

Stress Management



April is national stress awareness month. This month, we will teach you 3 scientifically proven ways to reduce stress: breathing, exercise and meditation. However, never underestimate the power of other simple things: reduce caffeine intake, increase water intake, aim to get at least 7 hours of sleep and spending time with loved ones.

STRESS BUSTING TECHNIQUE 1: BREATHING

To effectively combat stress, we need to activate the body's **natural relaxation response**. The relaxation response is a physical state of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional responses to stress (e.g., decreases in heart rate, blood pressure, rate of breathing, and muscle tension).

BENEFITS OF ELICITING THE RELAXATION RESPONSE:

- Heart beats slower and your muscles relax (less tension headaches)
- Breathing becomes slower
- Blood pressure decreases
- Inflammation lowers in the body (the roots cause of many chronic diseases)

Although there are many ways to combat stress, one stress super buster is breathing. When we are stressed, we tend to breathe more with our chest instead of using our diaphragm. This simple abdominal breathing exercise described below can help you fall asleep, deal with a stressful encounter while it's happening or release anger in a healthy manner.

Deep breathing increases the supply of oxygen to your brain and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes a state of calmness. Breathing techniques help you feel connected to your body—it brings your awareness away from the worries in your head and quiets your mind.

HOW TO: Place one hand over your belly. Take a deep breath in so you can feel your hand slightly rise. Try to make your exhalation last longer than your inhalation. Take 3 – 5 deep breaths this way or until you feel relaxed.

Total time: 1 minute.

If you want to take this technique to a whole new level of stress busting, **aim to do it for 20 – 30 minutes every day.**

BREATHING TIPS:

1. Try to do this practice at a regular time every day to create a new healthy habit. First thing in the morning works for many people.
2. Try doing this technique while you are doing other activities: walking the dog, standing in line at the grocery store, stuck in traffic, even while you are exercising on a cardio machine at the gym! This is also a basic mindfulness practice!
3. Aim to do this practice for 20 – 30 minutes each day, although the benefits may start after just one minute!

IDEA FOR KIDS: Teach Kids Teddy Bear Breathing.

Directions to guide children. "Lie on your back, place one hand on your chest and place your favorite teddy bear on your belly button. Close your eyes and relax your whole body. Breathe in slowly through your nose. Your teddy bear should slowly rise, but your chest should not. When you have taken a full deep breath, hold it, count to three then slowly breathe out. Repeat a few times, until you feel relaxed."

You could replace the teddy bear with other objects in their room or objects found in nature - pine cone, small rock, etc.

STRESS BUSTING TECHNIQUE 2: EXERCISE

The secret to sustaining an exercise program: Choose something you enjoy doing. If you despise running, don't run. If you enjoy mountain biking, then bike. You will be much more likely to sustain an exercise routine if you do what you enjoy.

6 BENEFITS OF EXERCISE:

1. Controls weight: The more intense the activity, the more calories you burn.
2. Combats health problems & disease: Regular exercise helps prevent or manage a wide range of health problems and concerns, including stroke, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, and depression, a number of types of cancer, arthritis and falls.
3. Improves mood: Physical activity stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier and more relaxed.
4. Boosts energy: Exercise delivers oxygen and nutrients to your tissues and helps your cardiovascular system work more efficiently.
5. Improves sleep: 1 out of 10 people experiences insomnia, but working out (not too late at night) can help with earlier sleep onset and better quality of sleep.
6. Improves social well-being: Ask a friend, co-worker or family member to join you on your next walk, participate in a dance class, try a martial arts class. Social well-being is also a critical factor in overall happiness and length of life!
7. Boosts immune function. A 30-minute walk increases killer T-cells and other markers of immune function.

TRY THIS: Move your body doing anything you enjoy for at least 10 minutes. This could be walking, yoga, group fitness class or even playing with your kids. Total time: 10 – 30 min.

WELLNESS TIP FOR KIDS:

Studies suggest that regular physical activity supports healthy child development by improving memory, concentration, and positive outlook. For example, researchers found that children who had an opportunity to run for 15 to 45 minutes before class were less distracted and more attentive to schoolwork. These **positive effects lasted two to four hours** after their workouts.

1. Start the day with movement: Start the day with exercises such as jumping jacks, arm crosses, and stretches.
2. If your kids are at home with distance learning, enhance attention during and between lessons: Incorporating short exercise or stretch breaks into the day can sharpen children's focus on learning. Especially for younger students, dividing lessons into 8- to 20-minute chunks punctuated with activities that involve movement keeps their attention on learning and helps make the content more memorable.

WEBSITES / APP RESOURCES:

- Everybody Walk: Full of motivation and education: <http://everybodywalk.org/>
- Map My Walk: Plan a walking route using this website <http://www.mapmywalk.com/>
- Webwalking USA: Track your walking minutes, miles, or steps and color in the trail segments as you do a virtual walk from Atlantic to Pacific on the American Discovery Trail. <https://www.verywell.com/webwalkingusa-walking-program-3432830>

STRESS BUSTING TECHNIQUE 3: MEDITATION

A cartoon from The New Yorker sums it up: Two monks are sitting side by side, meditating. The younger one is giving the older one a quizzical look, to which the older one responds, "Nothing happens next. This is it."

Meditation is the practice of turning your attention to a single point of reference. It can involve focusing on the breath, on bodily sensations, or on a word or phrase known as a mantra. In other words, meditation means turning your attention away from distracting thoughts and focusing on the present moment.

There are many different forms of meditation. This includes: mindfulness, laughter, walking, mantra, transcendental, plus so many more. A simple meditation exercise is to repeat a word of your choice in your mind.

HOW TO DO A BASIC MEDITATION: Sit in a chair or on the floor. You can close your eyes, or set your gaze a few feet in front of you. Choose a word that you will recite in your mind. This could be one, peace, relax, or whatever word or phrase resonates with you, or simply allow your attention to rest on your breath. When you have other thoughts arise, gently come back to your word or phrase with a non-judgmental attitude. **TRY THIS:** 5 min. Work toward 20 minutes per day.

7 BENEFITS OF MEDITATION:

1. Reduces stress: Meditation allows people to take charge of their own nervous system and emotions.
2. Improves concentration: Meditation has been linked to a number of things that lead to increased ability to focus.
3. Encourages a healthy lifestyle: Don't be surprised if you find yourself naturally gravitating toward healthy food choices, less caffeine or quitting tobacco once you begin a meditation practice.
4. Increases self-awareness: You will begin to feel more comfortable in your own skin.
5. Increases happiness: Studies have shown that brain signaling increases in the left side of the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for positive emotions, while activity decreases in the right side, responsible for negative emotions.
6. Slows aging: Meditators also have longer telomeres, the caps on chromosomes indicative of biological age (rather than chronological).
7. Benefits cardiovascular and immune health: *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, showed that 40 of 60 high blood pressure patients who started meditating could stop taking their blood pressure medication.

MEDITATION APPS & PODCASTS

- **Calm:** Calm is one of the most popular apps for meditation, relaxation, and getting some much needed shut-eye. Access some of their free resources [HERE](#).
- **Headspace:** Headspace is an app that teaches you how to meditate. Meditation has been shown to help people stress less, focus more and sleep better. Headspace is meditation made simple, teaching you life-changing mindfulness skills in just a few minutes a day.
- **Ten Percent Happier:** This app offers video and meditation combos that make it fun and straightforward to learn to meditate, includes a library of 500+ guided meditations on topics ranging from anxiety to parenting to focus, ensuring that you can find exactly the right meditation for the moment. The app also features bite-size stories, wisdom, and inspiration that you can listen to while on the go.
- **Ten Percent Happier Podcast:** 10% Happier author Dan Harris talks with meditation pioneers, celebrities, scientists, and healthexperts about training our minds.

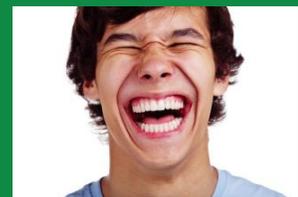
Carver County Launches COVID-19 Call Center

Carver County Public Health recently launched its COVID-19 Call Center. Community members can call (952) 361-1559 with questions about COVID-19 testing, vaccine eligibility, and assistance in registering for a vaccine for individuals unable to sign-up online. The Call Center is available Monday-Friday from 8:00am-4:30pm. If you receive a voicemail, please leave a message and a staff member will return your call.



April is also National Humor Month! The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor states that the strategic use of humor sparks connection, increases influence, improves communication and can be used as a competitive advantage in any industry. What's more, humor provides innumerable benefits to our overall health and well-being, including reduced stress, greater resilience, decreased depressive symptoms, and even increased pain tolerance. How about these statistics?

- ✓ 39% decrease in stress simply anticipating humor
- ✓ 2 times more productive after taking a humor break
- ✓ 23% increase in memory recall after watching a funny video



Not sure where to start with your employee wellness program? We are here to help! Carver County businesses can receive free worksite wellness consulting through the SHIP grant. Contact Kris Keykal at kkeykal@advantagehealth.com or 612.823.4470 for more info!

