muscle group moving up to the head—calf, thigh, waist, stomach, arms, chest, neck, face, and forehead.
3. Breathe in through your nose gently pushing your stomach out.
4. Breathe out through your mouth and let your stomach relax.
5. Continue for 10-20 minutes. Open your eyes as need to check time, but do not set a time.
6. When finished, open your eyes but remain seated for a couple of minutes.

## **PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION**

The following is a physical activity that can be used for releasing muscle tension triggered as a response to stress.

1. Lie flat on a soft surface or floor with your eyes closed and knees bent.
2. Beginning with your right foot, press foot firmly to the floor for five seconds, relax for five seconds; repeat with the left foot.
3. Straighten legs out and press back of lower right leg firmly to the floor for five seconds, relax for five seconds; repeat with left leg.
4. Press each of the following areas firmly to the floor for 5 seconds, relax for five seconds (one at a time):
  - Back of thighs and buttocks
  - Lower back and shoulder blades
  - Arms
  - Back of head
5. Breathe normally as you press and relax.



# Release THE TENSION

## **SIMPLE YOGA STRETCH**

The following physical activity can be used for releasing muscle tension triggered as a response to stress.

1. Stand relaxed, arms hanging at sides and feet about one foot apart.
2. Tilt head back and hold for five seconds
3. Roll head forward and hold for five seconds.
4. Curl chest and stomach forward as you bend at the waist; arms dangling for five seconds.
5. Inhale slowly through mouth as you straighten up. Raise arms overhead; drop arms slowly to sides as you exhale slowly through your mouth.

## **CONTROLLED BREATHING**

The following activity can be used for releasing muscle tension triggered as a response to stress.

1. Lie down with your back flat on the floor; place a book or large magazine on your stomach.
2. Bend your knees and close your eyes.
3. Push your stomach up 2–3 inches and hold for five seconds, then exhale. Repeat several times. Each time you exhale, say “I am relaxed.” Avoid lifting your chest.

