

1. Breathe

Yes, breathing is second nature, but during stressful times, that's often not the case. Under a cloud of worry, many people hold their breath or have shallow breath, or tense up so much that it's actually difficult to inhale adequate oxygen. So the first way to turn your stress level down a few notches is to focus on your breathing. Sitting up, close your eyes and inhale and exhale, nice and easy, then repeat 10 times. Or, lie down, place a pillow under your knees, and put your hand on your belly to feel your breath rise and fall. You can say the words "rising" and "falling" in your head as you take in and release your breath.

2. Eat Chocolate

Having a bad day? A piece of dark chocolate might be just the nibble you need to brighten your outlook and reduce stress. In fact, a daily dose of dark chocolate (70 percent cacao or higher) is a proven antidote to stress (Plus, it can lower your risk of stroke, diabetes and heart disease.). Cocoa beans are rich in flavonoids, an antioxidant, which counteract the anxiety-producing hormone, cortisol. If possible, opt for brands that offer the purest form, preferably organic and made from "single estate" or "single origin" beans. (Sorry, milk chocolate doesn't count.)

3. Reach for Soothing Scents

To calm those nerves in an instant, try inhaling aromas from bergamot, lavender or peppermint oils. Have a tension headache? Put one drop of lavender oil on your fingertips and massage your temples. To get the scent to permeate the room, add a few drops of essential oil to an unscented candle and light it. Not only will your space smell heavenly, this relaxation technique will calm your spirit in no time.

4. Take a Bath

Since ancient times, hydrotherapy has been practiced for its healing and restorative powers. To make your tub-time extra therapeutic, sprinkle in a handful of bath salts, turn down the lights, turn on some relaxing music and light an aromatherapy candle.

5. Get Moving

Even if it's the last thing you feel like doing at the moment, one of the quickest, most effective ways to reduce stress is to exercise. You've heard of a runner's high? The "high" comes from the endorphins that our brains produce when we get our heart pumping. Low impact exercises — walking, swimming, biking, weight lifting, yoga or Pilates — are just as effective when it comes to boosting your mood, too.

6. Picture Peacefulness

When you feel tension throughout your body, calm those nerves by closing your eyes and picturing the most peaceful place you can imagine. Whether it's curling up by the fire, lying on the beach or staring at a moonlit lake with only the sounds of lapping waves and crickets, just the thought can bring you some measure of peace.

7. Apply Pressure

Stress can cause some serious aches and pains. To manage these physical ailments, try acupressure — a Chinese therapy in which pressure is applied to the meridians, or channels, in your body. It is believed these channels connect your organs, and, when one is blocked, can result in pain or illness. To alleviate the discomfort of a headache, apply your index and middle finger to your wrist, at the base of your palm in line with your pinky finger and hold firmly for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other wrist. Similarly, you can try the point between your big toe and the second toe. Try it — it works!