

Top Tips: Simple lifestyle changes help to cope with stress

1. **Exercise.** Exercise releases hormones that reduce stress, balance your mood, and help you handle everything from injuries to aches to forgetfulness. You need to exercise regularly to increase energy levels and improve your moods. Exercise produces endorphins, which make you feel great. Try a new sport or any form of physical activity.
2. **Breathe.** Did you know that you can feel brighter and happier just by breathing deeply? Sit quietly and focus on your breathing. Breathe in to your stomach for the count of 5 through your nose - hold for 10, breathe out through your mouth to the count of 20; repeat at least 5 times. This exercise balances the serotonin, the chemical that regulates happiness in your brain. Relax in peace and quiet for 30 minutes a day.
3. **Don't beat yourself up for not being perfect.** We all have negative thoughts and emotions, and "bad" desires or feelings. It's not the feelings, even the supposedly "bad" ones, that really harm us – it's worrying about them, repressing them, fighting them.
4. **Start a gratitude journal** and write in it every day. Write down things that make you feel grateful. Try to add new things every day but do not stress over it if you feel stuck. The point is to notice and be grateful for the good things in your life.
4. **Get eight hours sleep** each night, preferably at the same time is the best way to feel energised. Sleep increases serotonin. Brisk exercise just before bed, a warm drink and some soft music may lull you off to sleep easier than you think. If not, get up and write down all the things that are bothering you, or list all the jobs you want to do tomorrow on a piece of paper. The act of writing things out gets your unconscious mind to work on problems whilst you sleep and also lets your physical body relax.
5. **Engage your mind.** Mental health studies consistently show that humans who engage their minds with activities like puzzles, reading, art, travel, new hobbies are happier, healthier, and live longer. This is your one, precious life – make the most of it!
6. **Volunteer to help others.** When you help others, it makes you feel good.
7. **Confront your problems as they come up.** Don't put things off to tomorrow what you can do today. Do not let a problem fester inside you. Often your problems are a lot easier to solve than you expect so get them sorted and out of the way. Talk any problems you have through with other people rather than bottling them up.
8. **Manage your time.** Much of the stress we feel is because we overload our lives. Write down your 3 most important things that must get done each day. Make a separate list of all the other things you'd like to address. Just concentrate on those 3, and if you get more done, great. As you reach each goal, tick it off on a progress chart. You will feel like you are achieving something and it will encourage you to keep progressing. If you're working on a project, don't answer the phone, don't surf the internet and set aside a few specific times in the day for checking your email.

9. **Do less better.** Delegate - don't try and take on responsibility for everything where you can share the burden. It's easy to say "yes" and difficult to say "no", but in the long run, doing less will benefit everyone in your life far more.
10. **Acceptance.** When you face something unexpected it is very easy to react negatively by arguing endlessly or by fuming silently. It is much better to take a deep breath, stay calm and accept that there are some things in life you just cannot change. When we hold a grudge, it builds stress in our lives. If we forgive and forget the perceived offenses, then we will lower our stress and live happier, healthier lives.
11. **Balanced diet.** Stress causes increased metabolic demands. A well balanced diet is even more important in order to have energy. Avoid sugary snacks and drinks and processed food, as well as over doing other stimulants such as caffeine, alcohol, or nicotine. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Eat fruits such as strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and cherries their full of feel good nutrients.
12. **Take Fish oil.** Fish oil is essential for cardiovascular health, mental health, and antioxidant support. Fish oil is a star stress tool because it's a double positive: fish oil addresses both physical and mental stress.
13. **Keep hydrated.** Our bodies are nearly 70% water. Water is important for circulation and cleanses wastes and toxins from the body. If you are not drinking enough, these toxins accumulate and cause headaches and stress.
14. **De-clutter** your desk and your home.
15. **Make downtime really downtime.** Everyone has to take work home from time to time, but try your best to have non-working weekends, nights and vacations. Make a serious commitment to playtime. Dedicate one night every week to pure fun: have dinner with friends, enjoy family movie night, or take a yoga class.
16. **Take a break.** The whole concept of vacation and recreation were conceived of for a reason. We have to give our minds and bodies a break occasionally. It's amazing how a brief change of scene literally refreshes your spirits and helps you gain some perspective. On a daily basis, apply this shift logic and take a brisk walk outside or call a friend.
17. **Reward Yourself.** When working under a deadline, you're more likely to finish on time if you have something to look forward to at the end of the day. When you're driven by anticipation instead of fear of missing the deadline, you'll work more efficiently.
18. **Make love!**