

4 Five-Minute Stress Busters

Everyone feels stress. It's a natural bodily response that can seem uncontrollable at times. But before it takes a toll on your long-term health, here are a few easy and inexpensive ways to relieve stress.

1. Stretch out. Exercise will always top the list for stress reduction. It not only improves your physical health, it can strengthen you mentally and emotionally as well. The good news is you don't have to run a 5k to see the benefits. Simple stretches, like toe touches and wrist flexors, can be effective stress busters.

2. Try this for 10 minutes each day. Lie with your back on the floor, legs and feet relaxed, palms to your sides and facing up. Take three deep breaths. On the third breath, bring your hands above your head, and stretch them away from you. At the same time, point your toes and stretch your feet away from you. Imagine you are being pulled gently by the hands and feet in opposite directions. Do this a few times, or as long as you desire. Then do the same stretch standing up. Reach your hands toward the ceiling, while standing on the balls of your feet (or just leave your feet flat if this is uncomfortable). Lower your feet and hands, and repeat. Incorporate other stretches as you desire.

3. Think gray. Do you ever catch yourself thinking in black and white? "If I don't save more money, I will never retire." "I neglected everything on my to-do list. I can't get anything done." All-or-nothing thinking leaves us no room for mistakes, and it is a breeding ground for anxiety and stress. Giving in to this line of thought can be easy, because it often happens subconsciously. How can you beat it? Black-and-white thinking usually contains all-encompassing words like "never," "always" or "nothing." Pay attention to what you are saying and the types of thoughts you are having. If you notice these black-

and-white words invading your thoughts, try to counter it. Ask yourself what other outcomes could occur. Are there really only two options here? If you can come up with a few positive alternatives to the situation, you've already set your mind on the right course.

When the black-and-white thinking is overwhelming, some people find having a "go to" thought, like a favorite person or song, can be helpful.

4. Keep journals. Identifying and writing down your stressors can help you understand triggers and address specific issues causing stress. If you find yourself noticeably stressed but don't understand why, it might be important to keep a log. Write down the date and time when you experience these feelings, so that you might notice a pattern of stressors in your life. Does a certain person or activity seem to show up at the same time as the stress? What can you do to address it?

Prayer journals can also help relieve stress. This can be a time to unload your worries or to simply rejoice in the beauty of God's creation. Let it be a tool to remind you that we cannot control everything in life, but we can find comfort in his sovereignty.

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