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# 16 ways to beat stress

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RedEye

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It's common for the frazzled to seek comfort in a stiff drink, a cigarette or a pile of junk food. But after the immediate gratification, too much of any of those vices can actually increase stress, studies show. Psychologists Howard Weissman and Nancy Molitor; Stress Institute CEO Kathleen Hall; and life coach Ruth Klein, a.k.a. "The De-Stress Diva," suggest healthier ways to reduce stress.

1. **Listen to music.** Research shows that listening to music increases the brain's serotonin, a neurotransmitter that has a calming effect. Any music works except for heavy metal, which has actually been shown to produce more stress.
2. **Laugh.** Laughing literally loosens you up. Stress reduces the diameter of your arteries by 35 percent; laughing increases artery diameter by 22 percent, lowering blood pressure.
3. **Tell yourself how awesome you are.** Memorize a short affirmation—"I am strong," for example—and repeat it to yourself a few minutes every day. Research has shown that people who repeat affirmations to themselves have lower cortisol levels than those who don't.
4. **Exercise.** Experts recommend at least 30 minutes of exercise every other day for stress reduction. If you're at work and think you might snap before getting to the gym, walk up and down the stairs, or try deskercises to relieve the tension. The University of California lists some good ones at [uclivingwell.ucop.edu/deskercise](http://uclivingwell.ucop.edu/deskercise).
5. **Fill up on omega-3 fatty acids.** Found in white fish, fish oil and canola oil, among other foods, omega-3 fatty acids are important in neuron membrane development and have been shown to benefit people with depression, cardiovascular disease and other illnesses. They can be taken as supplements.
6. **Eat breakfast every day.** Make sure every breakfast contains some protein, which helps sustain energy.
7. **Have a meal with a good friend at least once a week.** When we sit across from someone we know, our bodies produce oxytocin, which is a calming hormone.
8. **Eat foods rich in vitamin B6,** which increases the release of the calming brain chemical






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serotonin. B6 is found in bananas, turkey, tuna and sweet potatoes, among other foods.

9. **Breathe.** This is an important one. When you're stressed, your breaths become quick and shallow, limiting oxygen to your brain and making you feel foggy. Breathing deeply has been shown to clear your head and lower blood pressure.

10. **Perform a mini meditation.** For one to three minutes, close your eyes—or if you can't close them because you're at work or driving, focus your eyes on something—then take several deep diaphragmatic breaths, and repeat an affirmation with each deep breath. You also can do this with a string of beads, breathing and affirming as you touch each bead.

11. **Drink chamomile tea.** Chamomile has been shown to act as a mild sleep aid, digestive aid and anti-inflammatory.

12. **Soak your feet in water with Epsom salt.** Epsom salt can be absorbed through the skin to increase levels of magnesium and sulfates in the body. Raising magnesium levels is believed to help reduce stress, improve circulation, lower blood pressure and flush toxins out of the body.

13. **Find your pressure points.** If you have a headache on the left side of your head, apply pressure to the web between your thumb and forefinger on your right hand. Don't squeeze; just push in. If the headache is on the right side of your head, apply pressure to your left hand.

14. **Inhale lavender.** Research has shown that lavender calms and soothes people's moods and can help insomnia and anxiety. Boil lavender oil in water, inhaling the steam for aromatherapy. It also comes as massage oils, lotions and candles.

15. **Knit.** Knitting has become a trendy way to de-stress in recent years, with more than one in three American women saying they knit or crochet, a 51 percent increase from 10 years ago, according to the Craft Yarn Council of America. Knitting has been found to reduce heart rates by 11 beats per minute and lower blood pressure, according to a study from Harvard Medical School Mind/Body Institute.

16. **Make a checklist of all the behavior changes you plan to make to reduce stress.** For example, write down that you will do 20 sit-ups every morning, have lunch away from your desk, call a friend to meet up for dinner, find a financial planner, etc.—and then check off the items as you do them.