

Stress Management Series Part Two

Deep Breathing, Meditation & Environment

Music

Listening to the following types of music can be helpful during breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, before bed or just anytime. Calming music: yoga, classical, meditation, Christian, easy listening, nature sounds.

Breathing Exercises

When stressed or anxious, people will often experience an increase in blood pressure and heart rate. Taking a short break and focusing on breathing helps to lower your heart rate and blood pressure.

Deep Breathing:

- Get comfortable seated or lying down.
- Breathe in through your nose. Let your belly fill with air.
- Breathe out through your nose.
- Place one hand on your belly. Place the other hand on your chest.
- As you breathe in, feel your belly rise. As you breathe out, feel your belly lower. The hand on your belly should move more than the one that's on your chest.
- Take three more full, deep breaths. Breathe fully into your belly as it rises and falls with your breath.

4-7-8 Breathing:

- Get comfortable sitting or lying down. To start, put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest as in the belly breathing exercise.
- Take a deep, slow breath from your belly, and silently count to 4 as you breathe in.
- Hold your breath, and silently count from 1 to 7.
- Breathe out completely as you silently count from 1 to 8. Try to get all the air out of your lungs by the time you count to 8.
- Repeat 3 to 7 times or until you feel calm.



Alternate Nostril Breathing

- With your right hand, bring your pointer finger and middle finger to rest between your eyebrows. The fingers we'll be actively using are the thumb and ring finger.
- Close your eyes and take a deep breath in and out through your nose.
- Close your right nostril with your right thumb. Inhale through the left nostril slowly and steadily.
- Close the left nostril with your ring finger to take a brief pause.
- Open your right nostril and release the breath slowly through the right side; pause briefly at the bottom of the exhale.
- Inhale through the right side slowly.
- Open your left nostril and release breath slowly through the left side. Pause briefly at the bottom.
- Repeat 5 cycles.

Guided Meditation

- Guided meditation can be as short as a few minutes or much longer. A narrator walks you through the meditation to find a calm peaceful state one step at a time.
- Guidance is key to helping those who are new to the practice to get the most out of the experience.
- Most guided meditations follow a similar format: the teacher explains how the mind behaves during meditation, leads you through a particular meditation technique, and then suggests how to integrate this technique into your everyday life.
- Guided Meditation can be found on YouTube, Podcasts, and many apps. One app example is called Insight Timer.

Yoga

- There are many different styles and uses for yoga.
- Some types of yoga can be used as a challenging sweaty workout, while others are used more for relaxing.
- Both types are effective for managing and reducing stress, but each has their time and place.
- Many different types of yoga can be found on YouTube. If you're looking for a challenging workout try searching Power Yoga, Intense Cardio Yoga, Power Vinyasa.
- If you're looking for something easy going and relaxing try: Gentle, Yoga, Bedtime Yoga, Yoga for Relaxation.

Environment

- Meditative Environment - Find a quiet spot and set up a special chair, mat or comfy pillows to sit on.
- Consider enhancing the atmosphere with flowers, incense or candles. Set up your own little meditation retreat in your home or a small corner that promotes a mood of peace, harmony and comfort.
- Living and Working Environment - Also be aware of your environment in everyday life.
- Clutter and disorganization in your environment can carry over into your mind. Keep a clean organized living space that makes you feel good and at ease.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This is a great technique to reduce stress and tension, especially right before bed. Find a quiet room free of distraction and sit or lay down.

- Close your eyes. Sometimes it also helps to listen to soothing music.
- Contract the muscles in both feet and hold for 10 seconds. Make sure to continue breathing throughout the contraction.
- Clear your mind and focus on the muscle contraction. As you finish the contraction focus your mind on the release in tension.
- Work your way up from your feet, to your calves, thighs, buttocks, core, chest, upper back, upper arms, lower arms, hands and finish with the neck and face; focusing on contracting each muscle group individually.