

# REDUCING STRESS

Stress is our mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions to any perceived demands or threats. Any change, good or bad, requires adjustment and can cause stress. This handout offers healthy strategies for coping with stress.

## Relaxation Techniques

### DEEP BREATHING

Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and bring your attention to your breathing. Imagine that you have a balloon in your stomach. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates. Breathing from your abdomen, inhale through your nose slowly to a count of four. Pause and then slowly exhale through your mouth to a count of four. Repeat for 3 to 5 minutes.

### TENSE-RELEASE

Alternate tensing and relaxing muscle groups for 5-10 seconds while seated:

- Raise your eyebrows and wrinkle your forehead. Hold...and release.
- Clench your jaw and close your eyes as tightly as you can. Hold...and release.
- Lift your shoulders up to your ears. Hold...and release.
- Tense your fists and your arms. Hold...and release.
- Tense your leg and buttocks muscles. Hold...and release.
- Tense your toes and feet. Hold...and release.
- Tighten all of the muscles in your body as tight as you can. Hold...and release, feeling all tension leaving your body.

### GUIDED IMAGERY

With your eyes closed, take a moment to create, in your mind's eye, an ideal spot for relaxation. You can make it any place – real or imagined. See yourself completely relaxed and take a few deep breaths. Once you have created this place in your mind, you can go back there whenever you want an escape from your busy day or a stressful situation.

### MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Focus your awareness on the present moment with all of your senses. Notice in detail what it looks like, feels like, smells like, sounds like and tastes like (if applicable). Give the activity at hand your full attention free from distractions. Breathe slowly while experiencing the activity and do not focus on any particular thought.



## Other Stress Reduction Ideas

### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity has stress - busting benefits like pumping up your endorphins, improving your mood, and increasing self-esteem. Try to do something active for 20 minutes a day.

### SLEEP

Good sleep habits reduce stress. Try to get 7-8 hours of sleep a night and/or take short naps (less than 30 minutes).

### EATING SMART

Eating breakfast and eating regularly through- out the day (every 3-5 hours) prepares your body to better cope with stress. Skipping meals lowers your energy and your ability to focus. Choose more whole and unprocessed foods, and eat a lot of colorful fruits and vegetables to feel your best.

### MASSAGE

Massages release a hormone called oxytocin, which turns off your stress response and promotes a sense of relaxation. Give yourself a hand or foot massage or exchange massage with a friend.

### CHANGING YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Changing your environment can create a sense of calm and help to relieve stress. Suggestions include getting rid of clutter, bringing something from nature into your room (like a small plant or fountain), using natural light, displaying images or photographs that inspire you.



### AROMATHERAPY

Aromatherapy is a scientifically proven technique which uses your sense of smell to change your mood. Use the guide below to relieve stress, energize your mind and body, and encourage better health.

You can purchase ready-made products in the form of shower gels, lotions, room spray, candles, incense or tea; or buy essential oils to create your own experience.

To ease these emotions:	Try these herbs or oils:
Anger	Chamomile, Jasmine, Marjoram, Rose, Rosemary, Ylang-Ylang
Anxiety	Chamomile, Lavender, Orange, Neroli, Sandalwood
Fear	Cedarwood, Fennel, Ginger, Patchouli, Sandalwood, Thyme
Fatigue (physical)	Basil, Ginger, Lemon, Lavender, Orange, Peppermint, Rosemary
Sadness	Benzoin, Jasmine, Rose, Rosewood



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