

# Relax Wisely



**Have you tried deep breathing, yoga, positive affirmations, or meditation? Do they work for you? If not, the problem may lie with the relaxation techniques you are choosing. Everyone is different, so it makes sense to find a relaxation strategy that matches your specific needs.**

To decide which relaxation techniques are right for you, check off the signs of stress that you often experience and then learn about relaxation techniques that work well for each category.

## Physical

- muscle tension
- racing heart
- feeling alert or on edge
- sleeping problems

## Emotional

- irritability
- tearfulness
- anxiety
- sadness

## Cognitive

- negative thoughts
- racing thoughts
- trouble concentrating
- forgetfulness

## Emotional

- angry outbursts
- impulsive behaviors
- lack of motivation
- overeating, substance abuse

## Reducing Physical Signs of Stress

- **Physical Exercise:** Work out at the gym, go for a run, or take a brisk walk.
- **Focused Breathing:** Pair a word with slowed breathing to produce a calm, centered feeling.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation or “PMR”:** Systematically tense and then relax your body’s muscle groups. Using prerecorded audiotapes can be helpful.

## Reducing Emotional Signs of Stress

- **Journaling:** Record your feelings to release emotional energy.
- **A Time Out:** Get away with short breaks or by scheduling a vacation getaway.
- **Utilizing Supports:** Talk to a trusted friend, family member, or counselor.
- **Mindfulness:** Focus your awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.

## Reducing Cognitive Signs of Stress

- **Positive Self-Talk:** Identify and change self-defeating thinking. For example, if you tend to say to yourself, “Things will never get better,” interrupt that thought and replace it with a more positive one: “Things have been difficult before but I’ve always figured out how to make it better; I can do that again now.”
- **Affirmations:** Use affirmations, which are positive words or statements that you say to yourself to maintain a positive perspective. “I’ve got this,” “Things will get better,” or “I’m not alone,” are some examples.

## Reducing Behavioral Signs of Stress

- **Find Healthy Replacement Behaviors:** Unhealthy habits generally occur because our brain registers them as pleasurable without regard for consequences. The pleasure reward cycle involves the release of a chemical called dopamine. Dopamine is involved in creating a habit and in the experience of withdrawal if the activity is removed. Replacing the unhealthy response with a pleasurable and healthy response may make it easier to create a new healthy habit. For example, if you enjoy music, sit and listen to music for a half hour to relax instead of taking a drink as soon as you get home from work.
- **Get Help:** If destructive behaviors continue, coaching and counseling can be helpful as well as attending support groups.

Remember that not all stress is negative. However, if the stress response is activated over a long period of time without interruption, significant negative health effects are sure to follow. That’s why relaxation is so important.

What will your relaxation plan look like? Since behavior change can be difficult, make a plan and then commit to working that plan daily. Research shows that it takes as long as two months for many new behaviors to become a habit. So if you are ready to add some relaxation exercises into your daily routine, remember that you will need to work at them for quite a while before your new behavior becomes a habit.

If you need some help finding relaxation techniques that are right for you, or if you would like help making or sticking to a relaxation plan, contact Carebridge.

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