

## 10 methods to help melt the stress

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If you have any doubt that stress is pandemic, just Google it.

The word *stress* produces nearly 180 million responses. That thought alone is probably enough to send your stress hormones surging.

There's no escaping stress, but there are plenty of ways to deal with it, from homespun strategies to proven techniques.

Start by taking care of yourself, said Dr. Mary Lynn Crow, a Fort Worth psychologist and professor at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Getting enough sleep and eating healthful foods can help you tolerate stress better, she said.

"If you think things will never get better, it ups your stress, as opposed to thinking that this is not a good situation but everybody's doing their best," Crow said. "Your self-talk can make a difference."

Lots of techniques — deep breathing, yoga poses, list-making, exercise — can break up the day and help reduce stress.

"If you get a sense of peaceful control over your life and your world, it does reduce stress," Crow said.

Here are some fun and soothing ways to turn down the volume on stress:

### Try a little iRelaxation

1 Everything from the soothing sound of ocean waves to the relaxing image of a candle's flickering flame can be downloaded to an iPhone, often for free.

Slip on some headphones and relax to the sound of rain hitting the car roof, a clock ticking or wind blowing. AmbiSounds Plus works so well that fans say it's the secret to a relaxing snooze on long plane flights. At home, try combining soundtracks for the most relaxation and stress reduction.

Turn your phone into a relaxing massage with the app *Massage Me*. It uses the phone's ever-so-subtle vibrations to ease tension.

Or try the app *Stress Shaker*, which offers quotes to match your anxiety level. Just shake the phone and watch relaxing quotes come up.

Want a more aggressive way to relax?

How about smashing some of life's biggest stressors, starting with a laptop. Just tap the screen of your iPhone up to three times and watch the image as it is destroyed, complete with sound effects. Move on to answering machines, piggy banks, even iPhones. Then shake your iPhone to restore the object.

All of the apps are available through the iTunes App Store.

### A gentler way to wake up

2 My Wake Up Call promises to deliver an upbeat message that gets you out of bed in a kinder, gentler way than the annoying buzz of an alarm clock. A month's worth of daily inspirational messages can be downloaded to an MP3 player or CD.

Research shows that an uplifted mindset upon awakening adds up to a positive perspective throughout the day. And that means less stress.

My Workout Wake Up Call is the first in a series of motivational messages and includes music recorded by the American Wind Symphony Orchestra. The messages from a personal trainer are designed to encourage listeners to get up and go exercise.

Others on the way include: My Worthiness Wake Up Call, My Wellness Wake Up Call and My Wisdom Wake Up Call.

There are several ways to get the motivational messages. You can download a month's worth of messages to your iPod or iPhone for about \$20 a month (you'll need the free alarm clock from the iTunes app store) or buy a CD player with messages for about \$50. Other

options are available at [www.mywakeupcalls.net](http://www.mywakeupcalls.net).

## Put it in writing

**3**When you are stressed out by a demanding boss, a critical mother-in-law or an annoying neighbor, write the person a letter. Put every angry thought in your head on paper. Don't hesitate to say exactly what you're feeling. After a few pages, the stress that was gnawing at you should start to disappear. Just don't send it.

## Sip some Sleepytime

**4**There's a reason that cute little bear on the label of this Celestial Seasonings tea looks like he has fallen asleep sitting up: That's exactly what happens to people when they sip the tea famous for reducing anxiety. Sleepytime Extra Wellness Tea contains valerian, which is known for its ability to relieve insomnia. Studies have found that it also decreases the time it takes to fall asleep and increases deep sleep. The blend of chamomile, spearmint and valerian gently lulls stressed-out adults to sleep in no time. Available in grocery stores.

## Give yourself more time

**5**Racing to get to an appointment on time can turn up the stress level big time. So can worrying about what to wear when you have 10 minutes to get ready and out the door. A little planning can go a long way toward bringing down your stress level. Get ready 15 minutes earlier than you think you should so you can get ready in a relaxed manner. Decide what you want to wear the night before and make sure everything is clean and pressed. If you are going someplace for the first time, take a few minutes to find the location on a map or even visit it ahead of time. Giving yourself a little more time can make for a much more relaxing day.

## Play a game

**6**A quick game online can take your mind off your troubles and melt away stress. Studies have found that it takes 30 minutes or less to reduce stress by playing a favorite game.

You won't have to look far to find some fun. Classics such as Scrabble are right at your fingertips via the iPhone. You can play solo or with others. You'll also find plenty of games online.

## Turn back the clock

**7**Remember how much fun it was to blow bubbles, play jacks or spin a Hula-Hoop? Those childhood pastimes are quick and easy stress relievers, and they're virtually guaranteed to put a smile on your face.

Silly Putty, Play-Doh and other childhood staples can turn a stressful day into pure bliss.

Tucking a little toy — maybe a favorite Matchbox car — can serve as a reminder of a more relaxed time in your life. Just knowing it's there can make it hard to take life's ups and downs too seriously.

## Munch on pistachios

**8**A handful of these nuts can soften the impact that stress hormones have on the body. Pistachios are loaded with copper, phosphorus, vitamin B6 and magnesium. A few nuts a day can help lower blood pressure, fight infections, build muscle and boost energy. They also deliver 3 grams of dietary fiber and contain antioxidants that can help reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration. Another perk: Just cracking open the shell can help relieve stress.

## Keep your hands busy

**9**Knit a pair of mittens, crochet a scarf or try your hand at some other hobby. When your hands are busy, your mind takes a rest from anxiety-provoking thoughts. And when you're done, you'll not only feel more relaxed, you'll have something to show for your effort.

## Prioritize

**10**One of the best ways to reduce stress is to make a list of what must be done. Even if you only get one thing done on the list, enjoy that sense of success. After you do one thing well, move on to another. Accomplishing something will give you a sense of control over yourself and your schedule. The result: less stress.

Sources: Dr. Mary Lynn Crow, the Confidence Center, Leigh Anne Jasheway-Bryant, [Blisstree.com](http://Blisstree.com), [feelhealthyagain.net](http://feelhealthyagain.net), [associatedcontent.com](http://associatedcontent.com), [pistachiohealth.com](http://pistachiohealth.com)

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