



Ten Tips to Reduce Stress During COVID-19*

1. **Breathe deeply.** Diaphragmatic breathing, or belly breathing, tells our bodies and brains to relax, whereas shallow fast breathing is part of the fight/flight response. Slowly breathe in through your nose for about two seconds, making your stomach expand while keeping your chest relatively still. Slowly exhale for two seconds through pursed lips. Repeat several times.
2. **Exercise.** Taking a brisk walk after feeling stressed can help to bring our bodies back into a relaxed state. Even better is the habit of regular mild exercise, which has been found to increase the levels of brain neurotransmitters responsible for positive mood and outlook. Aim for 3-5 sessions/week of 45-60 minutes..
3. **Sleep longer.** Our brain and body's recovery and healing systems are the most active during sleep because the fight/flight response is inactive during sleep. Also, during sleep, special channels in the brain open up to allow for cerebrospinal fluid to clean away metabolic breakdown products, like leftover stress hormones. These "brain trash" clearing channels only open during sleep.
4. **Reduce your caffeine intake.** Caffeine injects adrenaline into your system and can increase the body's level of cortisol, the "stress hormone." Sensitivity to caffeine can vary greatly, so experiment with your caffeine intake to see if reducing caffeine helps you to feel less stressed (or depressed or fatigued).
5. **Assess the danger.** Decide if you are facing a real emergency or just potential for something bad to happen. If it's not a real emergency, calm yourself with the reminder that you are not currently in danger. The body only has one stress response – save it for a real emergency!
6. **Be grateful.** A habit of gratitude has been found to reduce stress, improve mood, sharpen mental focus, increase resiliency, improve sleep, raise emotional intelligence, and more! Set aside 10 minutes before you go to bed to write down and describe 3 things you are grateful for, or to send a "thank you" to someone. Try the same in the moment you find yourself overwhelmed by stress to shift your brain out of stress mode and into rest mode.
7. **Engage mindfulness.** When we live in the moment, focus on the present, and stop worrying about the future or dwelling on the past, our bodies and mind relax. Use the "Five Senses" exercise or try doing a "whole body scan": Lie with your back on the floor or a bed and close your eyes. Move your awareness from your head down to your toes, focusing on one area at a time. Stop whenever you find an area that is tight or sore. Tense the area once, then focus with deep breaths on this area to relax it.
8. **Set a reachable goal.** Focus your attention on a personal goal and set a reward for when you accomplish it. Shifting to a personal obtainable goal allows us to have an internal locus of control, which is associated with improved mood and better physical health.
9. **Create structure and routines.** Uncertainty is a huge contributor to stress. When your routines have been disrupted, create new daily structure for yourself that involves both times and locations.
10. **Pray/Meditate.** A meaningful spiritual life has been found to have significant health benefits (including pain relief and reduced risk of death from heart attack or stroke) as well as mental health benefits of reduced stress, anxiety and depression. Even a few minutes of prayer or meditation can restore a sense of peace and calmness. Use a guided meditation or written prayer; pray through or meditate on a specific passage of scripture; or use your own words to surrender your concerns to God's love and sovereignty and receive His care for you.

Bonus tip for COVID-19: Continual exposure to the potential for danger leads to chronic stress. Establish "coronavirus-free zones" in your daily schedule (e.g., the hour before bedtime) or in your home (like the dinner table) that is free of COVID-19 media or content. Instead, fill those times and spaces with positive thoughts and experiences (like gratitude!).

**Stress is a universal human experience. Regularly using these tips should lessen your stress levels. However, if your stress or anxiety is interfering with your relationships and work, consider seeing a physician or therapist for professional treatment.*



Ten Things You Can Do to Reduce Your Anxiety*

1. Don't let your anxious feelings hijack the rest of your brain by repetitively worrying about something you feel anxious about. Instead, develop a plan for what you will do if what you're anxious about what happens.
2. Do a mindfulness exercise that brings your attention to the present, not the realm of future worry or past pain. Slowly, name five things around you that you can see, four things that you can touch, three things that you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste. Remind yourself that you are presently safe.
3. Tell your anxiety to be quiet – “Anxiety is just a feeling and it has been wrong before.”
4. Speak God's truth to pull you out of anxious feelings and hypothetical worries. Examples include Malachi 3:6, Isaiah 43:1, Romans 8:38-39, and Matthew 6:25-34, but ask God to give you a personal verse you can repeat to yourself as soon as you start feeling anxious or a worry enters your head.
5. Sleep longer. During sleep, special channels in the brain open up to allow for cerebrospinal fluid to clean away metabolic breakdown products, like leftover stress hormones. These “brain trash” clearing channels only open during sleep. A good night's bath for your brain helps you to have a fresh start in the morning.
6. Eat healthier. Sugar amplifies the body and brain's anxiety response, so avoid the temptation to eat a carton of ice cream. Vitamin C reduces the body's stress hormone, so load up on fruits, and leafy greens, as well as healthy proteins, and lots of water (half an ounce to an ounce of water for each pound you weigh, every day).
7. Exercise regularly. Even the habit of regular mild exercise has been found to increase the levels of brain neurotransmitters involved in a positive mood and outlook. For some, regular exercise is as effective as medication in treating depression and anxiety. Aim for 3 to 5 sessions per week of 45-60 minutes of either aerobic exercise or resistance training.
8. Manage your media exposure. Time spent in social media has been found to contribute to higher anxiety and depression. News media exposure and anxiety have also been found to be positively related. Create three media/phone-free zones (e.g., in the car, at the dinner table, your bedroom) to set easy-to-keep limits.
9. Use a worry app to contain your worries. ReachOut WorryTime for iPhones/iPads allows you to list your worries and to set a specific time to worry about them, so they aren't with you all day long. The app also prompts you to plan, rather than just worry, as well as to throw away useless worries (great for visual learners).
10. Develop the habit of gratitude. We can get stuck in an endless loop between feeling anxious and worrying. Gratitude is the “eject button” that boosts you out of that negative feedback loop. Use the GLAD technique to shift your brain from worry and anxiety – (G) something you are grateful for, (L) something you learned, (A) something you accomplished, and (D) something that delighted you. Write a thank you note to someone. Or simply end each day by naming three things you are thankful for. Research has shown that gratitude is clinically effective in treating anxiety and depression, sometimes as effective as antidepressants. (Philippians 4:8)

**Anxiety is a universal human emotion. Regularly using these tips should lessen your anxiety and worry. However, if your anxiety is interfering with your relationships and work, consider seeing a physician or therapist for professional treatment. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable.*

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