

# Take a Stress Pause

Are things speeding up in your life? Do you feel like you just don't have a moment to take a breather? Are you feeling overwhelmed, over-stimulated, and pressured to make too many decisions too fast?

Fortunately, this easy exercise is an ideal way to create a buffer from speed and stress and to slow things down a bit. If you're stressed and reactive, and feel that you would benefit by stepping back, this could be just the way to open a new doorway. In addition, you can take a stress pause anytime you feel stuck in an old habit or routine.

## Instructions:

Use the acronym S-T-O-P to take a pause anytime, anywhere. Simply state each letter and then follow along with what it means. "STOP" doesn't mean to stop everything, but rather, to be more present, aware, at ease, and in flow with what is happening all around you. From this centered, flexible, and aware place, you don't have to react out of fear or impulse. You can be more available in order to make better choices and observe all the options and possibilities before you.

**S – Stand:** Slow the pace by standing in place and taking two or three nice, calming, deep belly breaths. By doing this you are making a conscious and purposeful decision to slow things down. You are deciding to be in control, rather than let external pressures trigger you to reaction and stress.

**T – Tune-in:** At this moment, tune in to your body with full presence. Feel yourself grounded and connected to the earth, just like a favorite tree. Slowly scan the body starting from the tops of the toes and moving up to the top of the head. As you move upwards, be aware of where you may be holding onto tension or negative emotions. Breathe into the tension and let it go. Optionally, you can visualize breathing into a soothing white or golden light into that tension-filled area. Then as you exhale, imagine your breath carrying the tension down the body – finally releasing it through the bottom of the feet. Take as many breaths as needed to release tension and negativity.

**O – Observe:** Change the channel by closely observing your external environment. Focus on the surroundings, taking note of at least three unique or pleasant things – colors, shapes, objects, sounds, or textures that you like. If you are in a familiar environment, look for even the smallest detail you may not have noticed before – like the space between the wood grains on the table, or the different shades of color in the carpet. Just immerse and ground yourself in your surroundings like this for a minute or two as you find something that delights or surprises you.

**P – Possibility:** Pause to reflect on the openness, spaciousness, and possibilities that lie before you. You have just gone off auto-pilot and are now free to choose a new and beneficial direction. If you had been feeling reactive or angry, for example, you can look with fresh eyes at the variety of different choices and options before you. Who says that right now you couldn't sing, smile, call a supportive friend, take a nice walk, or get a scoop of your favorite ice cream? You might even just feel pleased that you have completed this exercise. Stretch your mind and see how far it can go!

Reflections:

What was it like for you to S-T-O-P in this way? What did you notice most?

What kinds of new possibilities could this practice help you to find? How could you get creative with using this practice?