

# Stress Resource Guide

## Stress Management Techniques

### Relaxation (Diaphragmatic) Breathing

1. Sit, stand, or lie down
2. Take the posture that feels the most comfortable
3. Place your hands on your abdomen just below your navel
4. Notice your spine, your shoulders, and the location of your head
5. Make small posture adjustments, as needed
6. Slowly, count to 3; inhale through your nose while feeling your nostrils open and your belly expanding into your hands and then your chest
7. Exhale through your mouth and slowly count to 3
8. Continue to breathe in this way at your own pace for about 30 seconds up to several minutes
9. On the next exhale, release the breath and allow your breath to return to its natural rhythm and pace

### Guided Imagery

1. Find a comfortable position
2. Relax and concentrate on breathing
3. Keep an open attitude
4. Pick a visual theme (e.g., beach, forest)
5. Allow your mind to develop the image
6. Use all of your senses

## Online Resources

The following resources link to free examples of diaphragmatic breathing; guided imagery; and additional stress management techniques, such as Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), keeping a Thought Record, and relaxation response. In addition, using YouTube, you can search for any of the techniques to find free and helpful videos related to stress and stress management.

### Mental Health America

This resource contains information about the following: stress and how it can affect our lives; warning signs of stress; stress reduction strategies; and a stress screener, which can help you identify if and how stress impacts your life. Visit the Mental Health America website at <https://www.mhanational.org/conditions/stress>

### Podcasts

There are many stress management podcasts that are available for you to listen to. Try the following search terms: “managing stress,” “relaxation,” “relaxation music,” and “breathing.”

## Mobile Applications

Mobile applications are also available from the iTunes Store for iPhones and iPads. Similar apps are available for other smartphone devices. Those listed below are free; although, data charges may apply.

- Tactical Breather (Guided Breathing)
- Stop, Breathe & Think: Meditation & Mindfulness (Guided Breathing, Guided Meditations)
- Insight Timer (Guided Breathing; Guided Meditations)
- Nike Run Club (Guided Runs with Headspace; Segment of the Nike Run Club app that is a partnership between Nike and Headspace)
- Relax Now (Guided Mindfulness & Meditations)

## Stress Busting Strategies

- **Journal about your stress and worry**
  - Keep track of the times you feel stressed in a journal. Note the source of stress, how it made you feel, and what you did in response. Also, record whether the way you dealt with the situation helped you feel less stressed. This will help you identify common stressors in your life and examine how you deal with them.
- **Take the perspective of a detached observer**
  - It can help to think about our situations from a neutral perspective of a *fly on the wall*. This perspective allows us to consider alternative ways to view the problems we are facing. Thinking about your problem in the third person, describing your actions and reactions, allows you to view it without getting entangled in emotions.
- **Develop a gratitude practice**
  - Take a few minutes every day to reflect on a few things for which you are grateful. Pick a number, like 5, and, every day, record those things in a gratitude journal. You might find yourself looking for your five objects of gratitude throughout your day; this can help you realize the good things in your life.
- **Focus on the present rather than the past or future**
  - Do not dwell on what happened in the past or what might happen in the future. Directing your awareness to the current situation increases mindfulness, which can help reduce stress.
- **Do a physical activity**
  - Exercise can also increase endorphin production in your body, and it can improve your quality of sleep and increase your immune system functioning.
- **Talk to a friend**
  - Having a strong network of social support can alleviate and help you cope with stress. Ruminating on problems could make you feel worse. Instead, try to find other perspectives when talking to your friends. Check in with yourself after talking to a friend. Did the conversation make you feel better, worse, or no change? Remember, you are not alone, and many others face similar hardships.

- **Look for something potentially positive in the situation**
  - Although many situations arise that we find aversive or may not want, we have the option of changing how we view these situations. Look for ways to frame the situation as a challenge - something you can and will handle, perhaps even handle well. This doesn't mean you have to view the situation as a *good thing* but, at least, you can view it as having some potential benefit.
- **Slow down your breathing**
  - Concentrated breathing can help reduce the stress response. When you feel stressed, take a moment to focus on breathing slowly and rhythmically.
- **Relax your body**
  - Use techniques like the ones we learned about today to relax your body. PMR is another technique to help your body relax. This method is the practice of slowly tensing specific muscle groups for a period of time and then relaxing them.
- **Do something good for someone else**
  - Often, stress causes us to focus on ourselves, which can lead to ruminative thoughts, and this can impede our resilience. When we recognize the suffering or the needs of other people or other beings, we can reach out beyond ourselves to connect with others, which provides a sense of meaning that actually reduces our own stress and helps others.