

# Living Right®

Your Health and Wellness Awareness Bulletin

December 2018

Stress Relief

## Under stress? Take a breath

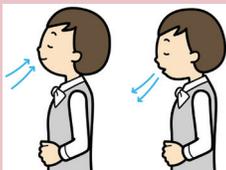
We're breathing every minute of every day – and that means we have easy access to a free stress relieving tool.

When we're under stress, breathing quickens, our heart rate goes up, and blood pressure rises.

### Using 4-7-8

Another simple stress relieving technique is to breathe in for

four seconds, hold your breath for seven seconds, and breathe out completely for a count of eight. Try this three to seven times.



Deep breathing signals the brain that it's time to relax. Both heart rate and blood pressure fall, as do stress hormones.

Deep breathing can feel odd at first, as we're often tempted to keep stomach muscles tight. However, with practice, breathing from the diaphragm to fill your lungs with air can be a benefit to your emotional health.

## To relax, practice breathing

It may seem odd to practice breathing – after all, it's something that you've done since you were born. However, practicing deep breathing can help you better use your breath to calm down and automatically turn to this technique when you feel tense.

To practice deep breathing:

- 1 Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- 2 Place a one hand on your belly (just below your ribs). Place the other hand on your chest.
- 3 Breathe in through your nose, making the hand on your belly rise. The hand on your chest should stay still.
- 4 Breathe out through your mouth, pursing your lips as if you're whistling. The hand on your belly will fall.
- 5 Repeat three to 10 times.

Try to observe each breath, focusing on the rise and fall of your chest and your breath flowing in and out. If you want, visualize that the air you're breathing in is filled with peacefulness while the air you're exhaling is filled with tension.

Because you'll get better with repetition, aim to practice focused breathing at a set time each day. You'll enjoy some calm moments while you're practicing, and if a tense situation arises you'll have an easily accessible stress-reliever at your disposal.



## Eat right to reduce stress

We naturally respond to a stressful situation with a higher heart rate, a rise in blood pressure, faster breathing, and the release of chemicals such as cortisol. When stress persists, this response can take a toll on the body, leading to high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, weight gain, and obesity.

A healthy diet with foods rich in stress-busting nutrients can help your body control the stress response. To build up your defenses, try:



### Oranges and citrus fruits.

They contain Vitamin C, which can lower the stress hormone cortisol.



### Oatmeal, quinoa, and other whole grains.

They encourage the production of serotonin, which has a calming effect. In addition, they help stabilize blood pressure.



### Beans, spinach, salmon, avocados, and almonds.

They are good sources of magnesium, which has a relaxing effect.



### Salmon, tuna, pistachios, and walnuts.

These rich sources of omega-3 fatty acids help keep stress hormones from spiking and offer protection against depression. In addition, salmon and tuna contain Vitamin D, which can lift your mood.



**Dark chocolate.** Not only does it help satisfy the craving for sweets that stress can bring, it can help reduce anxiety. As with all foods, moderation is best. Limit servings to one or 1½ ounces.

## Use a pair of Ps to ease holiday strain

Prioritizing and planning are key to cutting down on your holiday workload and the tension that comes with it.

Accept the fact that you won't be able to do everything. Decide which events, decorations, or special treats are priorities and make the rest optional.

Next, make a plan. Create a chore list at home and ask for help from family members. Perhaps turn a holiday meal into a potluck.

At work, create a daily to-do list that focuses on the most

important tasks. If the load is overwhelming, talk with your supervisor about extending deadlines or getting some help.

Make sure your schedule includes time for exercise and rest. They'll provide rejuvenation and power you toward the new year.



### By the numbers

**35 percent** of professionals are more stressed at work during the holiday season.

**32 percent** say balancing holiday events and work obligations is the most stressful aspect of the season.

Source: Accountemps survey, 2017



## 4 ways stress can be good for you

Prolonged stress wears a body down, but some short-term stress can be beneficial. That's good news, as there's little chance of living a completely stress-free life.

A 2014 study, "The Burden of Stress in America," from NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, found that 67 percent of those who said they experienced "a great deal of stress in the past month" believed that, at some point, stress had a positive effect.

Here's a look at how you benefit from short-term stress:

- 1. Motivation.** Good stress can stimulate a person to complete a task on deadline. It brings a mental state called "flow" in which awareness is heightened and one becomes absorbed in a task. The key to keeping stress at a healthful level is viewing the situation as a challenge that can be met rather than an insurmountable roadblock.
- 2. Resiliency** Learning to repeatedly handle short-term stressful situations develops a sense of control, so a person doesn't shut down when faced with more stressful events. A 2013 University of California San Francisco study found that moderate levels of perceived daily stress seemed to protect against damage from stress.



- 3. Increased immunity.** A 2012 Stanford University study found that subjecting lab rats to mild stress mobilized several types of immune cells in their bloodstreams.
- 4. Increased intelligence.** University of California Berkeley studies suggest the body's response to stress can temporarily boost memory and learning scores. Low-level stress stimulates the production of chemicals in the brain which strengthen the connections between neurons. If you've ever come out of a test wondering how you came up with the answers, you've experienced this stress benefit.

## Yes, you can run away from stress

Exercise is great for your mental health, as well as your heart and waistline. If you're avoiding exercise because of a tension-filled, packed schedule, you're missing out on an effective stress-reliever.

Physical activity encourages your body to produce endorphins – chemicals that improve your mood. It also lowers the body's levels of stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. As a result, you feel great after exercising.

In addition, being active brings a welcome break. A repetitive exercise such as jogging or using an elliptical machine lets you concentrate on the movement of your body and take your mind off your concerns.

Exercise classes also provide an opportunity for social connections that help you cope with stress.

The Department of Health and Human Services recommends 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity weekly, as well as two days of strength training activities. Check with your doctor for guidelines if you haven't exercised in a while, and motivate yourself to move with these tips:

**Put it on your schedule.** Set aside a specific time for exercise just about every day to avoid continually putting it off until "later."



**Break it down.** If you can't exercise for a long period of time, try three 10-minute walks.

**Enlist a friend.** You can motivate and support each other.



**Play with the kids.** Shoot baskets, go for a bike ride, or time each other as you run or speed walk around the house.

Next month:  
**Weight Control**



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