

Support stress with these healing habits

Stress is part of life. Whether it's a job interview, difficult breakup, or financial burdens, we all deal with things that cause us stress.

We can usually bounce back from most stress with the right support, and some types of stress can even be good for us — like when we exercise or complete a meaningful task.

But when the stress we're facing is severe or prolonged over time, such as from racial discrimination, microaggressions, or toxic stress resulting from trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), it can negatively affect our bodies, brains, and mood—and other challenges physically and mentally.

Luckily, we can work on that. **Research has found there are specific activities everyone can do to lower our day-to-day stress and heal.** We've included habits you can build into your daily routine to manage stress and help relax your body and mind. While some practices may not be right for everyone, it's important to find what works best for you and your lifestyle.

Fuel your body



Your body is influenced by what you consume on a daily basis. The food you eat directly affects your mood, your energy levels, and your focus.

Eat and drink what you need to feel comfortable, upbeat, and a good balance between calm and energized during the day.

Be mindful as you're eating. Try to focus on the experience of tasting and enjoying your food, instead of gulping it down while doing something else.

Try to stay hydrated. Adding a bit more water, tea, juice, soup, milk, yogurt, fruits, or vegetables to your day can help.

Learn some new recipes — maybe from your grandma or auntie, or from a cooking app. Experiment with pairing your favorite herbs and spices with veggies to get your daily fix.

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FOR MENTAL HEALTH

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Take Action for Mental Health at **TakeAction4MH.com**

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Prioritize your sleep



Disconnect from social media and screens at least one hour before you plan to go to bed. While the world of social media is very inviting, we need more sleep and rest now more than ever. Sleep helps to regulate and lower our stress hormones and gives our body and mind a break. If you struggle with getting the recommended 7–9 hours, try prioritizing finding moments to relax and recover.

If more sleep isn't possible right now, lying down to rest with your eyes closed and breathing deeply also helps reduce stress and can improve your mood.

Create sleep habits that work for you. **Learn more about what helps your mind and body relax naturally.** Maybe it's a hot shower, listening to music, stretching, or anything that signals your body to unwind and get ready for sleep.

Don't force it. If you have a hard time falling asleep, try doing something else to relax and try again.

Keep in mind that there are different types of rest – physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, creative, sensory – and that your needs may differ depending on the day or season of life. Pay attention to yourself and your needs.

Move your body and make time for fun



Physical activity relieves stress, increases your energy, and makes you feel good. Find what you enjoy – whether it's dancing, stretching, walking, bowling, roller skating, or playing basketball – and try to do it at least once a week. It will get you out of your routine, and gives you an opportunity to connect with your people. And remember, you don't have to make it a big thing and dedicate all your time to it. Find ways to fit it in throughout the day in short bursts, or other parts of your week.

Take activity breaks. For example, if you are sitting at a desk all day, make sure you leave the screen and take breaks. If you have to stand a lot, find time to stretch and move around once an hour if you can. It's good for your body and will refocus your mind too.

Have fun! Regularly engaging in carefree, relaxing activities can help to counteract stress, boost creativity, and uplift our mood.

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Build supportive relationships



Make the time and effort to nurture the relationships you have. Get together for lunch, talk on the phone, or go for a walk together. We often thrive when we feel connected to other people.

Develop new relationships. Reach out to people you meet in your community, at school, or during events to get to know each other better.

Connect with your community(ies). Having a strong sense of belonging is a powerful protective factor against stress. Chances are, you belong to at least one community whether it be based on your faith or spirituality, your identity or cultural background, your work or school, or your neighborhood. Think about how you can continue to engage with your community and strengthen your relationship to it. If you don't feel you belong to a community at the moment, explore where you might be able to find one that's right for you. There are hobby-related meet-ups, book clubs, community sports leagues, and more that could work for you.

Spend time in a calm environment



You deserve a place where you can be comfortable and let your mind process on your own terms. That can be a coffee shop, your room, any place where you feel safe and comfortable.

If you feel safe to do so, spend some time outside. Sun, trees, and fresh air can lower your heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones. You don't have to go far. Your local park will work. A walk around the block. Even a balcony, front stoop, or yard can give you a boost.

You can also bring nature inside to you. **Open your window shades and let in natural light.** Surround yourself with indoor plants or grow a mini herb garden in a planter. Listen to nature sounds like ocean waves, a burbling creek, or rainforest birds on YouTube.

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Be present and mindful



It's not always easy to clear your mind, but practice being present and in the moment. **Avoid dwelling on the past.** Try to enjoy what you're experiencing right now.

Be present for small rituals you already do, like pouring your coffee, eating, or drinking your tea.

Try some new mindful, calming exercises during stressful moments. For example, close your eyes for 10 seconds and hum your favorite song. Or feel the texture of your clothes and take some deep breaths.

Meditation is another way to practice mindfulness. Close your eyes and focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. You can find guided meditation sessions (including quick one-minute ones) on YouTube, Spotify, or Apple Music.

Mindful movement is an excellent way to strengthen your mind-body connection and practice engaging in the here and now. **Any exercise or movement can be a mindful practice as long as you're focusing on your breath and bodily sensations.** Some examples are yoga, tai chi, walking, weightlifting, and stretching.

Keep a gratitude journal. Write or voice-record what you're looking forward to today. Or jot down what you're grateful for before bedtime.

Be proactive in caring for your mental health



Regularly practicing stress-reducing habits will benefit your mental health.

It's okay if you can't do them every day! Give yourself grace as you are repairing and healing.

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. If you are feeling on the edge, talking with a trained mental health professional can be a meaningful step towards living the life you deserve. There are plenty of options that cost little to no money. If you have insurance, many plans cover mental health services. You can also look into sliding-scale or no-cost community mental health services.

Therapists often offer free consultation calls, so don't be afraid to ask questions about their approach, specialties, comfort level working with your cultural background, and anything else that is important to you.

Checking in with yourself regularly on how you're feeling can help head off a mental health crisis before it gets out of control.

If you find yourself thinking about suicide or hurting yourself, reach out to a trusted person or **call or text 988 right away** to speak with a trained counselor at the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. It's free, open 24/7, and language interpreters are available if needed.

2SLGBTQIA+ people can call, text, or chat with counselors at [The Trevor Project](#).

And if you need someone to talk with but don't feel it's an emergency, **call, text, or chat with a volunteer at [CalHOPE Warm Line](#).**

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