

Tips for Reducing Stress & Anxiety

Stress and anxiety are your brain's way of warning you about a potential danger. Stress in and of itself is not a bad thing. In small doses, stress can motivate us to get things done or make necessary changes in our life. If we were chill about everything, we probably wouldn't get much done. The problem comes when we experience high levels of anxiety or when we are stressed or anxious for long periods of time.

Managing stress is all about developing habits and skills that give our brain the best chance of handling stressful experiences.

Give yourself space

Your brain needs time that isn't filled with responsibilities and structured activity. It needs a break from constantly focusing on an activity and filtering all of the information we are taking in. When we have breaks in our day, our brain uses that time to process events, be creative, and build neural connections that we need to complete tasks later on.

Here are some ideas:

- Get outside and go for a walk
- Daydream (try to keep it positive!)
- Listen to music
- Take a 10-30 minute nap

Unplug

Take time away from social media and technology. When we are constantly bombarded with stimulation (bright lights and sounds), information, and social interaction, our brains are in a constant state of arousal.

Tech companies design apps to keep you coming back for more. That's how they make their money. Take back control by setting limits on the amount of time you're on electronics each day rather than mindlessly engaging.

Try going an entire afternoon (or even a day!) without looking at your phone or watching TV. Make it into a game and see who can resist the longest.

SEEDS for brain health

Social interaction

Exercise - 30 minutes a day

Education: learn something new!

Diet: fuel your brain with good nutrition and plenty of water

Sleep: 8-9 hours a night



Sometimes stress is made worse because our brains are fixated on all the things we need to do or on everything that could go wrong. When this happens, you can use these exercises to bring your mind back to the here and now.



TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Taking slow, deep breaths sends signals to our brain that you are safe and can relax. It helps our brain switch from the fight/flight/freeze response to a more relaxed, sustainable state of being. If you're feeling stressed...

- Sit up straight. You can close your eyes while you do this or keep them open, whichever is more comfortable for you.
- Breathe in through your nose. Breathe in slow and deep into your stomach, not just into your chest.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth. Try to push all of the air out of your lungs.
- Repeat at least 3 times or until you feel more relaxed.

Practice this every day! Like any skill, it takes practice to help your mind relax.



COLOR CHALLENGE

Pick a color.

Count how many objects containing that color are in the room.



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Write about what is on your mind. Getting the thoughts out of your head and onto paper helps you to work through whatever is bothering you.

- What emotions are you feeling underneath the stress?
- What events are triggering your stress?
- If you're worried about certain outcomes, how likely are these outcomes? How will you handle it if they do happen?
- What is within your control that you can change?
- What is outside of your control that you need to accept?