

# 53 Stress Reducers

1. **Laugh** : When we laugh or smile blood flow to the brain is increased, and levels of cortisol and epinephrine are decreased lowering blood pressure, diminishing other cardiovascular problems, increasing white blood cells to improve immunity. Saranne Rothberg started [www.ComedyCures.com](http://www.ComedyCures.com) while she was battling an aggressive breast cancer. It is a charity to help those experiencing tragedy to have some humor. "First you have to mourn, then you can give pain the freedom to leave" she says. Adults manage 15 laughs per day and toddlers laugh an average of 400 times per day! Rent comedy videos once per week for comedy night: Rat Race, Me, Myself and Irene, Naked Gun, Naked Gun 2, Best of Bill Cosby, Some Like it Hot. (Stuart Mclean on CBC).
2. **Breathe**: Square breathing is a technique where you pick one corner, count to four as you exhale. Reach the next corner on the inhale, leave it on the exhale. Four corners four deep breaths. This increases the amount of carbon dioxide in the body, which reduces the panic response.
3. **Dance**: make up a CD or tape of your favorite "Get Moving" music such as " Jump In", "I Will Survive" and "I'm So Excited". Take a moment and dance around the living room.
4. **Have sex**: make a date with your partner and keep it!
5. **Take a hot bath or a steaming shower.** I saw an ad for a bathtub once that said "stress can't swim". Visualize all the troubles of the day melting in the water and then traveling down the drain.
6. **Sweep**: Too tired to do anything? Sweeping is the most mindful way to be productive especially in the fall when the leaves keep falling! Just concentrate on sweeping and nothing else.
7. **Put yourself first**: If you don't have yourself then you can not be as effective in the other roles you play in your life. It isn't being selfish, it is being self-respectful. See "Family First" by Dr. Phillip McGraw. Start the day with "What would I love to do today?" and schedule time for it. If you don't know what you love to do then go through "The Artists Way" by Julia Cameron. This is a constructive form of rewarding yourself instead of doing it with addictive behaviors such as drinking alcohol, taking over the counter drugs or using sweets or coffee.
8. **Practice being mindful**: Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn Ph.D teaches this in his 8 week stress reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center as explained in his book "Full Catastrophe Living". Being mindful is living in the moment, not multitasking. The great leaders are very engaged people. They concentrate on what is at hand. Multitasking is the enemy of mindfulness. Thich Naht Hanh explains in his books when you wash dishes, wash dishes, when you have a cup of tea, drink only the cup of tea and do nothing else. This exercise helps you to live in the moment and be mindful. Be with the person you are with in that moment, to truly listen to them and see them and hear them. It is okay to do two things at once as long as you don't need to do either of them particularly well.
9. **Establish some healthful rituals**: Jim Loer, performance psychologist who wrote "The Power of Full Engagement" with Tony Schwartz, says: You tell me you're impatient, you're tired and you have very little tolerance for frustration? It's amazing how creating a ritual as basic as getting regular exercise, or even setting a date night AND making a big deal out of it, can change your life." Whatever ritual it is, making a big deal out of it means to take it seriously and keep the date with yourself.
10. **What IS working in your life**: this is the basis of the gratitude journal. We all know what is not working, but writing five things per day in a lovely book (Simple Abundance by Sarah Ban Breathnach) or emailing your friends or spouse allows you to recognize wonderful things that are happening in your life while they are happening. You will find yourself saying: "I have to remember to write this in my gratitude journal tonight" which is a mindful exercise and makes a great diary to!
11. **Be a Social Animal**: Isolation allows us to concentrate more on our problems and on negative thinking, activities that intensify rather than help resolve stress. Call a friend, be around children or animals or do some rewarding volunteer work. Whenever you are supported by loved ones, you'll suffer less. Nurture these relationships!
12. **Know your stress personality**: What do you do when you are stressed? Make note of any stressor that causes you stress and note the time and place it occurs looking for a pattern and how you feel and what you do as a result. Learn to respond to stress before it becomes a crisis.

13. **Be Aware of your stress:** Make it a conscious "response" instead of just a "reaction" according to Dr. Kabat-Zinn. He has people keep a diary of a stressful communication for one week. Answer each of these questions: 1. Describe the communication, with whom and what subject. 2. How did the difficulty come about? 3. What did you really want from the person or situation? What did you actually get? 4. What did the other person want? What did they actually get? 5. How did you feel during and after this time? 6. Has this issue been resolved yet? How might it be? This exercise increases awareness. Quote: When Buddha was asked if he was a god he replied "No, I am awake!"
14. **Back Away From Conflict:** "A great general is one that knows how to back away from conflict". This is easier said than done. Count to 10. For me that is not enough. I ask myself if I need to respond right away or not. Usually I do not. Then I give myself one or two days to give myself a chance to stand back for a better look at the situation. Usually within this time frame I have a much healthier attitude and can deal with the situation constructively rather than destructively. You might need to see a counselor to help you learn new skills. See "Anger" written by Nhat Hanh.
15. **Have a mantra:** Most of us say something when we are under stress and it is usually a four-letter word! The idea here is to repeat to yourself a useful word or phrase to get you through. Most of us have a very negative mantra: ie You idiot! Or "You have to do better". Some positive suggestions are: "Breathe!" "What I do is enough!" "I am the still point of my world." "There is a solution." "I am doing the best I can and so is everyone else." "Aum and "HU" are two good words to chant to yourself for a calming effect.
16. **Make your job work for you:** The most stressful position is not at the top but those who have the least control of their job situation. Try to be an active participant. Passivity leads to lack of personal control. Attend meetings and be sure your voice is heard in the workplace. Be supportive of co-workers and peers. Good relationships help establish a sense of control. Are you in the wrong job? Consider improving your skills in your leisure time so that you can change jobs. See "What Color is Your Parachute".
17. **Take a "Time Out" Daily:** Schedule down time in the midst of everything. During my washroom breaks I do some deep breathing while I am sitting on the "White Phone". Guys can start doing this too just so they can sit still for a few moments. Take some golden moments to do nothing. Step outside for a breather, water your plants, do some neck rolls or stretches at your desk, squeeze your handball, smell some aromatherapy. Standing in line or waiting for an appointment? Use your relaxation techniques here. Square breathing, collect your thoughts, start on your gratitude list. Use earplugs if necessary Ohropax from Germany.
18. **Be decisive:** indecision prevents action and contributes to a loss of control. If you are having difficulty making a decision try "mind mapping" where the angles to a situation are written out and makes it easier to see more of the whole picture.
19. **Dance With the Rhythm of Life:** If things aren't going well during your day,, stop and leave it for another day. There is a rhythm to life. Don't force the issue. Try again another day.
20. **Break the stress/sleeplessness cycle:** lack of sleep can make you moody, angry, more vulnerable to illness and the daily stressors that stalk you. If you are not sleeping your body does not heal. The average person needs 7-9 hours per night.
21. **Adapt your environment:** Make your environment work for you. Choose color and lighting to reduce stress at home and at work if possible. Put in full spectrum lighting. Control noise as much as possible and if not incorporate white noise such as a water fountain. Have healthy plants in your space. Use books on Feng Shui to give you ideas.
22. **Choose winners:** choose to develop relationships with people who are optimistic and have high self esteem and develop these same qualities in yourself to make yourself a good friend too!
23. **Nurture your Spirituality:** Take 5 minutes a day to contemplate: "Who am I? Why am I here? What are my strengths?" Contemplation is what I like to call it where the monkeys of the mind are escorted off the stage to allow the higher self to get a word in edgewise! This can be a very useful problem solving technique. Take yourself on a self-guided visualization to what I call "a healing place" and see what wisdom or insights you can come back with. Write this down and see how it can help you "Live your best life" , as Oprah suggests, throughout the day.
24. **Pen pent up emotions:** Julia Cameron talks about "morning pages" in her book "The Artist's Way. This is worrying on paper. When these thoughts are put on paper they are no longer cluttering up your subconscious mind,

leaving you time to be more AWAKE in your day-to-day life rather than worrying. Set time aside each day, either in the morning or at the end of your day. You will be amazed at the power of this tool!

25. **Frown on Perfection:** adopt the mantra: "What I do is just enough". Ask yourself: "Is it worth dying for?" and then complete a task to the best of your ability to allow time for the FUN stuff in your life.
26. **Identify Role Stress:** Most of us get stuck in a few urgent roles in our lives but forget about other IMPORTANT roles that may be less urgent. These roles are what Steven Covey has you identify in his book: "First Things First". Identify the 7 key roles you play in your life. Establish mission statements and goals for each one, and then give them some attention every week. Most of us give plenty of attention to our roles as a worker of some kind, but we pay little attention to our role as spouse, mother or father, grandparent, financial organizer, friend, member of your church, or creative coordinator. Exercise: List four people who are important to you. List the role you play in your relationship with each person. Ask yourself for each person: what activity can I plan to do with this person that will have a positive impact on our relationship and plan this into your coming week. You don't have to work on all your roles at once, focus on one substantial goal in one of your roles each week.
27. **Be a kid:** What was your favorite thing to do as a kid? Try adding that activity back into your life. Mine was coloring, so now I don't wait for any kids to hang around before I decide to color!
28. **Slow down:** try driving more slowly, talking more slowly, eating more slowly and let the phone ring a few times before answering it. One day per week don't get into your car.
29. **Separate yourself from work:** on the way home imagine that your entire office building is floating away on a huge river along with all the problems of the day. When you get home sit for a few moments in the car before getting out consciously deciding to be fully present with your loved ones. Shower and change to signal a change from the work environment.
30. **Be a pet person:** pets give us something else to think about when we are stressed. People with pets develop emotional bonds and bonding helps keep loneliness and stress at bay. Studies indicate that watching fish swim in fish tanks is very relaxing and dental offices are putting them in their waiting rooms to lower stress levels of patients. If you don't have a pet be aware of

animals in nature. They can speak to you. See "Medicine Cards".

31. **Prepare for changes and minimize uncertainty:** Research shows that the more you know ahead of time about a stressful situation the better you handle it. Anticipate how you will react when it occurs and this will trigger a milder stress response when the situation arises. Avoid voluntary change during times of stress. Change can be healthy but it may hold surprises so, for example, don't move your home when you are under a lot of stress at work.
32. **Take vacations:** get right away from the office to get a change of pace and do what you want to do. If it isn't what you want to do, it will not help with your overall stress level and you will really need your retreat weekends.
33. **Take time for retreat weekends:** vacations are often stressful in themselves. Take 2-4 days and plan to be away from any errands (I suggest that you choose a location not in your hometown, preferably a cabin somewhere where you do your own cooking. This is not a time to be social at a restaurant). Also no telephones, radio and Tv. Use this time to get caught up on some projects that need to get done and once done will decrease your stress level. However and be sure to also plan lots of time for those FUN projects that you never get time for. This is an excellent time to take stock of your life and plan for the next 12 months, and look at your 2 - 5 years goals. This weekend can be taken with your spouse so long as he/she knows the rules! It can be a great romantic time for couples to reconnect. See "Recipe for A Retreat" on my website.
34. **Get a hobby:** learn again what it is you love to do or find out new ways. Incorporate this into your life as much as possible, weekly if not daily. Quilting, fish tanks, (I know of a gentleman who has 7 fish tanks and for his stress reduction he takes care of them and then just watches them instead of TV), making cards, photography, playing an instrument, singing etc. See Artist's Way if you are stumped!
35. **Define your limits, then say no:** there is a book called "Learning How to Say No" if you need help with this one.. 1. Stop and say "I will get back to you tomorrow". 2. How important is it and does it relate to your sense of value and goals you have set for yourself? 3. Decide. 4. Respond. If you have said "No" be willing to explain that you have other priorities and would not be able to give due attention to their request. By saying "no" you are setting limits that define how you take charge of your time and space and get in touch with your feelings ie:

Learn to not answer your phone if you are wanting some time out.

36. **Set short and long term goals and prioritize them:** Once your goals are clear set priorities choosing specifically how you spend your time in order to best achieve your objectives. Just because a goal is not urgent doesn't mean that it is not important. Use your 7 roles to help you with this one. "No wind blows in favor of a ship that has no destination."

37.

- Delegate:** ask yourself "Who should handle this?" The idea being that it may not have to be you. Once you have delegated you need to establish accountability. Establish check points along the way so the task is completed satisfactorily. Set clear objectives, as well as a deadline and check in periodically to make sure the task is getting completed, asking if they need help. Once completed compliment the person so that delegation can be repeated in the future.
38. **Be in control of your finances:** we all have big expenses every year such as house taxes, income tax, car insurance. I suggest that to alleviate these stresses that we know are coming in the future, that you take all of these costs, add up their yearly total along with funds allocated for FUN stuff too like vacations, home improvements, rainy day account for unexpected expenses (like the hot water tank exploding),, retreat weekends and shopping for clothes. Take this amount and divide by the number of paychecks you get per year, and have this amount automatically deducted. This account can then be managed on a spreadsheet and the money put into an ING account or other savings where it is very difficult to withdraw funds. You want to forget that you have this money for your day-to-day financial affairs. Never again will you have to wonder where the money is going to come from for these big expenses.
39. **Sharpen your time management skills:** Become an expert organizer. Consider using a day-timer system like Franklin/Covey to help you with setting and realizing your goals. Use this day-timer system to practice preventive maintenance on your house, appliances, car, relationships and your health! This ties into your 7 key roles too.
40. **Don't procrastinate and live by lists.** If you try and get to some of your items on your to do list on a daily basis, slowly you will achieve your goals, step by step. Just do it and tell yourself you will start by doing the task for 5 minutes. Pretty soon it will 1-2 hours later and the task is getting done!
41. **Allow yourself a margin for the unanticipated:** When you budget time allotted for a certain task allow 10% more time for unexpected occurrences.
42. **Watch out for stress-induced compulsions:** Be aware of your stress triggers and learn new behaviors when you are in such situations.
43. **Take time to manage your diet:** See "Naturopathic Basic Treatment Guidelines".
44. **Replace OTC drugs with vitamins, minerals and herbs:** Over the counter drugs contribute to more stress! See "Naturopathic Strategies for Stress Management".
45. **De-clutter:** It is the small stresses that get us down. Look at what is bugging you and take care of the small details. Organize a messy kitchen drawer while waiting for the kettle to boil and see how good you feel afterwards. If something isn't working right, get it fixed.
46. **Listen to Life:** There are messages for you in your world around you to help you through the day: a billboard that says "Call Home" might mean for you to stop and check in with yourself. You may hear a snippet of a conversation or piece of music that speaks to you. Listen to these. They are sent to you to help you.
47. **Learn Tai Chi, Yoga or Pilates or go swimming:** These are not just good to maintain balance and muscular health, but are also meditative.
48. **Take a walk.:** Fill your eyes with green and walk in the trees. I call this taking a "Green Bath". In the winter I call it a "White Bath", in the summer I call it a "Blue Bath" (laying on a sunny beach) and in the fall a "Orange Bath".
49. **Be Aware of Your Body's Signals of Stress:** Your body will let you know when you are stressed. You just need to listen to it. Schedule a massage once per month for the entire year. Book them two months in advance. This is a healthful ritual and prevents stress from building up in your body.
50. **Find More Time:** Watch less TV. Listening to the news and reading the paper can be very stressful. Watch what it does to you and keep it to a minimum. Spend more time with your children at home rather than taxiing them to zillions of activities.
51. **Enjoy a spa treatment:** color your toenails a different color. A friend of mine said she was going to have a pedicure as a treat before her holidays. I say give yourself a pedicure once per week! Why wait for special occasions? Life IS a special occasion. Do some spa treatments at home but at least once per year on your birthday treat yourself and go to a real spa. Comox Beauty School offers inexpensive treatments so that students can practice on you.
52. **Use relaxation music and aromatherapy.** Make up your own CD or try the following: Sacred Well 2002 and Mega Relaxation. Get aromatherapy gadgets for your car, home and office.

53. **Re-program negative thinking.** The best way to do this is to pick a positive affirmation or goal that you want to achieve and write it out 15 times per day for at least 21 days, the time it takes to re-program or adopt a new

habit: "I am content, healthy and energetic". You will get the hang of it and want to change these goals regularly. Use "You Can Heal Your Life" by Louise Hay for more ideas.

**Resources:**

First Things First by Steven Covey

The Artists Way by Julia Cameron

Simple Abundance by Sarah Ban Breathnach

Stress: 63 Ways to Relieve the Tension and Stay Healthy by Inlander and Moran

Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Gift from the Sea by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Medicine Cards by Jamie Sams & David Carson

How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie

How To Master Change by Mary Carroll Moore

Watch the movie: "What the Bleep Do We Know?"

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