

3 Ways to Relax in the Face of Stress

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Stress can come in many forms: overwhelming work demands, a health crisis, an argument with a loved one or wanting circumstances to be different than they are.

When we're unable to change the circumstances that are causing stress, it can be helpful to have strategies to change how we react to the stressor. Even when you can't change the world around you, you can change yourself. With those changes, you can find calm in the midst of stress.

There are many techniques designed to help you calm the body, slow racing thoughts and quiet the mind. The ability to use these strategies to change your stress levels often depends on trying a variety of strategies to find one that works for you and practicing on a regular basis.

3 Relaxation Strategies:

1. If you're an auditory person, music can be an effective tool in reducing muscle tension and calming your mind. Nostalgic music, that is, music that calls to mind a sentimental experience or psychological comfort, can aid in creating a calm effect. Choose a piece of music that has some nostalgic component to it. Listen to the music with your full attention. As you listen notice the different musical instruments, the lyrics (if there are any), and the tone and tempo of the music. Allow yourself to experience the warmth of the nostalgic feeling. Let your body grow heavier and more relaxed as you listen.
2. Those who experience physical tension when under stress might benefit from progressive relaxation or other physical techniques. Progressive relaxation involves tensing and releasing the muscles of the body, until your muscles feel relaxed. For shoulder tension, for example, you might raise your shoulders to your ears, straining the muscles of the neck and shoulders and holding that pose for about 30 seconds and then relax, allowing the shoulders to fall and the muscles to relax. Repeat one or two times. Examples of other physical techniques include yoga, stretching, or jogging.
3. Mindfulness- creating a focus for your attention—is a technique that can induce calm and provide focus. Breathing is central to the practice of mindfulness. You might try sitting quietly for several minutes and while breathing slowly, pause at the top of an inhalation and at the bottom of an exhalation. These brief pauses can help to keep you focused when your mind has a tendency to wander.

There is no one right way to relax. Each person is different and different stressors might effect you differently. But we all face times when events in life are out of our control. When we can solve problems and reduce external strain and pressure, it is helpful to do so, but when you can't change the world around you, it's essential to have strategies to get you through.