

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.