

5 simple ways to ease stress right now

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Don't let stress get the better of you.



Stress gets to us all. Whether it's a demanding week in the office or relationship troubles, life's challenges overwhelm us all at some point. Not that stress is always a bad thing. In some instances, it can be just the push you need to stay motivated, meet deadlines and perform under pressure. It's when stress becomes a way of life that you need to be connected.

Our body needs time to rest and recuperate, which stress stops us from doing. Forget 'fight-or- fight'. If you're sick of feeling stressed, give these a try.

Treat yourself

Go on, you deserve it. Treating yourself to the snacks you love is a great way to relax, unwind and de-stress. Remember: choose dark chocolate over milk – it offers greater stress-busting properties. Cocoa-rich chocolate is packed with powerful flavanols, the antioxidants needed to keep your body healthy. They're also said to have cardiovascular benefits, improving circulation and lowering blood pressure – ideal for the stressed-prone out there.

And while you're at it, put the kettle on. According to a study at the *City University London*, drinking cups of tea can reduce anxiety levels. While it's unclear which ingredients create this effect, one thing's for sure: tea soothes a stressful soul.

Not only that, the study also suggests that the actual act of 'putting the kettle on' helps control stress hormones. Making tea is often a social activity; it stimulates conversation and can offer much-needed respite from everyday struggles, especially in the workplace. Jasmine for us please!



Go on YouTube, we dare you

If you feel like watching a cat video, watch a cat video. Research conducted by *Hiroshima University* found that 'cute pictures on the internet' not only evoke positive feelings, but they can also increase productivity and motivation in a work environment.

If you're racing against a deadline and feel like there's no time to lift your fingers from the keys, take a break and turn to YouTube. Contrary to popular belief, distracting yourself with seemingly 'pointless' articles in the office isn't always a bad thing; it lets your brain switch-off for a moment and stimulates creativity.

Then there's the laughter. Laughing provides instant stress relief, increases your oxygen intake, soothes tension and can even improve your immune system in the long run.



Cut down on social media

Anyone obsessed with the likes of Instagram and Twitter will agree: social media can get pretty addictive. And while it all seems like harmless fun – the odd like here, a retweet there –it can actually become pretty stressful.

Social networking is a quick and convenient way to interact with friends. Yet at the same time, many don't know when to switch off, getting lost in newsfeeds and constantly refreshing so they don't miss a second of what *could* happen. If you've developed a serious case of FOMO (fear of missing out), it's time to put down the device for your mental health.



Hug it out

If you want to feel happier, healthier and less stressed then get at least eight hugs a day, says neuroeconomist Paul Zak. Human interaction increases levels of oxytocin in the body, a hormone that encourages what's been described as "pro-social" behaviour and positive emotional responses, like relaxation and stability.

Increased oxytocin can also strengthen the immune system. It alleviates anxiety, lowers blood pressure and helps promote a healthy heart. If you're feeling down in the dumps after a hard day at work, hug it out.



Breathe!

Sometimes when stressful situations arise, we forget how to breathe. This starves essential oxygen from the brain and can leave you feeling worse than before. You have to concentrate on the task in hand but can't seem to think straight. The answer? Just breathe.

By sitting up straight and taking slow, deep shallow breaths that really fill the lungs, you can relieve tension and relax the body in a matter of seconds.

When you start to feel overwhelmed, spend ten minutes by yourself in quiet room, eyes shut and concentrate purely on your breathing. Trust us, it works.

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