

Stress Management Techniques

Deep breathing

Adults tend to breathe in a very shallow way, using only the upper part of the chest. This tendency is exacerbated during times of stress, as breathing becomes even more shallow and rapid. Deep, slow diaphragmatic breathing releases tension from the muscles by improving the flow of oxygenated blood throughout our bodies.

Deep breathing is a form of relaxation you can learn and practice at home using the following steps. It's a good skill to practice as you start or end your day. With daily practice, you will soon be able to use this skill whenever you feel stress.

- Lie down on a bed or on the floor. Bend your knees and relax your toes. Keep your spine straight. If necessary, put a small pillow under your lower back for support.
- Place one hand on your abdomen and one on your chest.
- Inhale slowly and deeply. Pay attention to which hand moves the most. Shallow breathing causes the hand on the chest to move the most. Deep, diaphragmatic breathing causes the hand on your abdomen to move the most.
- Continue breathing deeply for 5 or 10 minutes. Concentrate on moving the hand on your abdomen more than the hand on your chest.

What is meditation?

Meditation is a form of guided thought. It can take many forms. You can do it with exercise that uses the same motions over and over, like walking or swimming. You can meditate by practicing relaxation training, by stretching or by breathing deeply.

Relaxation training is simple. Start with one muscle. Hold it tight for a few seconds then relax the muscle. Do this with each of your muscles, beginning with the toes and feet and working your way up through the rest of your body, one muscle group at a time.

Stretching can also help relieve tension. Roll your head in a gentle circle. Reach toward the ceiling and bend side to side slowly. Roll your shoulders.

Meditation: a beginner's version:

- Pick a focus word or phrase.
- Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes.
- Relax your muscles.
- Breathe slowly and naturally, repeating your focus word or phrase as you exhale.

Continue this simple practice for ten to twenty minutes. Do not worry about how well you are doing. Try to concentrate on your breathing and your focus word. If other thoughts come to mind, gently direct your mind back towards your breathing.

Positive Self Talk

Negative self-talk increases stress. Positive self-talk helps you calm down and control stress. With practice, you can learn to turn negative thoughts into positive ones.

- "I've got this."
- "I can get help if I need it."
- "We can work it out."
- "I won't let this problem get me down."
- "Things could be worse."
- "I'm human, and we all make mistakes."
- "Some day I'll laugh about this."
- "I can deal with this situation."