

“What can I do to find relief from stress?”

Practicing relaxation techniques is one way to help.

Are you feeling overwhelmed, anxious or stressed out? You're certainly not alone. Millions of Americans experience these feelings each day. But, there are things you can do to minimize these feelings. Here are some relaxation tips:

Breathe

This is probably the easiest, most helpful technique of all, and the one that people use the least. Most of the time, breathing is taken for granted. Often times we hold our breath or breathe so shallowly that our bodies don't get enough oxygen. Once this occurs, we become tired and possibly more stressed. So, how should we breathe properly to relieve stress? It's easy. Follow these steps:

- Breathe deeply.
- Place your hand on your stomach underneath your diaphragm.
- Take a long deep breath in through your nose. Count to five as you breathe. Notice your stomach rising as you inhale deeply. Hold this breath for five seconds.
- Slowly release the breath through your mouth. Tighten your lips as if you were whistling. This is known as pursed lip breathing. Release as much air as possible to empty your lungs.
- Repeat this practice three or four times.

If you don't think you'll remember to do this exercise, write "breathe" on a sticky note, and put it somewhere on your desk, in your car, or on the refrigerator. This note will serve as a constant reminder for you to relax and breathe.

Take a break and move

Some of us never take a break! However, taking a few minutes away from what we are doing is another healthy way to relieve stress. Going for a walk is a fantastic stress buster. Taking a break will help you unwind, gather your thoughts and instill a sense of well-being. Be sure to get up from your desk at least once every hour and walk around for a few minutes. It's a simple, effective and healthy way to relieve stress.

Stretch

Relieve built-up muscle tension by trying a few stretching exercises. Stretching warms your muscles and gets blood flowing, carrying fresh oxygen to your muscles and organs.

Squeeze

Keep a stress ball handy and squeeze it for five to ten seconds, then relax. Repeat this several times. Using a stress ball will help relieve anxiety and strengthen your muscles at the same time.

Put stressful situations in perspective. If a situation is causing you stress, ask yourself, "How important will this be in five minutes, five hours, five days, five months or five years?" If the problem is not critical, then step back from it. Breathe and go for a walk. Then decide what you will do. Sometimes it's not the situation causing us stress, but rather the way we react to it. Once you have thought about it in the proper perspective, you can return to the problem and handle it much more effectively. Check Healthwise® Knowledgebase at fallonhealth.org for more information about reducing stress.

