

Want Less Stress? Try More B.R.E.A.D.S.

Here are six realistic tools for stress management. If you can focus on these every day, you'll see important differences in your energy level, enthusiasm, relationships, and improvements in your patience, relationships, and overall mental and physical health.

Breathing – All stress-related breathing is short, shallow, and rapid. Stress-managed breathing is long, deep, and slow. You can't think or function effectively if your breathing is out of control. Shallow breathing creates a vicious circle; the shorter your breaths, the more of them you need to take. Without good oxygen control, your body shifts into fight-or-flight mode. When you can, practice breathing slowly and deeply, concentrating on the length of each breath and spending a moment on those transitions between the end of one inhalation and the start of the next exhalation.

Relaxation – Using focused relaxation (or meditation) for stress control means you should try to find a minimum of 10 minutes each day to close your eyes and simply do one thing: breathe slowly, counting from 100 down to 1 (okay, so that's two things). If you can make this a part of your everyday routine, like brushing your teeth (and just like for good tartar control, twice a day is even better), you will actually want to start extending the time.

Exercise – Just walk. Daily. For about 30 minutes. Walking is easy on your joints, burns calories if you move along at a good pace (about 100 to 130 steps per minute), and is a great social activity to connect with your spouse or partner, friends, colleagues, or your dog. Exercise helps you get better sleep, burns your excess stress energy from the day, and supports your heart and lungs.

Attitude – In two words, you can better manage your stress when you are **relentlessly positive**. People who see the worst in every one and in every thing are no fun to be around. Not all the world is bad. Those same people who always see their glass (or their checking account) as half-empty rather than half-full bring everyone around them down. Leucadia, CA-based psychologist and stress expert Dr. Brian Alman says it best, "Successful people have one foot in the present and the other in the future. Miserable

people have one foot in the present and the other stuck in the past.” Find the good in the situation you’re in.

Diet – Out with the bad carbs (diet and regular sodas, candy, bagels, white rice, pasta, fries) and in with the lean proteins, more veggies, complex carbohydrates, fruits, nuts, more water, and vitamins. Food is a drug and it changes your mood for the good or the bad (caffeine, alcohol, sugar, fats). Small changes make a big difference over time, like cutting portion sizes, avoiding most fast foods, drinking two glasses of water before each meal, no carbs after dinner, or adding more fiber. Your body needs fuel but it needs the right kinds of fuel. What you eat makes a difference in how you think, feel, and even how you sleep.

Sleep – We are a sleep-deprived culture. People who say they can get by on four to six hours a night are actually harming themselves. Lack of sleep affects your hormones (which can give you belly fat), judgment, concentration, and interactions with people. If you feel tired all the time, resolve to get more and better sleep than you do now. Make your bedroom dark, quiet (use a white noise fan or ear plugs), and cool. Don’t fight with your spouse or partner in the bedroom. Go to another part of the house. The bedroom should be a place of peace.

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