

# Research-Based Well-Being and Stress Management Tools & Techniques

## 1. Breathing

There are all sorts of different ways to do this. The most important part is to breathe slowly and deeply. It is the fastest and best way to communicate with the non-verbal part of your brain.

<http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html>

<http://cdn.marksdailyapple.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/NPRDeepBreathing.mp3>

Apps: Breathe2Relax

## 2. Meditation

It rewards your brain and changes your brain's wiring in positive ways that tend toward contentment.

<http://braintalks.com/news/2013/04/this-is-your-brain-on-mindfulness/>

<http://palousemindfulness.com/selfguidedMBSR.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZlJdTHUsRo>

Apps: Insight Meditation Timer, Buddhify, Headspace, Zazn

## 3. Avoid isolation; connect with family and friends

Social connectedness is vitally important. It helps to reduce the effects of stress on brain and body; Good hormones (e.g., oxytocin) are released.

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/social-support/art-20044445?pg=2>

## 4. Exercise

It's good for your body: it helps reduce stress, combats anxiety & depression and it actually improves cognitive functioning, improves memory, and enhances mood. Good hormones (endorphins) are released – aka “the runner’s high.”

Spark: Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain, John Ratey (2013)

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/exercise-and-stress/art-20044469>

## 5. Take a fun class

Learn something new, exercise the creative side of your brain; have a scheduled time for your class, prepay for it; e.g., guitar lessons, dog agility class, knitting class, Tai Chi, Toastmasters, poetry writing. Something that is new, different, and that you look forward to – especially with a friend!

<http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2014/11/06/crafting-knitting.aspx>  
<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mental-downtime/>

## 6. Volunteer

It lowers stress, contributes to a sense of well-being, and improves physical health as well!

<http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/volunteering-may-be-good-for-body-and-mind-201306266428>

## 7. Power song

Taking breaks is really important for your brain. You can use listening to a song as a meditation or to pump you up! (Choose "We Will Rock You" not "Who Let the Dogs Out.") Join a choir. It does awesome things for you!

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/15/health/brain-music-research/>  
<http://www.unr.edu/counseling/virtual-relaxation-room/releasing-stress-through-the-power-of-music>  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/10496056/Choir-singing-boosts-your-mental-health.html>

## 8. Humour break

Breaks are vitally important and if you can combine that with some laughter, you have provided your body and your brain with some much needed feel-good time. Laughing stimulates many organs, activates your stress response and then relaxes your body systems. Laughing also strengthens your immune system.

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>  
<http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/pub/feap/work-life/newsletters/Humor%20and%20Stress.pdf>

## 9. Group/social activity

Same idea as above, but this can facilitate social connections. Double advantage: great camaraderie in joining others for coffee, lunch, or dinner.

<http://news.wustl.edu/news/Pages/5642.aspx>

## **10. Spirituality, religion, and connecting with nature**

Spirituality, organized religion, or just connecting with nature can help to foster a sense of meaning and purpose (and offer perspective when you are highly stressed). Being in nature or at least looking out a window at some nature is great for your brain. Light increases serotonin – one of our neurochemicals that helps mood and fights depression. Benefits of being outside: increased attention, focus, & memory; lower stress, and reduced brain fatigue.

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044464>

## **11. Pets**

If you have pets, try to maximize your interactions with them; this increases our feel good hormones, lowers stress levels, and lowers blood pressure. If you don't have pets, you can volunteer to walk dogs at the Humane Society or go visit someplace with a fish tank!

<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2012-05-13/dogs-stress-relief-on-campus/54921444/1>

<http://hyper.ahajournals.org/content/38/4/815.full>

## **12. Commitment & accountability**

We are more likely to do pretty much everything if we have another person we feel accountable to. So, get a gym buddy, a walking or running partner, a meditation buddy, a movie break buddy. You get the point!

Apps: <https://www.stickk.com/>

## **13. Intimacy**

Healthy intimate relationships can be a huge source of support in high stress times; physical contact with other people (even something as simple as a hug or a pat) releases oxytocin in our brains (that's good) and reduces stress and anxiety (that's also good).

[http://www.lcsun-news.com/las\\_cruces-healthy\\_u/ci\\_25048767/power-touch-mdash-intimacy-has-health-benefits-all](http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-healthy_u/ci_25048767/power-touch-mdash-intimacy-has-health-benefits-all)

## **14. Gratitude**

It's good for our well-being to make a practice of appreciation. It is also a state of being that increases our social connections.

<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/pdfs/GratitudePDFs/2Wood-GratitudeWell-BeingReview.pdf>

[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_gratitude\\_can\\_help\\_you\\_through\\_hard\\_times](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_can_help_you_through_hard_times)

## 15. Savouring practice

Our brain has a negativity bias. Bad experiences stick in our memories while positive experiences flow through like water through a sieve. You can shift your brain toward positivity by savouring a positive moment for just 10-30 seconds. This attention to the positive cements those moments in our memories just like the negative moments.

[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/10\\_steps\\_to\\_savoring\\_the\\_good\\_things\\_in\\_life](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/10_steps_to_savoring_the_good_things_in_life)

## 16. Diet

Quick Tips: 1) Hunger hurts Concentration -> eat breakfast (oatmeal is a natural brain food); 2) Good Foods = Alertness -> spinach, broccoli, & beans are great alertness foods; 3) Good Glucose = Good Memory -> complex carbs (e.g., green veggies, whole grains, beans, lentils, peas & potatoes) provide steady source of glucose, avoiding sugar spikes. Comfort foods (chips, candy bars, pastries) work ok in the moment, but can cause blood-sugar fluctuations that can increase stress and mood swings.

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/diet-weight-loss/emotional-eating.htm>

<http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/healthy-foods-eat-brain-power>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-science-willpower/201111/stress-sugar-and-self-control>

## 17. Sleep

Sleep deprivation and elevated stress hormones tend to be related. Healthy tips: stick to a sleep schedule, develop a relaxing pre-bedtime ritual, exercise daily, avoid alcohol/drugs, tobacco, caffeine, and heavy meals before bedtime; have a bedroom that is cool, quiet, and dark. Sweet dreams!

<http://sleepfoundation.org/>

<http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/guide/tips-reduce-stress>;

<http://consumer.healthday.com/encyclopedia/stress-management-37/stress-health-news-640/sleep-deprivation-and-stress-646063.html>

## 18. Listen to your body

Do a self-care body scan: check in with yourself. Are you experiencing any aches, pains, or other discomfort? If so, your body may be telling you something like: get some exercise, eat something, cut down on the caffeine, take a time-out, or call a friend? Listen to your body!

<http://www.mindful.org/the-body-scan-practice/>

## **19. Self-awareness**

Our daily lives are filled with innumerable things, people, obligations, schedules, and responsibilities competing for our attention, many of which are among the normal stresses of a law office environment. Practicing self-awareness simply means stopping and taking time to inwardly reflect on ourselves and what is going on within us in the present moment. For example, are we angry, tired, anxious, fearful, or sad, etc.? When we practice self-awareness, in a compassionate, non-self-blaming way, we are more likely to avoid unwanted stress-induced behaviors and reactions, more likely to regulate our emotions in a healthy way, and more likely to develop an understanding of ourselves and our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Meditation, mindfulness, yoga, journaling, and Tai-Chi are practices that people often use to increase their self-awareness.

<http://www.rebeccaanhalt.com/self-awareness-and-stress-relief/>

<http://www.turn-stress-into-bliss.com/self-awareness-exercises>

<http://www.thepracticingmind.com/author/chelsea15>

## **20. Structure and schedules**

Develop regular daily habits and routines for activities that are repetitive (e.g., going to bed, getting up in morning; work times, meal times, social times, self-care times, zoning out times, etc.). Perhaps even keep a simple log, journal, or calendar to record your success in maintaining your schedule and routine; for some, a visual track record of accomplishments tends to reinforce success.

Having a regular daily schedule reduces the need to make minor or routine decisions and choices. This practice: (1) eliminates needless decision-making, preserving the brain's energy for higher level tasks; (2) creates a sense of control & empowerment; (3) Encourages planning one's day; (4) Encourages the creation of healthy self-care habits, like exercising and visiting with family and friends.

<http://www.rebeccaanhalt.com/schedule-more-and-stress-less/>

## **21. To-do lists can be two-edged swords**

For some, to-do lists are helpful and stress-relieving, for others they are stress-producing. The longer the list, the less likely you are to get things done. If you make a to-do list, keep it simple and relatively short (eliminate low-priority items), and don't jump from one task to another – try to complete one item at a time. If you really like lists, consider including a done list at the end of the day to celebrate your accomplishments. All lists of things to do should include one or more healthy self-care activities.

<http://www.jillkonrath.com/sales-blog/quickly-reduce-your-to-do-list>

## 22. Avoid relationship drama

If you have personal relationships that are occasionally volatile, respectfully inform the other person that all your energies right now must be focused on your studies and self-care and you will not engage in any relationship drama – and stick to this rule. This is called maintaining healthy boundaries!

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-twardowski/6-steps-to-setting-boundaries-in-relationships\\_b\\_6142248.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-twardowski/6-steps-to-setting-boundaries-in-relationships_b_6142248.html)

## 23. Inspirational reading, dream, imagine, visualize success

Help your brain by doing things that encourage positive thinking.

<http://www.wisebrain.org/TakingintheGood.pdf>

## 24. Do something you love

If there is an activity that you enjoy doing right now, make sure you do not lose that as part of your proactive self-care study strategy.

[http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/wellness\\_articles.asp?id=1657](http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/wellness_articles.asp?id=1657)

[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/a\\_better\\_way\\_to\\_pursue\\_happiness](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/a_better_way_to_pursue_happiness)

## 25. Reach out for help

If you have questions, concerns, or simply need to talk with someone, call or contact **LAPBC** at **604.685.2171** or **1.888.685.2171**. You're also welcome to send a confidential email message to [info@lapbc.com](mailto:info@lapbc.com).