

De-Stress: 31 Ways to Relax

Learn how to relax with these quick and easy ideas to relax and relieve stress in 10 minutes or less

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Don't you love it when a too-nice-for-her-own-good friend notices how busy you are and croons, "You know, you really should [relax](#) more"? Said friend is lucky you don't slam her head into the giant file cabinet you're trying to [organize](#). The thing about relaxing is that it can be just as hard to manage as everything else on your massive to-do list. You don't have time to take a leisurely walk during your midafternoon slump or pop into a spa every other night of the week. That's why we've come up with 31 quick, easy tips on [how to relax](#) — no matter what time of day it is, no matter where you are. Because the last thing you need to stress out about is not relaxing.

7:00 a.m.

Wake up every morning to what sounds like an air raid? No wonder your nerves are shot. The Timex Retro [Alarm Clock](#) Radio T247LT (\$20, [Timex Audio](#)) calmly rouses you with soft music that gradually gets louder. Warning: may lead to bizarre dreams (or nightmares) about Dave Matthews.

7:12 a.m.

Feel like a head case? Take the problem by the roots: In the shower, grab your hair close to your scalp — sounds painful, but just try it — and tug up to release tension. Then rub your fingers in small circles over your entire head to stimulate blood flow, which reduces pain and stress.

7:24 a.m.

Swap your A.M. caffeine jolt for a mug of ginseng tea. A chemical compound in ginseng not only kick-starts your metabolism the way coffee does but soothes anxiety too.

7:30 a.m.

Take the dog for her morning constitutional. Studies show that doing just 10 minutes of physical activity three times a day can improve mood, relieve depression, and increase feelings of well-being.

7:44 a.m.

Eat a breakfast that's low in fat (fat takes longer to digest and may aggravate an uneasy stomach), rich in complex carbs (to raise serotonin levels for a relaxed, calm feeling), and high in protein (which boosts brain chemicals that help you focus). Go for plain oatmeal with low-fat milk and strawberries; one slice of whole-wheat toast with low-fat peanut butter and banana slices; or a whole-grain waffle with 8 ounces of low-fat cottage cheese and sliced peaches.

7:59 a.m.

Crank up KT Tunstall's album on the way to work. Listening to music is proven to reduce stress responses such as high blood pressure and elevated heart rate.

8:42 a.m.

Sit up straight at your desk and drop your shoulders. Good posture helps you take in more oxygen and perform better during stressful activities like timed logic puzzles — aka deadlines.

9:21 a.m.

Order a Peace Lily from [ProFlowers](#). A recent study shows that people working near plants reacted 12 percent faster and were less stressed, based on blood pressure readings taken before and after a typing assignment.

10:53 a.m.

Obsessing about the meeting your boss rudely left you out of? Think acupressure. Use the thumb and index finger of one hand to squeeze the soft spot between the thumb and index finger of the other. Hold for three counts. Switch sides. Next: With thumb and index finger, gently squeeze each of your fingers all over. Use your thumb to rub each joint in a circular motion. Then hold each finger at its base and pull gently to stretch it, sliding your grip up the finger and off the tip. For extra benefits, use a dab of lavender oil, which can relieve anxiety and headaches.

11:35 a.m.

E-mail a friend for the hell of it: Social support has been proven to lower stress.

11:46 a.m.

Revel in evil giggles at [Go Fug Yourself](#) or browse YouTube for ridiculous videos. Laughing fits are a surefire way to stamp out stress.

12:30 p.m.

Your favorite lunch spot is a 5-minute walk away and you're still ordering delivery? Big mistake. Get moving on that second 10 minutes of physical activity.

1:25 p.m.

While enduring an annoying phone call, do this: Sit on the edge of your chair and straighten your left leg in front of you. Exhale and bend forward from your hips, keeping your back flat and chest lifted. Hold for 2 to 10 breaths. Do the same with your right leg. This will relieve any tension built up from sitting at your desk all morning.

2:14 p.m.

Visualization reduces stress. So go ahead, picture yourself in an elevator, happily sandwiched between two hot actors of your choice.

3:22 p.m.

Attack of the afternoon blahs! Bypass the Snickers and grab a handful of dried fruit and nuts (which are just as easy to stash in a desk drawer). You'll avoid a mood-scrambling ride on the blood sugar roller coaster.

3:47 p.m.

Keep a golf ball under your desk and rub your bare feet over it for a private foot massage. Bonus: The boss will think you play golf.

4:03 p.m.

To get oxygen flowing again, sit up straight and interlock your fingers behind your head. Pull your elbows back, stretching your upper back and chest muscles. Bring your elbows forward. Repeat.

4:27 p.m.

Still craving that Snickers? Pop a few (that's three — not a whole bag) Hershey's Kisses instead. Researchers at the University of Cincinnati have discovered that consuming small sugary snacks (note: not artificially sweetened ones) can relieve stress.

5:10 p.m.

Squeeze in your last 10 minute exercise session on the way home. If you commute via mass transit, get off at an earlier stop and walk the rest of the way. If you drive, go shopping on the way home — and carry those groceries yourself.

5:53 p.m.

Ditch the starchy suit and pumps for drawstring pants and a terry hoodie the minute you walk in the door.

6:16 p.m.

Sip a nice Shiraz (or any other red wine) to help you unwind: It contains antioxidants that mop up free radicals — molecules that can damage cells and are often released when you're under stress.

6:42 p.m.

Snuggle with your kitty. Studies show that bonding with a pet — even, believe it or not, a goldfish — can help lower anxiety. How do you bond with a goldfish? We don't want to know.

6:51 p.m.

So you're not the Food Network's Giada De Laurentiis. For ordinary mortals, less is more. Prepare a simple, healthy meal that doesn't require many ingredients. See "[Ten Foods, Forty Recipes](#)". And take leftovers for lunch tomorrow.

8:00 p.m.

When you flick on *Lost*, grab some knitting. Researchers at the Mind/Body Medical Institute in Boston found that repetitive activities can help calm your nerves.

9:05 p.m.

Stress makes chronic skin conditions like acne worse, but honey can make them better. The bee's pride and joy is a moisturizer, antioxidant, and antiviral all in one sticky package. Spread a thin layer on your face and neck, let it sit for 10 minutes, then rinse off with tepid water.

9:20 p.m.

Who said you had to do yoga on the floor? Run a bath and lie back with the balls of your feet propped against the far end of the tub. With your heels touching and toes splayed in a "V," let your knees fall open and your hands float loosely at your sides. Inhale, allowing the buoyancy of the water to arch your back gently. Pull your elbows down behind you and place your forearms on the tub bottom. Let your chin sink toward your neck and take two deep breaths. You should feel a stretch in your shoulders. Next, with your feet hip-width apart, push your toes against the far end of the tub. Raise and lower your heels, stretching your calves. Breathe in as your heels move up; breathe out as they touch the tub.

9:45 p.m.

Gently caress your guy all over until he puts down the remote. Scottish researchers have found that couples who indulge in regular sex have lower blood pressure than those who don't.

10:12 p.m.

TiVo *The Daily Show* and go to bed. A 1997 University of Chicago study found that sleep deprivation reduces resistance to stress.

10:31 p.m.

Keep a notepad and pencil bedside to write down any to-dos that are weighing on your mind — it will help you let go of anxious thoughts and drift into la-la land.

10:40 p.m.

To ease your body into sleep, tense and relax all your muscle groups sequentially. Start with your toes, move to your calves, then your knees and thighs, and keep going until you get to your face. Deep relaxation has been shown to decrease anxiety.

11:00 p.m.

If you toss and turn for more than 15 or 20 minutes, get out of bed and do a calming activity, such as reading or meditation — or, what the hell, just fire up the vibrator until you feel ready for oblivion.