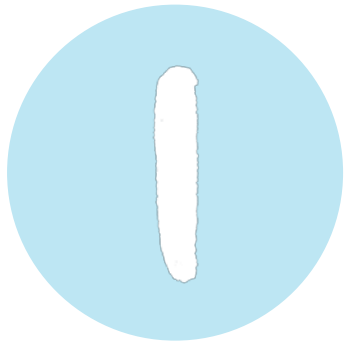


10 ways to
De-Stress.





MEDITATE

Did you know that all the stress you experience is self-created? That's because the stressful thoughts come from your own mind, and nobody else's. They're YOUR thoughts. As such, you decide what effect they have on your mind state. Either you let them run roughshod all over you, or you call the shots. So the first thing you need to do when a stressful thought arises is to recognise it's just a thought, and let it go.

How? You meditate. It's the best way to become expert at watching every little thing you think and noticing what's not helpful (e.g. all those panicky thoughts) before it's too late, and your mind is mired in worry.

So here's what to do: every day, either first thing or just before bed, whatever time works best for you, find a quiet place, relax your body, clear your mind and simply focus on your own breathing for 10 to 20 distraction-free minutes.

In ... out ... here ... now ...
breathe ... and just be.

Learn more about the amazing benefits of meditation and mindfulness from experts [Dr Mark Greenberg](#), [Dr Amy Saltzman](#) and [Shamash Alidina](#) at [Mind & Its Potential 2012](#).

2

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Inadequate sleep, whether it's too little, irregular or broken, is one of the main reasons people stress out. Is it any wonder? A good night's sleep is essential for good health.

Here are some tips to help with snoozing:

- Don't treat your bedroom like a play station. Beds are for sleeping so ban all electronic and mobile devices.
- If you're struggling to drop off, relaxation, mental imagery or meditation can be helpful.
- Avoid stimulants such as coffee, tea and chocolate at least a couple of hours before bedtime. Alcohol is another no-no. It might be easier to drop off after

a few wines but its overall effect is negative because it fragments your sleeping making you wake up more often.

- Keep your bedroom a little on the cool side, as a slight drop in body temperature is more conducive to sleep.
- Don't panic if you suffer from occasional insomnia. Excessive worry in this regard may just make sleeplessness worse.

Getting enough sleep may mean fitting a nap into your schedule.

Nap activist [Thea O'Connor](#) explains why at [Happiness & Its Causes 2013](#).





EXERCISE

Light to moderate exercise is one of the best ways to de-stress your body and mind. That's because your body releases feel-good chemicals whenever you physically exert yourself. You know yourself how much better you feel, and more able to cope with whatever the world throws at you, after you work up a little sweat.

Not only that, moderate, regular physical exercise also promotes relaxation and good sleep. Activities such as brisk walking, aerobics, swimming, cycling and jogging for about 20 minutes at least three times a week are all you have to do ... although it's even better if you can manage something daily.

Any exercise at all is good for the body, as long as it's light to moderate. Two simple rules of moderate exertion are:

- Work up only a light sweat (or 'glow')
- Don't exhaust yourself to the point of breathlessness i.e. you're no longer able to speak.

Check out these great [Exercise Handouts](#) on the Black Dog Institute website.



TALK POSITIVELY TO YOURSELF

"I have to be perfect."

"Something bad might happen so I might as well worry about it now."

"People must love me no matter what."

"If something goes wrong and I could've prevented it, then it's my fault."

"This is a total disaster!"

If this sounds like you, no wonder you're stressed. Thinking patterns like these – including a tendency to exaggerate the impact of events, or 'catastrophise' – mean that you're likely to experience even minor personal failings and problems as major setbacks. And because you worry about the future, there's no let-up – even when things are going swimmingly.

One antidote is cognitive behaviour therapy, a major approach in psychology based on the premise that negative feelings and emotions are created by our irrational thoughts and beliefs.

Given this, a primary strategy is identifying and challenging the negative thoughts and beliefs with more realistic alternatives, such as *"I'm imperfect like everyone else", "I don't love everybody so why should everybody love me?"* and *"Will this really matter on my deathbed?"*

Fortunately, there are lots of resources available including books and courses on the subject, as well as therapists trained in the discipline, to help you perfect the habit of talking positively to yourself.

For more information, visit
the [Australian Association for
Cognitive Behaviour Therapy](#).



JUST BREATHE

Have you noticed that you're breathing too fast? Stress and anxiety can affect your heart rate and breathing patterns. A relaxed breathing rate is usually 10 to 12 breaths per minute.

Need a short-term coping strategy? Practise this exercise three to four times a day when you're feeling strung out.

1. Time the number of breaths you take in one minute. Breathing in, then out is counted as one breath.
2. Breathe in, hold your breath and count to five. Then breathe out and say the word 'relax' to yourself in a calm, soothing manner.
3. Start breathing in through your nose and out slowly through your mouth, in a six-second cycle. Breathe in for three seconds and out for three seconds. This will produce a breathing rate of

10 breaths per minute. In the beginning, it can be helpful to time your breathing using the second hand of a watch or clock.

4. Count to yourself.
5. Continue breathing in a six-second cycle for at least five minutes or until the symptoms of overbreathing have settled.

After practising this exercise, time the number of breaths you take in one minute. Practise the slow breathing exercise each day before breakfast, lunch, dinner and bedtime. Use the technique whenever you feel anxious. Gradually, you'll be familiar enough with the exercise to stop timing yourself.

This exercise is from [beyondblue Fact Sheet 6, Reducing stress](#).





COMMUNICATE BETTER

Good communication is one of the most important tools for dealing with stress. When you communicate well, you can express your thoughts, feelings and needs in a way that promotes mutual understanding and doesn't cause others to feel threatened or defensive.

This fosters positive connections between you and the people you interact with, and makes everyone happier; it also reduces the risk of conflict.

Here are some top tips on effective communication:

- Avoid 'you' statements when explaining your needs to others, such as *"you never do ..."*. Instead use 'I' statements, like *"I feel that ..."*

- Avoid insults, such as *"Only a moron would ..."*
- Ask for time out if things start to heat up e.g. *"Let's reconvene when we're both feeling calmer."*
- Soften your tone.

[Dr Sarah Edelman](#) is a clinical psychologist and conference favourite. She conducts workplace programs on managing stress and depression and runs workshops on the use of CBT, which includes improving communication skills.



GET A PET

Consider investing in a pet. Research indicates that people with pets, particularly those living alone, suffer less stress and enjoy life much more. A dog or a cat or a bird provides company, they love you unconditionally which boosts well-being and self-esteem, and there's no doubt having a warm ball of fur to cuddle is hugely comforting.

But if for some reason, you can't have an animal at home, the next best thing is watching a video. Apparently just looking at [footage of a cute critter](#) can reduce heart rate and blood pressure in under a minute.

Looking for love? There are many beautiful animals available for adoption at [RSPCA shelters](#).





TAKE CONTROL

One definition of stress is our belief that we don't have the resources to deal with our current situation, in other words that we've lost control. So dealing with stress means regaining control and feeling confident we can manage again.

This may be by changing the way we think about a problem, or by taking some action towards resolving it.

For example, if you're spending too much time in the office and neglecting the rest of your life, your strategy might simply be to leave half an hour earlier every evening – and to cut some corners during your working day to make that possible.

It doesn't matter what you're stressing about, usually a solution can be found. You could even try brainstorming, or asking a friend or a counsellor for suggestions.

The great thing about taking action is it gives us a sense of control, even in circumstances where we can't make a big difference to the outcome.

Of course, different situations require different remedies: for instance, a conciliatory letter to resolve a falling out, a change of lifestyle to overcome ill health, a session with a financial planner to learn monetary restraint.

Indeed, the very act of planning and executing a strategy creates a sense of being in control, and reduces feelings of helplessness and frustration. It's this process of problem solving that puts you back in the driver's seat.



TAKE TIME OUT

It sounds obvious to take time out to rejuvenate, but so many of us lead lives that are seriously out of whack. Work is often to blame, stealing more and more of our precious free time. As a result, we see less of our friends and family, do little if any exercise, consume more fast food and put off having fun.

Yet spending time and energy on a variety of pursuits is much healthier than putting all your eggs in one basket.

Family life or work might be really stressful but if it's only one part of a full life, it'll have less of an impact than if it dominates your entire reality.

Therefore striking a balance must be a priority. The perfect life mix combines a number of elements:

- Work, or a stimulating interest or hobby
- Play, including relaxation and occasional treats and indulgences
- Supportive family and friends
- Health and fitness, including exercise, a healthy diet and plenty of sleep
- Meaning, whether you get this from volunteering for a good cause or having a spiritual belief.



STRESS BUSTERS

Incorporate these other stress busters into your life:

- At work, avoid unreasonable deadlines and minimise boring or repetitive duties.
- Leave work as early as your employer allows.
- Don't regularly take work home.
- Say 'no' more often.
- Get colleagues and family members to help with burdensome tasks.
- Confide in a doctor, counsellor, friend or religious adviser.
- Postpone major life changes, such as moving house or changing jobs, until you're feeling better.
- [Spend time in nature](#) (and yes, your garden counts) , or simply look up at the sky. Its vastness tends to put everything in perspective.
- [Have a laugh](#). A good guffaw reduces the level of cortisol, adrenaline and other stress hormones.
- Treat yourself to a massage.
- Listen to [soothing music](#). Slow quiet classical tunes slow the pulse and heart rate, lower blood pressure and reduce levels of stress hormones.
- [Smile](#)
- Remind yourself it could be worse.



HAPPINESS & its causes

19 – 20 June 2013
Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre
happinessanditscauses.com.au

mind & ITS POTENTIAL

29 – 30 October 2012
Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre
mindanditspotential.com.au



17 – 18 June 2013
Sydney Town Hall
youngminds.org.au