

DE-STRESS IN **10 MINUTES** OR LESS

THE
stress

management

WORKBOOK

Ruth C. White, PhD, MPH, MSW

The Stress Management Workbook

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*I dedicate this book to my daughter, Maya.
May the techniques in this book make your life healthier
and happier as you find your way in the world.*

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IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

Check the box next to any of the statements below that describe how you sometimes feel.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I feel anxious. | ☐ I just want to cry. |
| ☐ I feel as if I have too much to do. | ☐ I want to quit my job. |
| ☐ I feel as if there is not enough time in the day. | ☐ I need a vacation. |
| ☐ I have muscle tension and pain. | ☐ I need more time to myself. |
| ☐ I have stress-related headaches. | ☐ I don't have time to eat lunch. |
| ☐ I feel as if my heart is sometimes beating too fast. | ☐ I smoke too much. |
| ☐ I have sweaty palms when I get stressed. | ☐ I drink too much. |
| ☐ I feel like throwing up due to feeling stressed. | ☐ I have panic attacks. |
| ☐ I lie in bed and cannot fall asleep. | ☐ I have hypertension. |
| ☐ I feel overwhelmed. | ☐ I often feel irritable. |
| ☐ I find myself breathing too fast. | ☐ I have a short temper. |
| ☐ I have stomach problems when I feel stressed. | ☐ I use medication to manage my feelings of anxiety. |
| | ☐ I need medication to fall asleep. |

If you checked several of the boxes, read on to learn about effectively managing your stress and how to take control of it to have a healthier and happier life.

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INTRODUCTION

YOUR ALARM CLOCK GOES OFF. You press the snooze button, wishing you didn't have to face the day. A knot forms in your stomach as you consider all you have to get done. A vacation would be nice, but you know when you finally take one you'll find yourself feeling anxious about the number of messages piling up in your inbox. You know it's normal to feel stressed, but it's happening more than normal and becoming a larger part of your daily life. It's starting to take over. You know you have to change your life, but you have no idea where to start.

You are not alone in feeling overwhelmed by your stress. A recent study by the American Psychological Association found that only 37 percent of Americans reported doing an excellent or very good job of dealing with stress. The primary sources of stress for most people are work and family. These feelings come from trying to meet the demands of both in a way that would make them feel satisfied and happy.

The increased prevalence of anxiety, depression, and hypertension are the physical evidence of stress. Sustained stress packs a huge punch to our physical health and can significantly contribute to obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes. You may have a hard time sleeping or feel completely overwhelmed. You may feel irritable and short-tempered. You may be getting headaches or stomachaches or have muscle pain in your shoulders or back. No matter how stress expresses itself in your body and mind, this book can help you deal with the stressors in your life.

It's important to note that stress is not always bad. The adrenaline that stress triggers helps us deliver a great talk to a large group of people or keeps us alert to finish that demanding project by its deadline. Eliminating stress is neither possible nor realistic. But at the same time, the flight or fight response that stress triggers is not good for you when it's sustained over a long period of time and utilized too frequently.

We are all different in how we experience stress, so there isn't one stress management technique that works for everybody. *The Stress Management Workbook* will help you identify your triggers and reactions to stress and learn effective, personalized strategies to lower your stress levels.

At one point in my life, stress got the best of me. I was teaching a full load of classes at San Francisco State University; working part time at a prestigious Silicon Valley research institution; writing a PhD dissertation at UC Berkeley; raising a precocious, strong-willed child; and living with a partner who had a very demanding Silicon Valley tech career. In addition, I was working through bipolar disorder. You don't need a psychology degree to know that even Wonder Woman would crack under those conditions! I eventually ended up in the hospital because, like many people, I felt like I was living on fumes.

The problem is that this sort of unsustainable performance gets a lot of praise and admiration in our current culture. Being in the hospital changed my life because I promised myself it wouldn't happen again. As a social worker and social work educator, I decided to use my research skills to explore how to live a life that would make me healthier and happier. Yes, medication was a key piece of my

STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Depression and anxiety can be caused by stress, and stress also triggers and exacerbates these issues. It's a vicious cycle. Long-term exposure to stress can cause depression. It's as if the body decides it needs to take a break because it's so overwhelmed by daily functioning. The feelings of anxiety caused by stress are often related to feeling that there is no way to do everything that needs doing in the way that it should be done.

Conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are often first diagnosed after

a stressful event triggers symptoms to appear. In the case of schizophrenia, it usually starts in adolescence or early adulthood. Bipolar disorder has symptoms that vary between depression and mania, and each of these states are both triggered and exacerbated by stress.

If you suffer from a mental illness, you should consult your medical provider as you work through this book. If you are feeling incapacitated by your stress or are experiencing severe stress-related symptoms, please consult your medical provider.

recovery, but the side effects were having a negative impact on my career, and I wanted to know how to behave my way to mental health and well-being. The results of that research became the foundation for two books I wrote on bipolar disorder: *Bipolar 101* and *Preventing Bipolar Relapse*.

While doing research for my books, I realized that what helped me could also help people without a mental health diagnosis. My training as a public health professional drove me to focus on finding ways to prevent the negative health, social, and psychological impacts of stress. And over time my work began to focus more and more on helping people deal with the stresses that come with life in the twenty-first century. *The Stress Management Workbook* grew out of this work.

Most people know that to get the most out of life, they need to take care of themselves by exercising, sleeping well, and eating right. But knowing is not the same as doing! This workbook will teach you how to keep your brain sharp, improve your mind's response to stress, and develop strategies for minimizing stress. You will learn to keep anxiety at bay, reduce the likelihood of depression, and keep yourself calm, centered, and in control of your emotions and your psyche. You will gain the knowledge and skills to perform better at work, be a better friend, parent, partner, and colleague, sleep better, increase your endurance, and be healthier in both mind and body. This book is not about diagnosis and treatment. Instead, it gets right to what you need—concrete exercises to help you reduce stress in 10 minutes or less.

The goal of this book is fast and sustainable stress reduction. It starts with a chapter that helps you identify the sources of your stress. Next, you'll find three sets of exercises divided into one-, five-, and 10-minute increments. These will give you different options for getting back to your center and finding peace, depending on where you are and how much time you have. For example, a one-minute exercise may be as simple as a breathing exercise, a five-minute exercise may require some writing, and a 10-minute exercise may be something more physical, like taking a walk. I will show you how to choose the exercises you need for managing your stress. Finally, the book ends with some quick strategies for longer-term stress management and an appendix that helps you determine the impact of your stress reduction strategies.

Please note that this book does not replace the help you can get from a medical practitioner or therapist, nor does it replace medication or medical treatment. If you find yourself in extreme stress that causes you to feel ill in any way, seek out professional medical help.

I am a strong believer in writing down commitments, so before you get started on the exercises in this workbook, I encourage you to write a sentence or two that

expresses your commitment to managing the stress in your life. Maybe you want to write about why you want to manage your stress or the kind of life you envision living if you get your stress levels under control. You can write your commitment on a sticky note and put it on your bathroom mirror or keep it in your wallet, or write it in the space provided below. Either way, you can use it as a reminder to do the work you need to do to have a less-stressed life. I can't wait to share these exercises that will help you find moments of peace in your busy life!

My commitment to managing my stress:

Signature:

Date:

Place:

PART ONE:

Before You Begin

In order to treat your stress, you need to know where it comes from. What is stressful for some is not stressful for others. For example, many people function well in workplaces with lots of deadlines, whereas others would find that to be a source of constant anxiety. In part 1 we will focus on identifying your sources of stress. Here you will find checklists, quizzes, and other activities to help you clarify which areas of your life need to be a focus of your stress management strategies. Then, in part 2, you'll find specific strategies that will help you reduce stressors and improve your coping abilities. This section is broken down into easy-to-navigate, easy-to-do exercises. Let's continue on to chapter 1, where you'll take your first steps toward understanding the sources, symptoms, and triggers of your stress.

CHAPTER ONE

First Steps

THE FIRST STEP IN REDUCING YOUR CURRENT STRESS is to figure out what's causing it. You need to learn how to discern the patterns related to the stress in your life so you can change them. These may be certain behaviors, feelings, or thoughts you have that create a sense of anxiety or a feeling of being overwhelmed.

For example, the commute to work can be very stressful for some people. Perhaps sitting in traffic or being stuck on a delayed train or bus highlights your lack of control, and that frustrates you. It also makes you worry about missing that very important meeting first thing in the morning. You may constantly worry until you finally get to work. Your worry may have you repeatedly checking your watch, feeling that each minute seems like an hour. Or perhaps you're that driver who yells at other drivers.

I used to be that person until one day my daughter, who was about three years old at the time, reminded me that the other drivers couldn't hear me. I felt stupid. I explained that I knew that, but I was frustrated. In that moment, I also realized that I could not make traffic go faster, nor could I control other drivers, so I needed to find a way to not let traffic get to me. For me that meant listening to an oldies radio station so I could focus on singing the songs of my youth. For you it may mean listening to podcasts that are either funny or educational—a distraction from a situation over which you have no control.

In this chapter, you'll pinpoint the general issues that cause stress, examine how that stress manifests itself, identify physical symptoms of stress, pinpoint the triggers of your stress, and discern patterns related to it. You can't start to treat stress until you identify exactly where it's coming from. Let's start with a short quiz examining how stressed you are in your daily life.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

“If your work is stressful, it is not your work.” —Marty Rubin

Even if you love what you do, the demands of the modern workplace can leave you feeling stressed and looking for balance because your life feels out of whack. What does work-life balance really mean? For each person, it means something different. My sister is fine with two weeks of vacation each year because she loves her job and doesn't feel like it's work. On the other hand, I am now a remote worker who, as an academic, traveled as often as possible for the past 20 years during academic breaks and to far-flung conferences during the school year. And no matter how much I love my job, I can't imagine having only two weeks off. Some people love working from home

or their local café or co-working space, whereas others feel disconnected and lonely and miss the interaction that office life brings.

Take some time to think about what your ideal life looks like. What steps can you take toward creating that life? It may be as simple as disconnecting from your phone to connect with your family for one hour each day or as complex as quitting your job and moving across the country to be closer to family. Make a plan, and work at that plan. Making small or big changes can mean the difference between a life you don't want or like and the happy and healthy life of your dreams.

HOW STRESSED ARE YOU?

If you picked up this book, it's easy to assume that you're feeling stressed. So let's take a simple measure of how stressed you feel. For each of the questions below, rate your level of stress from 1 to 10, with 10 being most stressed.

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. How stressed do you feel right now? | _____ |
| 2. How stressed did you feel this morning? | _____ |
| 3. How stressed did you feel yesterday? | _____ |
| 4. How stressed do you expect to feel tomorrow? | _____ |
| 5. How stressful is your work? | _____ |
| 6. How stressful are your friendships and family life? | _____ |
| 7. How stressful are your finances? | _____ |
| 8. How stressful is your health? | _____ |
| 9. How stressful is your commute? | _____ |
| 10. How stressful is the community in which you live? | _____ |
| 11. How stressed do you <i>usually</i> feel at the start of your day? | _____ |
| 12. How stressed do you <i>usually</i> feel at the end of your day? | _____ |
| TOTAL SCORE: _____ | |

If your score is between 95 and 120, you are seriously stressed and really need to take steps to ameliorate the impact of stress on your life.

If your score is between 75 and 95, your stress level is still high and you'll want to take steps to make sure it gets no higher.

If your score is between 60 and 75, your life is relatively calm right now, although some areas of your life may be more stressful than others. Incorporating stress management techniques into your daily life will help you cope.

If your score is below 60, you are doing great at managing the stress in your life. This book can give you a few more strategies to keep you on track.

The Sources of Your Stress

There are many sources of stress, and we'll explore them in the following sections. After you read about a source, you'll have room to write about how it affects your life.

WORK

Work is such a popular source of stress that an entire scientific journal is dedicated to the study of it. For the past thirty years, *Work and Stress* has covered the impact of work and organizations on health. The American Psychological Association found that 65 percent of Americans named work as their top source of stress. It's not hard to understand why. We all want to do well at work because how we perform determines how much money we make, how we perceive ourselves, and how others perceive us.

A FLEXIBLE WORK EXPERIENCE

Flexibility in where and when you work is one of the ways people are taking more control of their lives. Not everyone has the kind of job that allows for working remotely, but if you do, maybe it's time to ask your boss for a day or two per week where you check out of the office and get your work done someplace else. There is something less stressful about rolling out of bed, making yourself a pot of coffee or tea, and sitting in front of your computer in your comfy pajamas. Or if that doesn't give you enough structure, a co-working space may give you the feeling of being at work without

all the interruptions and formality of a standard office.

Flexible time may offer the freedom of working four ten-hour days with every Friday off. Or you may choose to work an extra hour each day and have every second Monday or Friday off. That will give you the opportunity to have more long weekends to travel or get your chores done. Or maybe you can ask to work off hours so that you're not stuck in traffic with other commuters. Going in before 7 a.m. or after 10 a.m. will take the stress out of your commute, especially if you have a long way to go.

Work is also where we spend most of our time. A 40-hour work week is often not reality, as work demands more and more of our hours. Many people find it hard to say no at work because they believe that if they don't say yes, their jobs may be in jeopardy. We often agree to new responsibilities as we wonder how we're going to fit one more task into our ever-lengthening day. According to the American Psychological Association, the common sources of work stress are the following:

- Low salaries
- Excessive workloads
- Few opportunities for growth or advancement
- Work that isn't engaging or challenging
- Lack of social support
- Not having enough control over job-related decisions
- Conflicting demands or unclear performance expectations

Looking at that list, you can see that the less control you have over your work, the more stressed you are likely to feel. Think about which items on the list apply to you, and pick one you may be able to change. This change may not happen right away, but making a plan will give you something to work toward in the exercises. (Remember, no matter which stressor you choose, there is no reason to feel as though you shouldn't be stressed about it. It's not about what you should or shouldn't feel but how you do feel.)

Work is stressful for me because

FINANCES

In a capitalist society where we constantly buy new and better items, it would seem that we're set up to be stressed about money. Money stress is often related to work stress because of salaries and benefits. In the United States, where our social welfare benefits are not very generous, it's on us to save enough to cover emergencies while still paying for our day-to-day expenses. Credit card debt is increasing as we spend more than we make and use debt to fill the gap. And with student loan debt in the trillions, too many of us will be paying back loans for a really long time. If you have children, planning for their college expenses can seem like a herculean task as tuition costs get higher and higher.

Whether reading Suze Orman or watching The Budgetnista YouTube channel, many of us want to learn how to be better at managing our money so we can spend less time worrying about it. The list below will help you identify sources of stress related to your finances. If you find yourself marking any of the statements below "True," you may want to seek out a financial planner to help you put your finances in order so you can feel more in control of this area of your life. And after completing the list, use the write-on lines to engage with your feelings regarding stress and finances.

My student loan debt is more than \$25,000.	TRUE	FALSE
I have credit card debt of more than \$10,000.	TRUE	FALSE
My rent/mortgage is more than a third of my salary.	TRUE	FALSE
I have less than three months of expenses in savings.	TRUE	FALSE
I have to borrow money for my child's college expenses.	TRUE	FALSE
I have ongoing medical expenses.	TRUE	FALSE
I sometimes need to use my credit card to pay basic expenses.	TRUE	FALSE
I use payday loans.	TRUE	FALSE
I take cash advances on my credit cards.	TRUE	FALSE

My finances are stressful for me because:

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The relationships you have with family and friends can be both a blessing and a curse when it comes to stress. If you have loving, supportive relationships, then family is your refuge from stress and can be a key factor in reducing the impact of stress in your life. However, if your relationships are fraught with conflict, you may find yourself dreading going home at the end of a long, stressful day.

The amount of stress we experience from family life also depends on how demanding our roles are at any particular time in our lives. For example, if you're a new parent with a demanding infant, you may find that when your alarm goes off in the morning you feel as though you just can't keep going. Or maybe you're caring for a parent with dementia, or your romantic relationship may be going through a difficult time and you're not sure if you're going to last over the long haul.

Friends can be a source of stress, too. Sometimes I find myself watching one of the *Housewives* shows and wondering why these women stay friends when their friendships are so full of drama and conflict. Sometimes it's not the friendships that are stressful in and of themselves; perhaps your friends are facing challenges and you are playing a supportive role. Your love and care for them may make their problems feel like your problems, which makes you a good friend, but a stressed one nevertheless.

TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS

Although friends and family can provide lots of support when we are going through trying times, sometimes it is these problematic relationships themselves that are the source of our stress. If you find that certain relationships make you feel drained and overwhelmed, sad, or frustrated every time you engage, then perhaps it's time to rethink the relationship. Being around people you love is supposed to make you feel good,

loved, cared about, and supported, no matter what. Loving difficult people is hard; you don't have to stop loving them, but you don't have to perpetually feel bad because of them. Setting emotional boundaries for yourself will make you less stressed even as you mourn what you wish the relationship could be but clearly isn't. For more on setting boundaries, see *Learn to Say No*, page 117.

Use the following checklist to identify some common sources of family and friend stress. The more boxes you check, the higher your level of stress is likely to feel. After completing the list, use the write-on lines to engage with your feelings regarding stress and family and friends.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ I have a child under the age of one. | ☐ I live far away from my siblings and parents. |
| ☐ I have more than one child younger than five. | ☐ I am going through a divorce. |
| ☐ I have teenagers in my home. | ☐ I am recently divorced. |
| ☐ I have a sick parent. | ☐ I have a friend who is a steady source of stress. |
| ☐ I have a sick child. | ☐ I am helping a friend going through a major life change or crisis. |
| ☐ I am a single parent. | |
| ☐ My spouse travels frequently for work. | |

My relationships with my friends and family are stressful because

HEALTH

Stress and health are two issues that go hand in hand. People who experience a lot of stress may have related illnesses such as hypertension or cardiovascular disease. Stress also manifests itself in physical issues like hair loss, skin problems, asthma, and panic attacks. The true-false list below identifies health conditions that can be caused or exacerbated by stress. If you have any of these conditions, you may want to monitor their symptoms as you work through this book, as reducing your stress may reduce your symptoms. After completing the list, use the write-on lines to engage with your feelings regarding stress and health.

I have diabetes.	TRUE	FALSE
I have a skin condition.	TRUE	FALSE
I have anxiety.	TRUE	FALSE
I have depression.	TRUE	FALSE
I have cardiovascular disease.	TRUE	FALSE
I have hypertension.	TRUE	FALSE
I have asthma.	TRUE	FALSE
I am overweight.	TRUE	FALSE
I am underweight.	TRUE	FALSE

My health causes me stress because

SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

The negative impact of social media is connected to our constant need to compare ourselves to other people. The problem is that on social media, friends, family, and influencers only show the best parts of their lives. Social media is also a distraction from work, and for some of us—including me—it is easy to get sucked down the rabbit hole when we have more important things to do.

Research has shown that we touch our phones thousands of times a day. Even if you are not connected to social media, your mobile devices keep you constantly connected to the world of work. You may check your e-mail at night and feel compelled to respond as soon as you can. Many people check and respond to their e-mail while on vacation because they're afraid that if they don't, their inboxes will be overflowing when they return to work. Technology often means that we are always reachable. This is why some companies have taken steps to shut down servers on weekends or after hours so that workers can disconnect, take a break, and be more productive when they are actually at work.

But it's not just work that keeps us on a leash. Even our cars come with the ability to connect to the Internet and to our phones, leaving us no place to hide and no time to ourselves.

Ask yourself why social media and technology are stressful for you and record your observations below.

Social media and technology are stressful for me because

MAJOR LIFE CHANGES

Major shifts in our lives cause stress because change is stressful, even if it is necessary or wanted. Major life changes such as the birth of a child, a marriage, moving to another city, or a change in employment can create a disruption in our lives that requires us to reinvent ourselves in some way. If you move to another city, you have to find a new salon, a new gym, and the shortest or fastest way to work. You need to find a new favorite restaurant and a new route to run or walk. If you have a new job, you have to learn the new office politics and get used to a new boss, new tasks, and new work relationships. Planning a marriage or preparing for a new member of the family can be very stressful, even though these events are a source of happiness. The same goes for sending a child off to college. You are happy for your child, but now you may have a little too much free time to manage.

Have you experienced any major life changes recently? Note in the lines below whether they have caused you stress.

I have experienced a major life change, and it has been stressful for me because

LOSS

Whether it is the loss of a relationship or a loved one, these life changes require us to think for a long period of time about our identity or mortality. Yes, we know that we are all going to die, but losing someone who means something to us often makes us reconsider who we are and what we want out of life. Even if the loss is something that we wanted, like the end of a bad relationship, we still experience stress as we try to reorient our lives to accommodate a new role. Loss is particularly stressful because we may feel like we can't address the person who is gone.

On the lines below, record losses that have caused you stress.

I have experienced a loss, and it is stressful for me because

ENVIRONMENT AND SURROUNDINGS

The environment where we live and work can be a source of stress. Even for those of us who love living in cities, the density, concrete, pollution, and noise can put us on edge. This is why people often seek out green spaces, like rooftop gardens, to feel relaxed. Living in a neighborhood where you don't feel safe or living next to a noisy neighbor can also be a source of stress. Sometimes, where we live is a source of stress because we live in areas that are very socially competitive. No matter what your worries are, write them out so you can understand them better.

Where I live is stressful for me because

INTERNAL STRESSORS

In addition to the external causes of stress, some of the stressors in our lives are internal. These include our fears, such as the fear of flying, fear of public speaking, or fear about how we are viewed in social settings. Sometimes we experience stress because we don't feel as though we're in control, whether regarding the outcome of a medical test or the traffic jam on the way home from work. Beliefs about and expectations of ourselves can cause stress, too. Maybe you believe you're on the outs with your family when you're not, or you may expect that you should have a perfect life, which isn't possible.

Write down any of these internal irritations that cause you to feel stressed.

These fears make me feel stressed:

These situations make me feel out of control and make me feel stressed:

The following beliefs and expectations I have about myself cause me to feel stressed:

The Symptoms of Stress

In this section, we'll explore the common physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms of stress. Being able to properly identify them can make you aware of your stress levels and spur you to make a change. By understanding the symptoms of stress, you can better identify and reduce it in your daily life.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

A recent study found that stress is the number one reason people visit their primary care physician. This shows that stress can cause a lot of physical distress. Our bodies react to stress in a wide variety of ways, and each of us has our own unique responses.

Stress causes our bodies to release adrenaline and cortisol. Though the release of adrenaline can cause some health risks, the more dangerous hormone is cortisol, which is considered a “bad” stress hormone. One of the body's responses to cortisol is to reduce inflammation, but when chronic stress exposes the body to a constant stream of cortisol, the flood of cortisol causes long-term chronic inflammation that causes damage to blood vessels, which leads to insulin resistance and cardiovascular disease and can worsen painful joint diseases.

A lot of research over the years has shown that stress can exacerbate and complicate many health problems, but more and more we are finding out that stress can also cause disease.

According to Sheldon Cohen, a leading stress researcher at Carnegie Mellon University, stress leads to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome, and it may even lead to early death. If you are already dealing with physical or mental illnesses, stress can also exacerbate your symptoms and hinder your recovery efforts.

Figuring out how you physically react to stress can help you manage it. Identify your responses to stress below.

I experience these physical symptoms of stress:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Breathing faster | ☐ Muscle tension |
| ☐ Breathing harder | ☐ Muscle pain or soreness |
| ☐ Hyperventilation | ☐ Jaw pain |
| ☐ Asthma attack | ☐ Back pain |
| ☐ Sweats | ☐ Joint pain |
| ☐ Rapid heartbeat | ☐ Frequent colds and infections |
| ☐ Hypertension | ☐ Teeth grinding |
| ☐ Heartburn | ☐ Painful periods |
| ☐ Diarrhea | ☐ Shorter periods |
| ☐ Ulcer | ☐ Longer periods |
| ☐ Acid reflux | ☐ Irregular periods |
| ☐ Constipation | ☐ Hot flashes |
| ☐ Excess flatulence | ☐ Lack of sexual desire |
| ☐ Irritable bowel syndrome | ☐ Other _____ |
| ☐ Headaches | |

EMOTIONAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

Stress impacts us not only physically but also emotionally. Our friends, colleagues, and family members may notice that we are not our usual selves when we're under stress. Common emotional reactions to chronic stress include anger, irritability, depression, and anxiety. One of the key motivators I had for writing this book was having several friends who rushed to the emergency room, convinced they were having a heart attack, and finding out that they were having panic attacks due to chronic stress. Only then did they realize that they needed to change their lives.

Think about how your mind and body respond to the stress in your life and record your observations below.

My emotional and psychological responses to stress are

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

Unhealthy behavioral responses to stress often contribute to the health issues that stress can cause. Some people smoke as a response to stress. Others end up drinking a lot to calm the chaos in their heads. Some eat too much or eat too little, while others end up burying themselves in work and taking mental health days just to get some reprieve. Below is a checklist of common behavioral symptoms that you can use to identify your behavioral responses to stress. As you go through this workbook, you may want to refer back to this section periodically to monitor how these behavioral symptoms change as you reduce your stress.

When I am stressed I . . .

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Smoke more | ☐ Avoid friends and family |
| ☐ Smoke marijuana | ☐ Work more |
| ☐ Drink more alcohol | ☐ Work less |
| ☐ Use illegal drugs like cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamine | ☐ Work out less |
| ☐ Use legal drugs that are not prescribed to me | ☐ Watch more TV |
| ☐ Eat more | ☐ Play more video games |
| ☐ Eat less | ☐ Other _____ |
| ☐ Eat more junk food | ☐ _____ |
| ☐ Sleep more | ☐ _____ |
| ☐ Sleep less | ☐ _____ |

THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

When it comes to stress and the way we experience it, it's important to remember that your body and your mind are not separate. It is highly unlikely that you will feel stress only in your body and have no emotional or psychological symptoms. And the mind-body connection regarding stress works both ways. For example, as we discussed earlier, your emotional reaction to chronic stress may result in a release of cortisol (the “bad” stress hormone), which in turn suppresses your immune system and thus leaves you more susceptible to a range of illnesses. A chronic physical illness that causes you stress may result in depression. The physical and emotional symptoms are linked. That's great news because treating your stress will help make you feel better both physically and emotionally.

THE LONG-TERM HEALTH EFFECTS OF STRESS

The physical, emotional, behavioral, and psychological responses to stress described above are the short-term impacts of stress, but if we are exposed to high levels of stress over a long period of time, the short-term impacts may put us at risk for more long-term health problems. For example, cardiovascular problems can lead to heart attacks, elevated blood pressure can lead to stroke, and endocrine imbalances can lead to diabetes, weight gain, or weight loss. Extreme weight gain resulting in obesity comes with its own set of health problems. Gastrointestinal problems such as acid reflux, ulcers, and irritable bowel syndrome can be chronic, and though symptoms may improve with a reduction in stress, the underlying illness may not go away. Long-term migraines that need medical intervention can become a chronic problem. Finally, some chronic mental health problems triggered by stress may require long-term psychiatric care.

Now that we've taken a closer look at the common symptoms of stress, let's examine the triggers that lead to you feeling stressed.

Identify Your Triggers

In order to manage your stress, you have to be able to identify what makes you feel stressed. Think about these stress triggers:

I feel stressed when

I feel like I have too much to do.	TRUE	FALSE
I skip a meal.	TRUE	FALSE
I am stuck in traffic.	TRUE	FALSE
I don't feel in control of my life.	TRUE	FALSE
I have to wait in line.	TRUE	FALSE
My phone keeps ringing.	TRUE	FALSE
I think about my finances.	TRUE	FALSE
I don't have time to exercise.	TRUE	FALSE
I feel like I can't say no to a request.	TRUE	FALSE
I think things are not as perfect as I want them to be.	TRUE	FALSE
I have to do things I don't want to do.	TRUE	FALSE
I am very tired.	TRUE	FALSE
I am very hungry.	TRUE	FALSE
My environment is not as organized as I like it to be.	TRUE	FALSE
My boss is stressed.	TRUE	FALSE
I am behind at work.	TRUE	FALSE
I have a pressing deadline at work.	TRUE	FALSE
I am late for work.	TRUE	FALSE
I work long hours.	TRUE	FALSE
I make a mistake at work.	TRUE	FALSE

I have to travel for work.	TRUE	FALSE
I have to speak in public.	TRUE	FALSE
My colleagues don't do what they are supposed to do.	TRUE	FALSE
My child(ren) won't listen to me.	TRUE	FALSE
I have an argument with a family member.	TRUE	FALSE
I have an argument with a friend.	TRUE	FALSE
I have an argument with my partner.	TRUE	FALSE
I have to care for an ill family member.	TRUE	FALSE
I have to care for an ill friend.	TRUE	FALSE
Someone in my family is sick.	TRUE	FALSE
I have friends or family visiting me.	TRUE	FALSE
I have to host friends or family during the holidays.	TRUE	FALSE
I don't have time for friends or family.	TRUE	FALSE

FORM NEW HABITS

To take the next steps, you will have to change your behavior and habits. In some ways, habits are shortcuts that the brain takes without thinking. These habits form after we have connected two behaviors for so long that our brain no longer needs to make a decision about doing the second behavior after we do the first. For example, you may snack on a bag of chips when you come home from work. You may not remember

why you started linking behavior A with behavior B, or you may not even realize that you *have* linked behaviors A and B. The exercises in this book will help you get rid of old habits—and that means disrupting the trigger-to-behavior process. Research shows that it takes 66 days on average to form a single healthy habit—and since we're talking about your health and well-being, these are 66 well-spent days.

Finding Patterns

It's important to know what causes you to have a stress response. We each have triggers that get us worked up, start our hearts racing, and increase the rate of our breathing. Understanding the patterns of triggers that set off your stress response will help determine which stress management techniques you should use. Look over your answers above and write down situations that cause you to feel stressed. Is it getting cut off in traffic, a last-minute assignment at work, a delayed flight, being late, or not having enough time to have lunch? Try to find the common denominators shared by many of your stressors. Are they caused by lack of control? Lack of time? Pressure to be perfect? Do you see any patterns below?

I get stressed when my boss . . .

I get stressed when my colleagues . . .

I get stressed when my friends . . .

I get stressed when my family . . .

I get stressed when . . .

Next Steps

Congratulations on completing the first chapter of the book! You have taken the most important step toward solving any problem: defining it. Now that you have a good understanding of what stress is, the sources of stress in your life, your responses to stress, and the situations that trigger you, you are prepared to take action. You are about to embark on a journey of changing the way you live by engaging in exercises that will teach you how to live a life free from the bonds of stress.

Chapter Check-In

Before you move on, take some time to write down what you learned from working through chapter 1. Summarize what you learned about the different types of stress, how stress impacts the body, and how stress affects you. Which sources of stress cause you the most problems? What responses to stress do you want to focus on changing? How are you feeling now that you have a better understanding of your stressors, stress triggers, and stress responses?

CHAPTER TWO

Approaching the Exercises

IN CHAPTER 1 YOU LEARNED A LOT ABOUT WHAT STRESS IS and how it can impact your body and mind. In the following chapters, you will engage with the one-, five-, and 10-minute interactive exercises that will help you manage your stress. But first, you'll work on preparing yourself for the exercises and setting goals. These goals will help you decide which kind of exercises you want to do, when and where you want to do them, and how often.

You'll have lots of exercises to choose from that you can use on a daily basis to manage the stress in your life. In addition, write-on lines accompanying the exercises will help you record your experiences; your physical, emotional, psychological, and behavioral responses; and how you decide to change them to make your life healthier and happier. (You can also record your progress with the Stress Tracker on page 132.)

First, use this checklist to clarify where you are in terms of life changes. Use the blanks next to the check boxes at the bottom of the list to add any major life changes not covered here, and check those off as well.

Major Life Change Checklist

In the last year . . .

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I started a new relationship. | ☐ I moved to a new city. |
| ☐ I ended a relationship. | ☐ I started a new job. |
| ☐ I got married. | ☐ I was fired or laid off from a job. |
| ☐ I got separated. | ☐ I started a business. |
| ☐ I got divorced. | ☐ I closed a business. |
| ☐ I welcomed a child into my family. | ☐ My partner lost a job. |
| ☐ I lost a child. | ☐ My partner lost a parent. |
| ☐ I lost a parent. | ☐ My partner lost a close friend or family member. |
| ☐ I lost a close friend or family member. | ☐ I started school. |
| ☐ I was diagnosed with a chronic or severe illness. | ☐ I had legal problems. |
| ☐ My partner, child, or parent was diagnosed with a chronic or severe illness. | ☐ _____ |
| ☐ I moved to a new home. | ☐ _____ |
| | ☐ _____ |

Set the Stage

Before you start doing the exercises, you need to be in the right frame of mind. You need to be optimistic about the possibilities for changing your life in the future, open to the experience of learning something new, and willing to risk failure while remaining excited about the possibility of success.

Sometimes all you will need is one minute to catch your breath and slow yourself down. But other times you may need to disengage from your work routine, get out of the office, and engage in a 10-minute activity. Your choice of exercises may be constrained by your location or how much time you have to do an exercise. For example, if you are getting stressed in a business meeting, you may not be able to take a 10-minute time-out to get yourself together, but a one-minute breathing or visualization exercise while taking a trip to the bathroom may be all you need to get you back to the best of who you are.

To set the stage for the exercises, you need to be aware of what you are feeling and thinking. If you are not conscious of the stress you are feeling, then you will not be able to make the choice that is right for you. This requires you to be fully present in the moment.

Here's how to work through the exercises, from start to finish:

1. Decide what you will use for a timer. This could be your watch, your phone, or the clock on the wall. In situations where using a timer may not be practical, like in a meeting where you don't want to be seen watching the clock or checking your phone, or where an alarm will disturb others, you can still do the exercises while simply estimating the time. Not all exercises in the book require using a timer anyway, as simply following the instructions will take about one, five, or 10 minutes.
2. If you can, remove yourself from the physical location of the source of your stress.
3. Close your eyes and take one deep breath. Open your eyes.
4. Follow the directions of the exercise.
5. Lastly, record in the margins of this workbook which exercise you chose; the date, time, and location of when you did the exercise; and whether the exercise worked. Depending on where you are, you may not have access to this book; if you don't, use a note-taking app on your cell phone to record your activity and later copy your results here.

State Your Goals

Now that you know how stress impacts your life, you can use that information to determine your goals with the exercises. Yes, you want to reduce your overall stress level, but what else do you want to accomplish with these exercises?

Perhaps you want to reduce a particular stressor, react differently to a particular trigger, or be able to re-center yourself when you are beginning to feel overwhelmed. You may want to start the day in a calmer frame of mind or be able to calm yourself in the evening to enjoy longer, deeper sleep that leaves you feeling rested and alert. Maybe your goal is to become a master of peace and tranquility, be less stressed at work, or be less distracted by stress and more present when you're with your family and friends. Thinking about your goals now will make choosing your exercises easier and help you make more appropriate choices.

My goals for using this stress management workbook are

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

When do you want to do your stress management exercises? Think about whether you want to have a schedule of little breaks throughout the day, if you want to use them in the morning to start your day in the right mood, or whether you will rely on them to help you relax and sleep better at night. Feel free to combine all these options and add your own, but try not to schedule more exercises than you think you will actually engage in. You can always start in the area(s) of most urgent need and gradually expand your exercise practice to other areas of your life.

Here's when I will do my exercises:

Where do you plan to do your stress management exercises? Will you be at work, at home, on the road, or a combination of all of the above? This will determine the kind of exercises you do. For example, it will be easier to do dancing and stretching exercises at home because your office situation may not be conducive to that kind of activity. You may not want to access YouTube or travel websites at the office, since you don't want your boss thinking that you're not focused on your job. Some exercises are hard to do on a plane or while driving and may not be suitable for managing your stress while in transit.

Here's where I will do my exercises:

Choose Your Exercises

How will you decide which exercises are right for you, given the goals you have articulated and how you want to incorporate the stress management exercises into your life? Let's start with how much time you have to dedicate to your self-care process. This workbook shouldn't be one more thing you have to do that may cause you even more stress. Only you know how much time you have to take care of yourself.

But note that because stress can get in the way of your performance, completing the exercises will improve your performance and give you more quality time in your busy day. Of course, the more time you have to dedicate to your stress management practice, the better you will feel. That said, you'll begin to feel changes with just a few one-minute exercises per day. Many of the exercises lend themselves to being repeated throughout the day, so, if possible, try to schedule breaks all day long. If you can't, using the exercises in the morning and/or evening will reduce stress as well.

Keep your goals in mind as you review the types of exercises below. If you want to calm yourself down, breathing exercises will be very helpful. If you are feeling muscle tension, you will want to do a stretching exercise. And if you want to prepare for a stressful event, you may want to do a visualization exercise that helps you reorient your thinking to focus on success. See the following pages for recommendations for choosing the right exercise for your needs.

GOAL: ACHIEVE CALM

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Breathe	49	Self-Massage	67	Perfect Poses	102
Visualize Calm	50	Self-Hypnosis	74	Mindfulness Now	105
Recite an Affirmation	51	Put Stress in Its Place	75	Peaceful Relaxation	107
Pictures of Peace	54	Clear the Clutter	78	Take a Shower	108
Pictures of Love	54	Music Moments	80	Color Your Calm	108
Break-Away	55	Jigsaw Puzzle	81	Paint or Draw a Picture	108
Prayer Pause	56	Embrace Your Green Thumb	85	Card Play	109
State Your Stress	56	Carve Out Worry Time	89	Name Your Game	110
Count Up, Count Down	58	Move for 10	96	Rake the Sandbox	111
Quick Quote	61	A Cup of Calm	99	Nothing for 10	113
Rehydrate	64	Fold It Away	99		
Stress Squeezer	66	Natural Communion	101		

GOAL: STOP HEADACHES

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Breathe	49	Neck Roll	59	Get Your Groove On	86
Stress Stretches	57	Rehydrate	64	A Cup of Calm	99
Shoulder Roll	59	Self-Massage	67	Perfect Poses	102

GOAL: RELEASE MUSCLE TENSION

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Standing Posture Check	53	Neck Roll	59	Perfect Poses	102
Sitting Posture Check	54	Form a Fist	64	Peaceful Relaxation	107
Stress Stretches	57	Self-Massage	67	Take a Shower	108
Shoulder Roll	59	Move for 10	96		

GOAL: IMPROVE FOCUS AND MENTAL PERFORMANCE

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Visualize Calm	50	Snack Break	81	Rinse and Repeat	106
Break-Away	55	Carve Out Worry Time	89	Rubik's Cube	106
Count Up, Count Down	58	Mantra Moment	90	Color Your Calm	108
Stay Still	66	Move for 10	96	Paint or Draw a Picture	108
Focus for Five	74	Fold It Away	99	Card Play	109
Put Stress in Its Place	75	Natural Communion	101	Name Your Game	110
Clear the Clutter	78	Perfect Poses	102	Juggle Gym	110
Jigsaw Puzzle	81	Puzzle Practice	105	Rake the Sandbox	111

GOAL: PREPARE FOR A STRESSFUL EVENT

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Close Your Eyes	50	Count Up, Count Down	58	Lower Your Expectations	87
Visualize Calm	50	Quick Quote	61	Mantra Moment	90
Recite an Affirmation	51	Stay Still	66	Play with Doh	91
Pictures of Peace	54	Self-Massage	67	A Cup of Calm	99
Pictures of Love	54	Put Stress in Its Place	75	Perfect Poses	102
Prayer Pause	56	Talk to Yourself	76	Mindfulness Now	105
State Your Stress	56	Learn Your Limits	77	Peaceful Relaxation	107
Stress Stretches	57	Music Moments	80	Juggle Gym	110

GOAL: GET BETTER SLEEP

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Breathe	49	Self-Hypnosis	74	A Cup of Calm	99
Stress Stretches	57	Music Moments	80	Natural Communion	101
Count Up, Count Down	58	Instagram Moment	83	Perfect Poses	102
Gratitude Minute	60	Carve Out Worry Time	89	Peaceful Relaxation	107
Stay Still	66	Mantra Moment	90	Take a Shower	108
Self-Massage	67	Journal Your Journey	98		

GOAL: FEEL MORE OPTIMISM

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Recite an Affirmation	51	Quick Quote	61	Instagram Moment	83
Prayer Pause	56	Shift Your Perspective	72	Lower Your Expectations	87
Gratitude Minute	60	Talk to Yourself	76	Journal Your Journey	98

GOAL: FEEL HAPPIER

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Compliment Others	62	Embrace Your Green Thumb	85	Journal Your Journey	98
You Love You	79	Get Your Groove On	86	Natural Communion	101
Music Moments	80	Find Meaning	88	Juggle Gym	110
Instagram Moment	83	Move for 10	96	Random Acts	112
Write What Went Right	84				

GOAL: BURN NERVOUS ENERGY

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Jumping Jacks	63	Get Your Groove On	86	Cut It Up	100
Tear It Up	65	Play with Doh	91	Natural Communion	101
Stress Squeezer	66	Move for 10	96	Puzzle Practice	105
Paper Toss	80	Fold It Away	99	Do the Dishes	111

GOAL: GET RID OF ANGER OR FRUSTRATION

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Tear It Up	65	Get Your Groove On	86	Puzzle Practice	105
Stress Squeezer	66	Find Meaning	88	Rubik's Cube	106
Put Stress in Its Place	75	Play with Doh	91	Peaceful Relaxation	107
Talk to Yourself	76	Move for 10	96	Color Your Calm	108
Paper Toss	80	Fold It Away	99	Paint or Draw a Picture	108
Jigsaw Puzzle	81	Cut It Up	100	Card Play	109
Embrace Your Green Thumb	85	Natural Communion	101	Name Your Game	110

GOAL: DISTRACT YOURSELF

EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Jigsaw Puzzle	81	Fold It Away	99	Color Your Calm	108
Instagram Moment	83	Rhyme . . . or Not	100	Paint or Draw a Picture	108
Pin Your Interest	84	Cut It Up	100	Card Play	109
Embrace Your Green Thumb	85	Watch a Mini-Documentary	101	Name Your Game	110
Sports Time	86	Natural Communion	101	Rake the Sandbox	111
Phone Cleanup	89	Puzzle Practice	105	Do the Dishes	111
Play with Doh	91	Rubik's Cube	106		

GOAL: FEEL PRODUCTIVE					
EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE	EXERCISE	PAGE
Jigsaw Puzzle	81	Fold It Away	99	Color Your Calm	108
Embrace Your Green Thumb	85	Rhyme . . . or Not	100	Paint or Draw a Picture	108
Phone Cleanup	89	Cut It Up	100	Card Play	109
Send a Postcard	89	Puzzle Practice	105	Name Your Game	110
Move for 10	96	Rubik's Cube	106	Do the Dishes	111
Journal Your Journey	98				

The chart below highlights some common stressors and a list of exercises that will be most beneficial for each. Consider this list a menu of choices, or do all of them in combination with each other for the stressor that applies to you.

STRESSFUL SITUATION	EXERCISE
You are rushing to get to work in the morning and are feeling overwhelmed.	Breathe (page 49) Sitting Posture Check (page 54) Count Up, Count Down (page 58) Shoulder Roll (page 59)
You are stuck in traffic, feeling irritable, and getting angry.	Count Up, Count Down (page 58) Music Moments (page 80) Mantra Moment (page 90)
You have a very important presentation at work; your palms are getting sweaty and your stomach is getting upset.	Breathe (page 49) Recite an Affirmation (page 51) Form a Fist (page 64) Talk to Yourself (page 76) Mantra Moment (page 90)

STRESSFUL SITUATION	EXERCISE
You just had a fight with a friend.	Send a Postcard (page 89) Move for 10 (page 96) Journal Your Journey (page 98) Natural Communion (page 101) Viral Video (page 104) Go Away (page 127)
You are late for a meeting.	Breathe (page 49) Visualize Calm (page 50) Count Up, Count Down (page 58) Stay Still (page 66)
You are waiting in line to complete an errand and have many more important things you could be doing instead.	Breathe (page 49) Visualize Calm (page 50) Count Up, Count Down (page 58) Stress Squeezer (page 66) Music Moments (page 80) Mantra Moment (page 90)
Your plane/bus/train/car/ferry is late.	Breathe (page 49) Visualize Calm (page 50) Count Up, Count Down (page 58) Stress Squeezer (page 66) Music Moments (page 80) Jigsaw Puzzle (page 81) Instagram Moment (page 83) Mantra Moment (page 90) Puzzle Practice (page 105) Rubik's Cube (page 106)

STRESSFUL SITUATION	EXERCISE
You have been assigned a demanding project at work.	Breathe (page 49) Visualize Calm (page 50) Count Up, Count Down (page 58) Stress Squeezer (page 66) Paper Toss (page 80) Music Moments (page 80) Lower Your Expectations (page 87) Find Meaning (page 88) Mantra Moment (page 90) A Cup of Calm (page 99)
You have to unexpectedly work late.	Breathe (page 49) Visualize Calm (page 50) Count Up, Count Down (page 58) Stress Squeezer (page 66) Find Meaning (page 88) Mantra Moment (page 90) A Cup of Calm (page 99)

Chapter Check-In

Now that you have completed another chapter, you may be able to more clearly see the way forward out of stress. Summarize what you learned in chapter 2 about preparing to tackle your stress. Write down what you have done to prepare for the activities you will start doing in chapter 3. How are you feeling about the goals you have outlined and your ability to achieve them? Do you feel prepared to work on the exercises?

[illegible]

PART TWO

The Exercises

Welcome to part 2: the exercises that will help you manage your stress. Yes, it's good to know what stress is and how it impacts your body and mind, but you need to learn how to manage the stress in your life so you can function at your best. Here you'll find separate chapters for one-minute, five-minute, and 10-minute exercises, as well as a final chapter that provides effective strategies that lead to long-term lifestyle changes for a more fulfilling life.

CHAPTER THREE

One-Minute Helpers

FOR SYMPTOMS OF STRESS THAT OCCUR in the moment, you want to get help right away. These one-minute exercises were created to help you feel less overwhelmed by your immediate response to a stressor. For example, you may have a very important presentation. Your hands are sweating, your heart is racing, and you also feel a bit nauseous. These are common responses to the fear of public speaking, a fear that many people have no matter how experienced they are. But you don't want to let your fears control your performance. You want to perform without feeling overwhelmed or that you are going to fail and lose the deal. Although audiences are usually very supportive of early signs of nervousness such as talking too fast, getting distracted, or having shaky hands, you don't have to be that person. You can step out with confidence, feeling present and in command and ready to show how prepared and knowledgeable you are.

This chapter gives you fast-acting strategies to reduce the impact the flood of adrenaline and cortisol can have and take you from feeling afraid of failure to feeling like you've got this. These are stress management strategies that can be used wherever you are, whether at home, at the office, or stuck in traffic. Most are so subtle that others won't be aware of what you're doing. And even if they are—such as seeing you take a deep breath—these exercises won't make you feel self-conscious. Many of these strategies are used by high-performing athletes

and leaders who need to make that first impression go a long way. The first strategy is probably something you have done before: Take a breath.

One way to effectively develop your stress management toolkit is by using the write-on lines at the end of each exercise chapter to keep track of the exercises you prefer. Which ones helped relieve your stress the fastest? Which ones did you like doing? Did some work better in particular circumstances? Keeping notes will help you discern which strategies work best for you and which you will use in specific situations. Keep in mind that you don't have to try all the exercises before moving on to chapter 4.

12 SUPER QUICK AND SIMPLE STRESS SOLUTIONS

There are lots of ways to reduce stress without taking even one minute. Use these strategies as a quick way to distract yourself from stressful thoughts and give yourself a hit of feeling good.

1. In the vein of "Fake it until you make it," take a second to smile. Research shows that even a fake smile makes us feel good.
2. Take one slow, long, deep breath. Just one. It might be all you need to calm down.
3. Eat a small amount of chocolate.
4. Slowly drink a glass of room-temperature water.
5. Chew gum.
6. Laugh out loud. Yes, you can fake this one, too.
7. Make a fist and then release it slowly.
8. Speak more slowly.
9. Text a family member or friend: "I love you."
10. Make a funny face.
11. Blink slowly.
12. Sit up straight.

BREATHE

Our breath is life. It's how we take in the vital oxygen that we need and expel the carbon dioxide we don't. Shallow and rapid breathing are two of the first signs of feeling stressed. If left unchecked, you may even hyperventilate, which means you are breathing too fast to get the oxygen you need. The cure for that is to hold a paper bag over your mouth and breathe deeply to re-regulate your oxygen intake.

But before your breathing gets you to that point, you can counteract the lack of oxygen that may result from shallow, rapid breathing by taking a deep breath. The flood of oxygen will calm your body and keep your brain sharp and clear. A deep breath also takes you from worrying about the future to focusing on the present. The more aware you are of your physical responses, the more you are able to rein them in before they become a problem. Here is a short checklist to evaluate your stress response.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You feel as if you can't catch your breath. | ☐ Your stomach feels upset. |
| ☐ Your chest feels tight. | ☐ You are beginning to feel anxious, afraid, angry, or upset. |
| ☐ You feel lightheaded. | ☐ You feel as if you can't think straight. |

If you checked any of these boxes, then it's time to get your breath under control so your body and brain can get the oxygen they need to function well.

1. To start, stand with your legs shoulder-width apart and arms loosely by your sides with palms facing forward.
2. Breathe in slowly, slowly counting up from one to five.
3. While counting, raise your arms above your head and bring your palms together. Hold your breath for a count of three, keeping your palms together above your head.
4. Lower your arms and bring your palms together in front of you. Exhale, counting in your head from one to five. Resume normal breathing. (The arm motion opens up your lungs as you inhale, maximizing the volume of air you take in.) Depending on where you are, you may not be able to raise and lower your arms, but you should feel free to do this exercise without the additional arm action, as the focus is on your breathing.
5. Repeat three times if you are able. If you can't, remember that doing it once is enough to center you and keep you focused on the now, thereby reducing your stress.

6. Note: If you can't stand—if, for example, you're stuck in traffic or in a meeting with your boss—do the exercise seated upright (no slouching!) without moving your arms.

CLOSE YOUR EYES

This exercise is perfect when you want to shut out the world. Set your timer for one minute, and close your eyes. When the alarm goes off, slowly open your eyes and get back to work. You can combine this with the preceding Breathe exercise or the Visualize Calm exercise that follows.

VISUALIZE CALM

Visualizing is a great strategy that can be used for improving performance in many situations. For example, as a way of increasing their confidence, athletes often visualize themselves winning. Visualizing calm can help you relax by using your imagination to slow down your body. The first step in this process is to think about a place that puts you at ease. If it's the beach or the woods, be specific about which beach or which woods so that you have a real place to go in your mind. You can choose a vacation place, your childhood home, or your favorite spa. Wherever it is, think about that place. Make a list of some of these places here so you can use them as a resource any time you want to do this exercise.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Set the timer on your phone for one minute, then close your eyes and imagine yourself in this place. If it didn't work the first time, try again.

RECITE AN AFFIRMATION

Affirmations are positive statements that reinforce a particular belief about yourself. They work by replacing negative thoughts that create anxiety with positive thoughts that make you less stressed. For example, if you are about to deliver an important presentation and you're taking a few minutes to get yourself in the right frame of mind, you may decide to say the words "I can do this." Depending on where you are, you may not be able to say these words out loud, even in a whisper, but you can say them in your head. Close your eyes and repeat your affirmation three to five times. Try "I am awesome," "I am really good at this," or "I will succeed." Affirmations are best used when you are not feeling confident about what you are doing or about to do. If you answer "True" to any of the following statements, affirmations may be a good stress management strategy for you.

1. I don't think I can do this.	TRUE	FALSE
2. I am going to fail.	TRUE	FALSE
3. It is impossible to do this.	TRUE	FALSE
4. I need more time to do this.	TRUE	FALSE
5. I am no good at this.	TRUE	FALSE
6. I will look stupid.	TRUE	FALSE
7. I am not qualified to do this.	TRUE	FALSE

Whether or not you circled "True" for a statement, write the opposite statement as an affirmation in the area below for practice. For example, in response to the statement "I don't think I can do this," write the statement "I can do this" as an affirmation below. Use these affirmations whenever you begin to hear any of those negative messages in your head.

Affirmation 1:

Affirmation 2:

Affirmation 3:

Affirmation 4:

Affirmation 5:

Affirmation 6:

Affirmation 7:

You can combine the affirmation exercise with the Breathe exercise to get even greater stress relief. Breathe in deeply. While breathing out, slowly say the affirmation. This combination will give you confidence while centering you and clearing your mind. You can set the timer for one minute before you begin or simply recite your chosen affirmation in this manner three to five times.

Another way to use affirmations is to make them part of your daily routine, regardless of whether you have a stressful event. For example, you may choose to state your affirmation three to five times when you wake up in the morning, before you start your workday, or before you go to bed at night. You can also make it part of your commuting routine. You can start your day with “This is going to be a great day” and end it with “This was a great day” or “Tomorrow is going to be a great day.” A daily ritual of saying affirmations can help you start the day in the right frame of mind or finish the day with less worry in order to get more restful sleep.

STANDING POSTURE CHECK

Your stress levels affect your posture. Do you hunch your shoulders? Look at the ground as you walk? Not standing straight affects your ability to breathe deeply and face your challenges head-on.

Doing regular posture checks throughout the day can help you manage your stress. Choose a specific time every hour to check in with your body and make sure that you are standing upright. No matter how absorbed you are in other tasks, be sure to do it.

1. Set your timer for one minute.
2. Stand up with your feet facing forward and shoulder-width apart.
3. Breathe in slowly. As you breathe out slowly, relax your shoulders.
4. Imagine a string running through your body—from the center of your belly through your spine and up through the top of your head—that it is pulling you upright.
5. Repeat until you hear the timer.
6. When your timer goes off, return to what you were doing.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Your health is important. Schedule and attend a yearly checkup with your doctor. If you have chronic health problems, make sure you are doing what the doctor ordered in terms of lifestyle changes and medication. This book takes a holistic approach to stress management but is not meant to replace medical care if you find yourself experiencing symptoms that are not being ameliorated by stress management techniques. You need to confirm that your heart, lungs, and other organs are not being

negatively impacted by the stress you are experiencing.

Many illnesses that are stress-related will respond to behavioral changes, but they may not be enough. For example, hypertension can be improved by dietary choices and exercise, but you may still need medicine for your condition. Diabetes can also be positively affected by lifestyle changes that include reducing stress, getting exercise, and changing how you eat, but you may need medical care for that as well.

SITTING POSTURE CHECK

We all sit for much too long every day, and studies have shown how so much sitting is bad for our health. It's also bad for our stress levels, since breathing deeply and stretching—which relieve stress—are much less effective when you're sitting. Long, unbroken periods of sitting can easily lead to hunched or slouched shoulders. Take regular standing breaks if you can. When you stand, you may choose to do a breathing exercise or repeat your affirmation before sitting down.

But perhaps you can't stand. Anytime you find yourself slouching while sitting, do this exercise to realign yourself. This is a preventive strategy that will reduce your stress levels throughout the day.

1. Set your timer for one minute.
2. While sitting, plant your feet squarely on the ground, shoulder-width apart.
3. Sit up so your spine is stick straight.
4. Place your left hand on your left thigh and your right hand on your right thigh.
5. Relax your shoulders.
6. Breathe in slowly. As you breathe out slowly, continue to relax your shoulders.
7. Imagine a string running through your body—from the bottom of your spine and up through the top of your head—that is pulling you upright.
8. When the minute is up, go back to working at your desk, and maintain your upright posture.

PICTURES OF PEACE

Research has shown that looking at pictures of greenery makes people feel calmer. Find a picture of a scene in nature that makes you feel calm, and bring it up on your computer screen or phone. Set your timer, and spend one minute looking at it. Good sources for these kinds of pictures are National Geographic and the Sierra Club. You might even want to buy a calendar that has natural scenes and look at it for one minute whenever you need to manage your stress levels.

PICTURES OF LOVE

Another way to use a picture of peace is to fill your workspace or living space with pictures that remind you of the love in your life. Maybe it's your child's art, or perhaps it's a picture of your family, your pet, or you and your partner on a special day. It may be a picture of the view from a scenic hike you took with your children

or a picture of that time you caught a big fish with your dad. Put these pictures in frames on your desk at work or throughout your home. When feeling stressed, set your timer and spend one minute looking at them and picturing yourself surrounded by love.

BREAK-AWAY

One way to reduce stress is to avoid the source of your stress. Take a break from the source of your stress for one minute, and during that time, use one of the earlier exercises to bring you calm. If the news is stressing you out, turn it off for one minute and practice the Breathe exercise (page 49). If you just got a stressful e-mail, set your timer for one minute, turn off your screen, and Visualize Calm (page 50). Take a step away from a difficult conversation, try the Pictures of Peace exercise (page 54), and step back in calmer and ready to engage.

What is your source of stress? How can you break away from it? Fill in the chart below with your usual stress sources and the one-minute breaks that you think would be a good match for each, and refer back to it when you need a quick break.

SOURCE OF STRESS	TAKE THIS ONE-MINUTE BREAK

PRAYER PAUSE

If prayer is part of your life, take a minute to say a short prayer of two to three sentences. Prayer helps you surrender to the moment and let go of your own concerns, thereby reducing your stress levels.

If you don't have a specific spiritual practice, you can choose to repeat the Serenity Prayer: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*

Write out your favorite prayer here for quick reference when you need it.

STATE YOUR STRESS

Naming your stress helps you own your stress, and owning your stress is one way of reducing its power over you. If your boss is stressing you out, say (to yourself) or write, "My boss is stressing me out." Think about what is stressing you out right now, and fill in the blanks below.

_____ is stressing me out.

_____ is stressing me out.

_____ is stressing me out.

_____ is stressing me out.

Or write your stress down on a piece of paper and throw it away. Throwing it away physically helps you get rid of it.

STRESS STRETCHES

Muscle tension is a common symptom of stress, and too much muscle tightening can lead to headaches, muscle pain, and joint pain. Stretching your muscles when you feel stressed can help you relieve the tense feeling that often signals stress is getting to be too much. Stretching also improves mobility and relaxes movement, which in turn helps reduce your stress. Here are several stretches to try. Set your timer for one minute before starting each one. (Check with your medical provider if you have back problems or other issues that could make stretches harmful for you.)

STRETCH 1: STANDING TOUCH YOUR TOES

1. Stand with your bare feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Bend at your hips and reach your arms down to touch the floor, bringing your chest toward your thighs. You may not be able to touch the floor, but reach down as far as you can.
3. Hold the stretch for a count of five and then let your arms dangle.
4. Swing your arms toward each other so that they cross and then uncross.
5. Slowly come back to an upright position.
6. Repeat.

This exercise gives your back a break from extended sitting and stretches out your neck, shoulders, and hamstrings.

STRETCH 2: SEATED TOUCH YOUR TOES

1. Sit with your bare feet planted on the floor shoulder-width apart.
2. Bend at the hips, bringing your chest toward your knees and your arms down alongside your knees.
3. Grab your toes and raise your chest from your thighs, giving your shoulders and arms a good stretch.
4. Hold for a count of five.
5. Slowly sit back upright.
6. Repeat.

This exercise is a great compromise for when you can't stand.

STRETCH 3: SIDE STRETCH

1. Place your right hand on your waist.
2. Stretch your left arm up to the sky, with your upper arm touching your left ear, for a count of five.
3. Bend your body toward the right as far as you can. Stretch your left arm over your head toward the right as far as possible.
4. Repeat on the other side.

You can combine this exercise with either Stretches 1 and 4 or Stretches 2 and 4.

STRETCH 4: THE BIG HUG

1. Wrap your arms around your body, giving yourself a tight hug.
2. Stretch your arms and shoulders by trying to touch your fingers behind your back.
3. Hold the stretch for a count of five before bringing your arms down to your side.
4. Repeat.

This quick exercise can be done standing or sitting.

COUNT UP, COUNT DOWN

Counting to ten and back again to one is one way to take your mind off a stressful event and center yourself. Counting like this is meditative because it slows you down and focuses your mind.

1. Close your eyes.
2. Count slowly from one to ten and back again.
3. Repeat three times.

Another way to do this is to start at ten and count down.

Feeling particularly stressed? Try these combinations.

- Count backward from one hundred.
- Count to forty by twos and back again by twos.
- Count to fifty by odd numbers.

SHOULDER ROLL

So many people hold stress in their shoulders that massage therapists have a special chair for giving shoulder massages. If your shoulders are feeling tense or you have so much tension you are now in the pain zone, this exercise is for you. It will relieve your tension and your stress, all in the same exercise. You can do this exercise sitting or standing, but when you stand you get the most benefit because your blood does a better job of circulating.

1. Set your timer for one minute, and relax your shoulders by either placing your open palms on your lap while sitting or hanging your arms down while standing so that your palms face toward your thighs.
2. Hunch your shoulders straight up toward your neck.
3. Roll your shoulders in a circle going forward, then down, then back and around, bringing them back up toward your ears.
4. Repeat step 3 by rolling your shoulders in the opposite direction toward your back, then down, then forward and back up.
5. Relax your shoulders, bringing them back to the position in step 1.
6. Repeat steps 2 through 5 until your timer rings.

NECK ROLL

A lot of us feel tension in our neck when we're stressed. To relieve this stiffness and reduce stress, take a minute to release the tension from your neck.

1. Set your timer for one minute, and bring your chin down toward your chest. Holding for a count of five, feel the stretch between your shoulder blades.
2. Slowly roll your head toward the right so your right ear is down toward your right shoulder. Feel the stretch in the left side of your neck as you hold for a count of five.
3. Roll your head back down to the first position, chin toward chest, and hold again for a count of five.
4. Slowly roll your head toward the left so your left ear is down toward your left shoulder. Feel the stretch in the right side of your neck as you hold for a count of five.
5. Repeat, rolling slowly back and forth and stopping to feel the gentle stretch at each position for a count of five, until your timer rings.

GRATITUDE MINUTE

Studies show that people who express gratitude experience less stress. Expressing gratitude immediately shifts your perspective to the positive, distancing you from your current upset.

Think of what you are thankful for, and record your thoughts here.

I am thankful for

I am thankful for

I am thankful for

I am thankful for

Use these written statements to reconnect with gratitude on a regular basis, and continue to record what you're grateful for to alleviate some of the stress in your life.

QUICK QUOTE

Sometimes it's hard to come up with your own positive words to relieve stress and make yourself feel better. Reading a calming quote by someone else can work wonders. When you're feeling stressed, read the selection of quotes below. In addition, spend a minute looking for quotes online—via Pinterest, Instagram, or a Google search—that will settle your mind and give you peace.

“Breath is the power behind all things. I breathe in and know that good things will happen.”

—TAO PORCHON-LYNCH

“Within you, there is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself.”

—HERMANN HESSE

“Calmness is the cradle of power.”

—JOSIAH GILBERT HOLLAND

“Rule number one is, don't sweat the small stuff. Rule number two is, it's all small stuff.”

—ROBERT ELIOT

“Give your stress wings and let it fly away.”

—TERRI GUILLEMETS

“Breathe. Let go. And remind yourself that this very moment is the only one you know you have for sure.”

—OPRAH WINFREY

“When you realize how perfect everything is you will tilt your head back and laugh at the sky.”

—BUDDHA

Write your favorite quotes here:

COMPLIMENT OTHERS

Sending out good vibes into the universe is as easy as saying, “Your hair looks great,” or “Thanks for doing such a great job today”—and this is a situation where you reap what you sow. Focusing on the positive aspects of life, you will feel better and subsequently relieve some stress. Spend a minute thinking about how to compliment a friend or family member and send some positivity their way. You’ll find it reflected back at you, whether through a direct compliment or simply thinking about how lucky you are to have a loved one, family, or friends.

I will tell that

I will tell that

I will tell that

I will tell that

JUMPING JACKS

This one-minute exercise works if you are dressed in clothing that allows for motion and you can find an appropriate area to do it. Jumping jacks will distract you, get your blood flowing, burn off some of your nervous energy, and give you the post-exercise mental clarity that will get you through the rest of your day—all of which serve to relieve stress. Aim to do 30, or however many you can fit into a minute. Set your timer and go!

Check off other one-minute exercises that you like to use to relieve stress. Use the blanks to record how many you can do in a minute, where applicable.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Jump rope _____ | ☐ Jog in place _____ |
| ☐ Sit-ups _____ | ☐ Leg lifts _____ |
| ☐ Forward lunges _____ | ☐ _____ |
| ☐ Side lunges _____ | ☐ _____ |
| ☐ Push-ups _____ | ☐ _____ |
| ☐ Squats _____ | ☐ _____ |
| ☐ Climb stairs _____ | ☐ _____ |

FORM A FIST

You can do this exercise anywhere and at any time. It helps you physically let go of stress in one minute. (It's also part of a longer stress-reducing exercise you'll find in the 10-minute section called Peaceful Relaxation [page 107].)

1. Form a tight fist with your left hand, then spread your fingers wide.
2. Form a tight fist with your right hand, then spread your fingers wide.
3. Form a tight fist with both your right and left hands, then spread your fingers wide. Set your timer, and repeat steps 1 through 3 for one minute.
4. When the timer goes off, relax your hands.

REHYDRATE

When you're stressed, you may get dehydrated more quickly due to high levels of circulating stress hormones and the fact that stress causes your body to get rid of fluids. And being dehydrated can increase your levels of cortisol, one of the stress hormones that can have a negative impact on your organs—and your organs need water to properly function. It's a vicious circle! So when you begin to feel the symptoms of stress, take a minute to slowly drink a glass of water. Better yet, stay hydrated throughout the day.

The Mayo Clinic suggests that women drink about 9 cups of water each day and men drink about 13 cups. But there's an easy way to figure out exactly how much you should drink, as determined by your body weight.

My body weight (in pounds) _____

Divide by 2.2 _____

Multiply by your age _____

Younger than 30: multiply by 40

Between 30 and 55: multiply by 35

Older than 55: multiply by 30 _____

Divide that number by 28.3 _____

This is how many ounces of water you should drink each day.

How many cups do you need? Divide the last number by 8 _____

TEAR IT UP

When that moment of stress hits, you may feel like destroying something. Now you can. Find a sheet of paper or newspaper, and tear it up however you please. Tear it into strips or little pieces or any way you want. Imagine that the paper is your source of stress, and you will find this exercise very therapeutic.

To make tearing up the paper symbolic as well as therapeutic, write your sources of stress on the pieces of paper before you tear them up. Write your recurring sources of stress here for quick reference.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and no margins or other markings.

STAY STILL

Rush, rush, rush. This is how many of us live our lives, waking up feeling behind before the day starts and ending the day hurrying to get to bed. The object of this exercise is to take a moment to simply be still.

1. Set your timer for one minute, and close your eyes.
2. Place your palms facedown on your thighs, whether you are sitting or standing.
3. Don't move, for just one minute.

STRESS SQUEEZER

One tried and true method for beating stress is to squeeze a stress ball. These stress relievers are usually made of a soft material that rebounds to its original shape after you squeeze it. You can find lots of them online or in office supply stores. The act of repeating a cycle of squeezing and releasing the ball relieves stress.

- For the first exercise, place the ball in the palm of your hand. Squeeze the ball as hard as you can for a count of five. Release. Repeat 10 times.
- For the second exercise, place the ball between the palms of both hands and interlock your fingers. Squeeze the ball between your palms for a count of five. Release. Repeat 10 times.

SELF-MASSAGE

Wouldn't it be wonderful to end each day with a long massage to knead out the knots in our muscles and relax us into sleep? Alas, for most of us that's not even a remote possibility. But you can give yourself a mini-massage to relieve some of the muscle tension that can accompany the stressful moments in your life. Here's how to work some stress out of your system.

SHOULDER MASSAGE

1. Set your timer, bend your arms, and place your left open palm on your left shoulder and your right open palm on your right shoulder, with your fingers facing your back.
2. Using four fingers (not your thumbs) on each hand, massage the spot where your neck meets your shoulder.
3. Continue your massage for one minute.

You can also use your right hand to massage your left shoulder and upper arm. Switch arms and repeat on the other side, again for one minute.

BODYWORK

You can give yourself lots of mini-massages, but sometimes nothing hits the spot like a professional massage, whether it's shiatsu, Swedish, or Thai. Massage therapy can be something you use when you need more than a few minutes of intervention to relieve your stress. You can also make it part of a wellness routine by having monthly massages to keep your muscles relaxed and supple.

If you are feeling tension, pain, or limited movement in your joints, you may

choose to go to a chiropractor, who will focus on your biomechanics, especially those of the spine. If you are open to non-Western medical practice, acupuncture may also be an option to relieve your stress symptoms. Other forms of bodywork include Rolfing (soft tissue manipulation) and reflexology (pressure to feet and hands). It may take some research and a few tries to find the technique that works best for you, but you may find it a worthy investment to keep your stress at bay and your body feeling its best.

TEMPLE MESSAGE

Set your timer for one minute. Using your index finger and middle finger together, press your fingertips firmly on your temples. Rub in a circular motion until your timer goes off.

SCALP MESSAGE

If you don't mind messing up your hair, set your timer and use all ten fingers to firmly make tiny circles in your scalp. This may stave off a tension headache by getting the blood flowing, as stress often causes your veins to constrict, and smaller veins restrict blood flow. Continue for one minute.

HAND MESSAGE

This exercise is best done on your dominant hand (the hand you use for writing).

1. Set your timer for one minute. Hold your dominant hand, palm facing upward, in the palm of your non-dominant hand.
2. Using your non-dominant thumb, make small circles in the center of your dominant palm.
3. Make bigger circles that go from the base of your thumb to the base of your other fingers.
4. Switch hands, and continue until you hear the timer.

Chapter Check-In

Chapter 3 gave you a lot of stress-busting strategies that take only one minute each. Which ones did you like best? Review the notes you kept for each activity you tried, and write down the one-minute activities below that worked best for you.

[illegible]

CHAPTER FOUR

Five Minutes to Feeling Better

AFTER WORKING THROUGH THE LAST CHAPTER, you now have lots of strategies for reducing your stress levels in one minute or less. But some actions take more time than others. This does not make them any more or less effective, but they do ask more of you in terms of time, energy, and thought. These activities may require that you spend more time using the workbook, and you may need a quiet spot for completing them. Through these activities you will also learn more about your stressors and how they impact you. Five minutes that reduce the negative impact of stress on your health and happiness are five minutes well spent.

SHIFT YOUR PERSPECTIVE

The way you think influences the way you experience the world. Optimists tend to be happier than pessimists, no matter what happens to them. A key principle of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is that changing your behavior will change your thoughts and vice versa. If you see yourself as someone who can accomplish whatever you put your mind to, you will feel less anxiety and stress about your performance. Are you moving to a new town or starting a new job? You may see a move as an adventure, or you may focus on the loss of friends, family, and your comfortable routine. If you think about a new job as a way to meet new people and learn new skills, you will feel a lot less stressed than if you focus on what you don't know. Below, write down a particular thought that causes you stress. Then reframe your thought to be more positive.

Forethought 1: Write down something that stresses you.

Afterthought 1: Reframe it to focus on the positive.

Forethought 2: Write down something that stresses you.

Afterthought 2: Reframe it to focus on the positive.

Forethought 3: Write down something that stresses you.

Afterthought 3: Reframe it to focus on the positive.

FOCUS FOR FIVE

Focusing takes you away from the worries and tasks that cause you stress. You can choose to focus on whatever you are doing at the moment or on something else. First, decide what to focus on. Choose a mundane task that needs doing, like organizing your desk if you're at work or sorting laundry if you're at home. It's important that the task is simple and worthy of your attention so you don't get distracted. Second, set your timer for five minutes. Then go deep, focusing only on the activity at hand. When time's up, go back to your original task with a clearer mind and something checked off your to-do list.

Try these activities, and circle which ones work best for you:

- Clean five windows.
- Repot a plant.
- Sharpen all your pencils.
- Sort through your pens, and toss those that don't work.
- Sew on a button.
- Clean out your purse or backpack.
- Reorganize your wallet.
- Water your plants.
- Pay a bill.
- Schedule a doctor's appointment.
- Clean out your car.
- Balance your checkbook.
- Hang up your clothes.

SELF-HYPNOSIS

Teaching yourself hypnosis to use on yourself is a skill worth mastering, since it can reduce your stress levels. Follow the steps below to relax and get ready for the next challenge of your day. When you relax this deeply, your breathing will slow down and you may have a sense of euphoric peace. You may feel warmer or cooler or have tingly feelings.

1. Set your timer for five minutes.
2. Close your eyes.
3. With the middle finger of your dominant hand (the hand you use to write), lightly and slowly stroke your face from the middle of your hairline down the bridge of your nose.
4. Repeat until the alarm goes off.
5. When you hear the alarm, take a deep breath and count slowly to 10 as you exhale. Open your eyes.

PUT STRESS IN ITS PLACE

Sometimes your source of stress occupies a huge space in the big picture of life. You can put stress back in its place in five minutes by remembering a time when you faced a similar situation and successfully worked through it. Knowing this will make you feel that this time will also go well. In addition, ask yourself, "Will this matter one year, five years, or ten years from now?" Your answer will remind you that the source of your stress is less significant than you originally thought. Record this previous instance in the lines below and explain how you conquered it, and refer back to it when a similar stress rears its ugly head. Record additional instances for future reference as well.

When I face (source of stress), I will remember that I successfully

When I face (source of stress), I will remember that I successfully

When I face (source of stress), I will remember that I successfully

TALK TO YOURSELF

Telling yourself what you wish someone else would tell you is a great way to change the script of your life and reduce your levels of stress. Set a timer for five minutes. Take a minute or two to write a script below in which you tell yourself how wonderful you are, how capable you are, and how competent you are to do what you need to do. Read the script to yourself. Better yet, read the script out loud in front of a mirror. You can also read it quietly to yourself whenever you have five minutes.

[illegible]

LEARN YOUR LIMITS

Only you know how far you can go without feeling overwhelmed. Maybe you need seven to eight hours of sleep (and that makes you a normal human being, despite those who claim they can function well on four hours) or you know you need to eat every three hours to feel your best. If you find yourself frequently feeling overwhelmed, take five minutes to think about what you sacrificed to get to that place. Once you've thought about your limits, write them down below. Return to them when you feel stressed and need to be reminded of your limits.

I need	hours of sleep every night.
I need to eat every	hours.
I need to drink	glasses of water each day.
I need	social interactions every day.
I need	minutes of exercise per day.
I need	minutes of alone time every day.
I need	minutes to meditate or pray.
I need	minutes to do nothing.
I need	minutes to read.
I need	minutes to spend with family.
I need	minutes to journal.
I need	minutes to play with my pet.

CLEAR THE CLUTTER

Having too much stuff or a disorganized space can be very stressful, not only because your mind often reflects your space but also because the challenge of finding what you need when you need it can add more stress. Breaking up cleaning into manageable pieces is one way of taking the stress out of the situation. Take five minutes each day to get rid of at least one item you don't need or put one item back in its proper place. This is a beneficial, step-by-step way of getting rid of things in your life that you don't need as well as a way to get more organized. Remove the clutter in your life, and your life will feel less stressful. You will also have a sense of accomplishment.

For this exercise, you will need your phone (to take before and after pictures) and a garbage bin.

1. Start by taking a photo of the space.
2. Set your timer for five minutes.
3. Pick one spot in the room to focus on, whether a desk drawer, a medicine cabinet, or a bureau.
4. Choose one thing at a time to throw or put away, and continue until you hear the timer.
5. Take another picture with your phone to document your progress and serve as motivation and inspiration.
6. Reassess your stress levels, and work these five-minute decluttering breaks into your routine.
7. On the lines below, write down the main areas in your home you'd like to focus on for this exercise.

YOU LOVE YOU

Building on the Gratitude Minute (page 60) and Quick Quote (page 61) exercises in chapter 3 and the Talk to Yourself exercise earlier in this chapter (page 76), this exercise is a wonderful way to shift your perspective and lower your stress in five minutes. Think for five minutes about several things you love about yourself, and complete the following sentences. Things you love about yourself may include your personality traits and characteristics, but try to go deeper in this exercise.

Things I love about myself

1.

2.

3.

4.

I love myself because

1.

2.

3.

4.

PAPER TOSS

Yes, physical activity and play help reduce stress, but you don't always have time to dribble and shoot a ball. But with this exercise, you can have some basketball fun wherever you are. Take a sheet of paper, crush it into a ball, and throw it into the container of your choice—a trash bin or empty coffee mug perhaps, the farther away the better. Set your alarm, throw, retrieve, and repeat as many times as you can in five minutes. Focus on your activity for the duration of the exercise to alleviate some of the stress you feel about other activities or events in your life.

MUSIC MOMENTS

We all have a piece or type of music that makes us happy or calms us down. For some it's a pounding bass beat, for others it's a symphony, and for still others it may be classic jazz. To make sure you're ready for your next stressful moment, create a playlist of whatever music calms you.

Write a playlist below of at least five pieces of music that take you to your Zen space, and add it to whatever music platform you use. After you're done, set your timer for five minutes and indulge in your favorite sounds. Tune in to the music, and tune out the stress. If your favorite song is less than five minutes long, play it in its entirety. Indulge in however many songs you can fit into your five-minute time frame, and zone out in peace.

JIGSAW PUZZLE

Doing jigsaw puzzles is a great way to distract yourself from the stress of the moment or the day. First, the puzzle gives you focus so you're not thinking about anything but what is in front of you. Second, doing a puzzle can give you a sense of accomplishment, which can help when your stress stems from feeling like you're spinning your wheels. Third, doing the kind of brain work that puzzles demand is good for your brain, which can improve your current performance. All of this helps reduce your stress level.

Set a timer for five minutes, and work on a jigsaw puzzle until the timer goes off. Use an inexpensive puzzle mat to roll up the puzzle and set it out of the way if you have limited table space, so next time you can pick up where you left off.

SNACK BREAK

Hunger can make you think stress is much more catastrophic than it is. When you're hungry, you may find it hard to think clearly and quickly; you may also be less creative. But you don't want stress management to ruin your healthy eating habits, so your choice of snack food is important. Stick to real food as found in nature, and eat it slowly as you savor each bite. Here are some healthy snacks that are good for stress reduction and can be consumed slowly in small portions on a five-minute snack break:

- **Blueberries.** Known as a "brain food," blueberries improve cognitive function and memory.
- **Salmon.** Salmon is packed with omega-3s, which are essential for brain function.
- **Nuts and seeds.** Nuts and seeds are full of Vitamin E, which has been linked to better cognitive function as we age.
- **Avocados.** Linked to higher brain function, avocados also lower blood pressure, which is one way to calm the body and reduce the risk of hypertension.
- **Oatmeal.** A complex carbohydrate, oatmeal causes your brain to produce serotonin, which makes you feel good.

If you have other favorite healthy snacks, write them on the lines below.

GOING BEYOND FOOD

These nutrients can help you deal with stress without having a negative impact on your health or your waistline:

Vitamin C. Researchers found that when people were given vitamin C before a stressful task, they had lower blood pressure and lower levels of cortisol than those who did not ingest it. Citrus fruits are a fantastic source of this vitamin, as are strawberries, kiwi, and Brussels sprouts.

Zinc. Low levels of zinc have been linked to anxiety and depression. Meat such as beef, lamb, pork, and chicken are good sources of zinc, as are oysters. If you're not a meat or oyster eater, try nuts and seeds. Spinach, beans, and mushrooms are good sources of zinc for everyone, especially those who have nut allergies.

INSTAGRAM MOMENT

If you don't have any vacation time coming and you're feeling stressed, spend five minutes looking at photos of your dream vacation on Instagram. Think of this as the extended vacation version of the one-minute Pictures of Peace exercise (page 54). Don't forget to turn on your timer—it's easy to get sucked down the rabbit hole of social media! Want to escape to Barcelona? Try #barcelona and get lost in pictures of beaches, museums, architecture, and food. Or do you want to retreat back to that time on the beach in Negril, Jamaica? Take a trip down #negril, #negrilbeach, or #negriljamaica lane. Write down your favorite accounts, hashtags, and locations in the lines below as a reminder for the next time you're stressed. Or better yet, record where you want to go and search for those places.

[illegible]

WRITE WHAT WENT RIGHT

When you're down in the weeds of a stressful situation, you sometimes need perspective. Take five minutes to write down five things that went right during your day, week, or month. Whether you are only an hour into your day or three days into your week, take note of what went right to help shift your perspective to the positive, bring a smile to your face, and reduce your stress levels.

WHAT WENT RIGHT

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

PIN YOUR INTEREST

Instagram is not the only place to get your fix of pretty pictures and cool ideas. Indulging in Pinterest for five minutes can become your new way to effectively reduce stress. Search for pictures of gorgeous bedrooms, awesome ideas for birthday celebrations, or anything else that draws your focus away from your stress and makes you happy. Write down your favorite accounts and keywords below. Or note a plan you have for the future (a new kitchen, perhaps?) and the accounts and keywords that help you realize that plan.

EMBRACE YOUR GREEN THUMB

Gardening is a very relaxing, stress-reducing practice. Buy plants and add them to your office or home decor, then dedicate five minutes a day to caring for them. If you have pets in your home, a quick Google search can provide you with a list of pet-safe plants, just in case they take a nibble. Plants need more than just water to grow and flourish. Even if your plants are low-maintenance, you can spend five minutes polishing leaves, picking off dead leaves, and rotating them so they all get the best light. You can also take time to observe what has changed about your plants over the past few weeks. And if you have a plant that is slow to grow, talk to it! Many gardeners swear by this practice. Share your dreams, hopes, fears, and joys with your plant, or encourage it to grow with your own plant mantra. You will both benefit.

GROW SOMETHING OUTDOORS

Just viewing a picture of greenery has been shown to reduce stress symptoms and improve mood, so it's not surprising that gardening has also been shown to reduce cortisol and make people happier. And while growing a plant at home or at work can help reduce stress, outdoor gardening can be an even more effective stress reducer than a few minutes of indoor watering and pruning.

Being outside improves mood, and focusing on pulling weeds and pruning those plants is a helpful distraction from whatever is keeping you up at night. Even if you live in a city and have no room for an outdoor garden, you may be able to find a public garden where you can volunteer or a community garden where you can grow your own food.

GET YOUR GROOVE ON

Take a dance break to manage your stress. Set your timer, put your headphones on, play your favorite songs, and let your body move to the music for five minutes. Return to your task when the timer goes off. List your favorite dance tunes on the lines below for future reference.

SPORTS TIME

Whether your favorite sports involve physical confrontation, mental strategy, or inspiration, they often provide an escape from stress. Watch your hometown team play its rival, cheer on marathon runners as they approach the finish line, or admire a gold-medal-winning ice dance routine for five minutes.

Watching highlight reels of your favorite sports can also distract you and consequently relieve some of your stress. Which inspirational sports moments appeal to you? Find highlight reels online to watch, set a timer for five minutes, and feel yourself relax. Use the lines below to record your favorite sites for finding these reels online.

LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS

The source of your stress may be your unrealistic expectations of yourself. We all have ambitions, goals, and lots of items on our to-do lists, but now it's time to give yourself a break. Aim for good enough when your best may not be doable in the moment. For example, you may have an expectation of keeping a perfectly clean house at all times, but maybe you can reframe that to an expectation of cleaning the house once a week and being okay with things getting a little messy in between. Take five minutes to think about the expectations that are stressing you, and use the lines below to reset these expectations.

Expectation 1:

Expectation 1, good enough:

Expectation 2:

Expectation 2, good enough:

Expectation 3:

Expectation 3, good enough:

FIND MEANING

Stress can result from a disconnect between what you're doing and how you feel about doing it. Finding or recovering meaning in your work will help you reconnect with something bigger than the task at hand and lower your stress levels. Take five minutes to complete these sentences. Then revisit them when you need to check in with yourself about the meaning of your work.

1. I chose this career because . . .

2. I am doing what I am doing because . . .

3. I love what I do because . . .

PHONE CLEANUP

Over time you have probably acquired a lot of phone numbers in your contacts list and taken a lot more pictures than you want. You may also have a lot of apps that you haven't used in a while. Take five minutes to free up some space on your phone by deleting contacts that you no longer need, not-so-great photos, and useless apps. You may also use this time to create folders of similar apps to make them easier to find. This will make your phone more organized, more efficient, and less of a source of stress.

CARVE OUT WORRY TIME

Sometimes you can't get rid of your stress and you have to face it head on. Concentrating on what's stressing you can actually reduce stress. Focusing on a particular worry for five minutes may help you put it in perspective—is it really as bad as it seems after examining it from several angles?—and may help you find solutions. Take these steps to carve out some worry time for yourself, and see if you find it beneficial.

1. Schedule five minutes of worry time, preferably during the day (so you can sleep at night) and not at work (so you can focus on your thoughts).
2. Set your timer for five minutes.
3. Focus on one source of stress that you have, and think about only it.
4. Stop after the timer goes off so your worry doesn't become obsession.
5. Repeat throughout the week as needed.

SEND A POSTCARD

Buy a stack of postcards and a book of stamps. You may also want to buy a pen just for this exercise: a special pen that writes the way you want in the color you want. The postcards can be photos of your city, your favorite pieces of art, or whatever suits your fancy. Take five minutes to write a personalized message to a friend or family member, stick on a stamp, and put it in your outgoing mail. Connecting with someone you love is an effective stress reducer.

MANTRA MOMENT

A mantra is a word or sound that people repeat to help themselves concentrate in meditation. You can use mantras in the same way to put yourself in a meditative state of calm and peace and reduce stress. A mantra relaxes your mind and lowers your blood pressure. It's also a substitute for negative thoughts that cause you stress. The sound *om* is a popular mantra that many people chant at the beginning and end of a yoga session. You can choose any word or sound that gives you a sense of calm and relaxation. Simply repeat it for five minutes. If you want, you can shorten this exercise to one minute when you're short on time, or extend it to 10 minutes as part of a more involved meditation practice.

Choose two or three sounds or words you want to repeat, and write them down for future reference. Note which ones work best for you.

Mantra 1:

Mantra 2:

Mantra 3:

To do this exercise, set your phone or watch timer for five minutes and repeat the word with your eyes closed until the timer goes off.

PLAY WITH DOH

Doing something fun and creative is a great distraction from whatever is causing you stress. Buy Play-Doh in different colors and keep it on your desk for stressful times. Here are some ideas for stress-reducing creations:

FLOWER

1. Make six small balls.
2. Roll a long stick.
3. Break off two short pieces from the long stick, which will be the stalk, and attach one piece to the left and one to the right of the stick as the leaves.
4. Flatten one of the small balls at the top of the stick to make a circle. This is the center of the flower.
5. Arrange the five remaining balls in a circle around the center, and press them to make circles. These are the petals.

SNOWMAN

1. Make three balls, each bigger than the previous one.
2. Stack the balls so that the biggest one is at the bottom and the smallest one is at the top.
3. Attach two paperclips to the middle ball to make arms, and put one in the middle of the face to make a nose.
4. Draw on eyes and a smile.

BEEHIVE

1. Roll out a long piece of dough.
2. Make a circle by connecting the ends of the dough.
3. Repeat using a slightly smaller piece of dough and making it into a slightly smaller circle that you can lay on top of the larger circle.
4. Repeat, laying on slightly smaller and smaller circles of dough, until you close the space at the top.

PRETZEL

1. Roll out a long piece of dough.
2. Twist it into a pretzel shape.

TEACUP

1. Roll out two balls, each about two inches in diameter.
2. Roll out another piece of dough to make the handle of the teacup.
3. Flatten one ball to make the saucer.
4. Make a bowl shape with the second ball to make a cup.
5. Attach the handle to the bowl and set it on the saucer.

Chapter Check-In

Chapter 4 has given you more strategies for your stress management toolbox. These activities take a bit more time and preparation than the one-minute strategies, but they also have a larger payoff. Review the notes you made throughout the chapter related to each activity you tried and how it made you feel. In the lines below, write down the five-minute exercises that worked best for you.

CHAPTER FIVE

10 Minutes to Better Stress Management

THE GOAL OF THESE stress management activities is to take the edge off when stress gets in the way of you feeling competent, productive, peaceful, and happy. By doing the one- and five-minute activities, you have learned more about yourself and started taking control of your life and health. You may not be able to change your workplace or your family, but you now have learned ways to become a healthier and happier colleague, parent, partner, and/or child.

The strategies in this chapter take more time and require more engagement with the workbook. They may also require that you set aside time in your day to engage in your stress management practice and find a place that can accommodate you in these activities. You may also need to wear the right clothes to carry them out, because suits and close-fitting dresses are not really yoga or dancewear.

Adding these longer activities to your stress management toolbox will give you more of a feeling of control over your life, reduce your stress levels quickly, and even help you prevent the negative impacts of stress.

MOVE FOR 10

Movement helps with the physical and psychological symptoms of stress and is a good way to burn off what we often call nervous energy. Movement also causes the brain to release the pleasure chemicals serotonin and dopamine.

Research has shown that if you exercise during your workday, you will be more productive, more engaged, and less stressed. Moving for 10 minutes after waking up is a great way to start the day. Also consider moving for 10 minutes before you eat lunch or right after work (before you eat dinner).

BUILDING AN EXERCISE ROUTINE

Exercise is a great way to reduce stress. And including exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle builds resilience and keeps both your mind and body healthy. (Remember that you should consult your healthcare provider to get the go-ahead before you begin any exercise regimen.) Deciding what kind of activity to do and where and when to do it can be a challenge, so here are some suggestions to help you make exercise part of your routine.

Start with something easy to do, like walking. Walking doesn't require special skills or technical equipment other than a comfortable pair of shoes. You can incorporate more walking into your daily life by parking farther away than usual from your home or office, getting off one stop earlier if you take public transit, and taking the stairs instead of the elevator. If you want to make walking your workout, decide whether you want to walk before work, during your lunch

break, or after work. A 30-minute walk three to five times a week is all you need to get the mental and physical benefits of exercise. And best of all, studies show that you can break your 30-minute walk into 10-minute increments and reap the same benefits.

Swimming is a great low-impact way to de-stress, but if you don't have a pool nearby it may not be the best choice, since the fewer barriers you have to exercise the more likely you are to stick with your new habit.

Joining a gym and getting a personal trainer is a good way to get started if you lack motivation and knowledge and want accountability and instruction. There are lots of free and low-cost workout apps if joining a gym will bust your budget. And no matter what you choose to do, keeping track of what you did and when can keep you motivated and inspired.

These are exercises you can do in your pajamas, your workout gear, or whatever you wear to work. To prepare for this exercise, download a movement app to your phone and use it to create a 10-minute workout. (A good app is Sworkit, which allows you to choose your workout and set the time for your workout and includes various types of activities, including stretching.)

To start, choose a mini-workout that suits where you are and what you are wearing. Then set your timer for 10 minutes and do your workout. For the biggest stress-busting impact, go outside for an additional mental health boost. Find a time that works for you, and make it part of your daily routine. Keep track of your activity in a journal, as seeing your progress can provide inspiration and motivation.

If you don't have access to a workout app on your phone or choose to create your own workout, check out the following activities that you can combine to create a 10-minute mini-workout.

- Take a walk (outside if possible, or inside a mall if the weather is bad).
- Go for a run.
- Walk up the stairs in your building and take the elevator down, or vice versa.
- Do jumping jacks.
- Jump rope.
- March in place.
- Do calisthenics—as many sets of any of these as you would like, with hand weights or without:
 - » 10 push-ups (which you can also do against a wall or a table)
 - » 10 sit-ups
 - » 10 tricep dips
 - » 10 bicep curls
 - » 10 tricep extensions (one set for each arm)
 - » 10 squats
 - » 10 calf raises
 - » 10 standing leg raises (one set for each leg)
 - » 10 shoulder presses
 - » 10 lunges

In the lines below, record your favorite exercises that you would like to repeat and exercises you want to include in your 10-minute workout.

JOURNAL YOUR JOURNEY

Whether through cave drawings or books in libraries around the world, humans love to record their lives because it allows them to reflect and learn from their experiences. Recording your life brings a consciousness to how you engage with the world and how the world engages with you—and this reflection can help you appreciate what you have, which may put your stress in perspective (and potentially make it easier to deal with). Take 10 minutes at the end of each day to write in a journal. You can focus on gratitude, write your worries, or log your success with stress management techniques. Writing is a great lifetime practice that is beneficial to mental health and well-being in the long run and to stress reduction in the short term.

A CUP OF CALM

A warm drink can reduce your stress, depending on what you have in that cup. Caffeine can exacerbate feelings of anxiety because it's a stimulant, so whenever you feel the need to relax, replace that cup of caffeine with a cup of calm. Chamomile and peppermint have soothing properties that reduce anxiety and promote relaxation, and many people use them to help themselves fall asleep at night. You can use these herbs proactively by making a cup of chamomile or peppermint tea a regular part of your day. The next time you're feeling stressed, take ten minutes to boil water, brew, and sip your creation.

FOLD IT AWAY

Origami is the Japanese art of folding paper, and it can be a very meditative—and stress-reducing—practice. Focusing on the creation of art is a great way to escape from a stressful situation and enjoy the satisfaction of creating something beautiful. Start with something easy, and when you have mastered that, try a more difficult project. Here's a simple example of how to create a hat.

HOW TO FOLD AN ORIGAMI HAT

- Get a rectangular piece of paper (a typical sheet of 8½ x 11 inches is best).
- Fold the paper in half lengthwise.
- Unfold the paper.
- Fold the paper in half from the top to the bottom so that the paper is open at the bottom.
- Fold the left and right corners to the center. You will see two triangles at the top and a rectangular strip at the bottom.
- Fold one piece of the bottom flap up and over the triangles.
- Flip the paper over.
- Fold the remaining piece of the bottom flap up to mirror the other bottom flap.
- Enjoy your new hat!

RHYME . . . OR NOT

Reading poetry for 10 minutes can help you reduce stress while indulging in the beauty of words. Some people find haikus to be particularly enjoyable to read, as they often capture an emotion, which can help you understand your own stress.

If you are feeling particularly creative, why don't you try writing your own? A haiku has three lines. The first line consists of five syllables, the second line includes seven syllables, and the third line returns to five syllables. A haiku doesn't have to rhyme (and in fact it usually doesn't). Use the lines below to write your own haiku.

CUT IT UP

Although 10 minutes is not long enough to cook anything, you can certainly do some meal prep. If you like fruits and vegetables for a snack, you can devote 10 minutes to cutting them up to make them more suitable for eating. Or you can spend 10 minutes before dinner cutting up your vegetables or fruit for a salad, a stir-fry, a dessert, or anything else that appeals to you. Along with reinforcing healthy eating habits, cutting up ingredients is a way to relax while taking your mind off the stresses of your day. Are you rushed in the evenings and want to save time later? Set a timer for 10 minutes now, and start cutting up ingredients for tonight's dinner.

WATCH A MINI-DOCUMENTARY

Lose yourself in learning something new about the world by watching a mini-documentary about a subject you're interested in. You'll move focus off your stress and feel good about learning something new. You may even watch a documentary that puts your stress in perspective. You can find plenty of mini-documentaries on Vimeo and YouTube. Record the name of your favorite stress-busting clips in the space below.

NATURAL COMMUNION

The sounds of nature can be very soothing to the mind and spirit. Listening to recordings of a babbling brook, the ocean, or crickets in the woods for 10 minutes will help you get rid of stress. You can download apps that play the sounds of nature for a set period of time, or you can create a playlist of sounds for this activity and set a timer. Better still, take yourself outside, set a timer for 10 minutes, close your eyes, and focus on the sounds around you.

PERFECT POSES

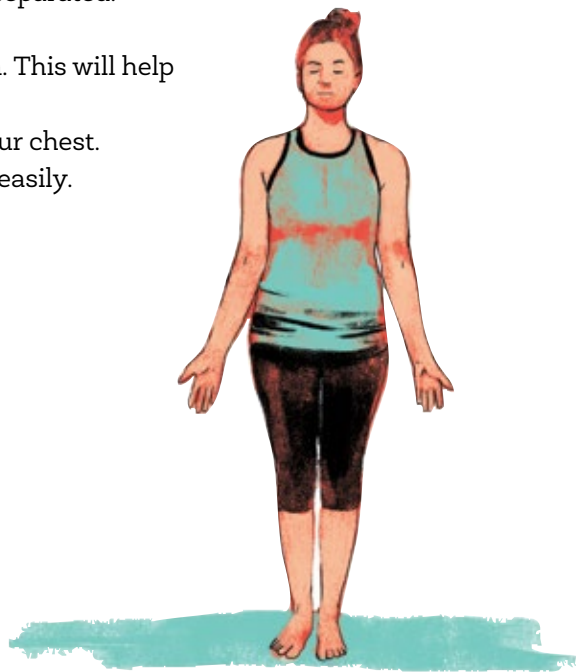
Office life is not easy on your body, particularly when you're stressed. The stress, combined with sitting all day, may result in a tense or painful back, shoulders, and hips. One of the best ways to relieve the symptoms of stress from sitting is yoga, and you can feel its stress-reducing benefits in 10 minutes. You may want to do a few poses before your day starts, incorporate them into your workday, or use them to relax at the end of a busy day.

Taking a few minutes to relax, breathe, and stretch your muscles is a great way to spend 10 minutes reducing stress. And you can rack up 30 minutes of exercise each day if you spend 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes at lunch, and 10 minutes before bedtime (which will make for much better sleep) working on your posing skills. Your yoga practice will also help with your posture and flexibility, which will leave you less susceptible to muscle aches and pains.

Here are three poses for beginners that are well suited for the office. Wearing comfortable, stretchy clothes will make them easier to do.

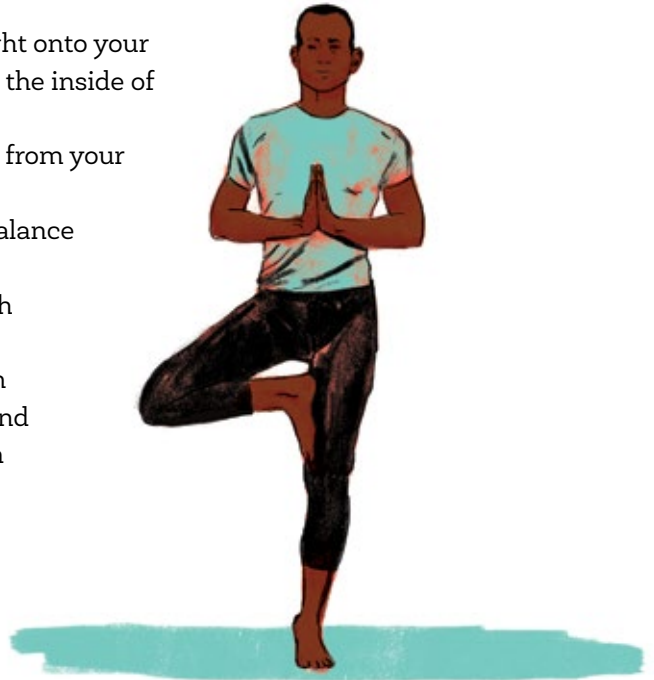
MOUNTAIN POSE (TADASANA)

1. Stand up tall with your heels slightly separated. Keep your arms at your sides.
2. Draw your navel in and your tailbone down. This will help lengthen your lower back.
3. Pull your shoulders back and down. Lift your chest.
4. Stay in the pose for one minute, breathing easily.



TREE POSE (VRKSASANA)

1. Stand in Mountain Pose. Put your weight onto your left foot and bring your right foot up to the inside of your left leg.
2. Extend your right knee out to the right from your hip joint.
3. Place your hands together in prayer. Balance and breathe.
4. Try extending your arms overhead with straight elbows.
5. Stay in the pose for one minute. Return to Mountain Pose with an exhalation and repeat for the same length of time with the legs reversed.



COW POSE (VIRALASANA)

1. Come to your hands and knees in a “tabletop” position, with your wrists directly under your shoulders and your knees directly under your hips.
2. As you inhale, lift your tailbone and drop your belly. Look up and let your spine droop.
3. Exhale, coming back to neutral “tabletop” position on your hands and knees.
4. Repeat 10 to 20 times.



VIRAL VIDEO

If you can devote 10 minutes to relieving your stress but think a mini-documentary may not do the trick, try something more mindless. Find a viral video that makes you laugh: Maybe you'll like babies with ninja skills, dogs doing yoga with their owners, or funny pranks. Laughter can lower cortisol and boost the pleasurable feelings that a burst of endorphins brings, thereby reducing stress. Take 10 minutes of your commute (if you're a passenger), a 10-minute break at work, or 10 minutes before bed to watch, laugh, and relax. Write down your favorite viral video names on the lines below.

[illegible]

MINDING MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a popular spiritual and health practice with powerful mental health benefits (including decreased stress) that is taught in schools, workplaces, and hospitals. It is about staying in the present while becoming aware of and acknowledging emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations. By focusing on the present and having a heightened sense of awareness, you stop worrying about the future and the past. The great thing about mindfulness is that it can be practiced by anyone, anywhere, at any time.

Yet because of all the distractions of modern life, especially those of

technology, tuning out the world and focusing inward can be challenging. But with practice, it gets easier.

Meditation is one way to practice mindfulness, and there are lots of different ways to meditate. Some people meditate through movement, such as yoga or tai chi, while others sit still. You may have to experiment with various forms of meditation to find what works best for you and what you like to do. Daily meditative practice can make you a much calmer, more focused, less stressed person.

MINDFULNESS NOW

Mindfulness is about focusing on the here and now. Worrying and anxiety are rooted in the future. Set your timer for 10 minutes and focus on what you are doing right now, whether it is analyzing a spreadsheet or writing a report. Do not think about when the report is due, who is going to see it, or what will happen when you submit it. Just focus on the task at hand. Taking 10 minutes to focus on what's in front of you will change the way you experience stress.

PUZZLE PRACTICE

Finding the perfect word for 4 down or 12 across is one way to keep your brain sharp and reduce stress at the same time. You can find a puzzle in a newspaper, buy a crossword puzzle book that suits your level of skill, or find puzzles using an app on your phone. Set your timer for 10 minutes and find the right word for the right boxes. Crossword puzzles are a great tool to reduce stress, make you feel

productive, and give you a positive feeling about your abilities. You can combine this with mindfulness practice as a way to disconnect from everything around you and immerse yourself in the present—a double stress reducer!

If you prefer numbers, Sudoku is a great way to put your problem-solving skills to work in reducing stress. Take 10 minutes to solve a number puzzle and combine it with your mindfulness practice.

RINSE AND REPEAT

Repetitive motions can help reduce your stress levels. Think about how relaxing many people find knitting, whether alone or with friends. Scientists have shown that repetitive motions can lower heart rate and blood pressure. Try these repetitive motions for 10 minutes to focus your mind and relieve your stress:

- Knitting
- Ironing
- Practicing a musical instrument
- Practicing a sport
- Quilting and other needlework
- Walking
- Folding laundry

Now record what works for you:

RUBIK'S CUBE

Intellectual puzzles can be stress relievers for people who enjoy them, and Rubik's Cube is an old-school cultural obsession that attracted legions to its challenge. It requires focus and may be just what you need to take your mind off the stresses of your day. Set your timer for 10 minutes, and start rotating those colorful cubes.

PEACEFUL RELAXATION

Relaxing your whole body one part at a time forces you to focus on your body and how it is feeling. It combines deep breathing and mindfulness and results in a body with less tension and pain—and relieves your stress. Set your timer for 10 minutes and follow the steps below while taking slow, deep breaths.

1. Sit or lie down if you can.
2. Starting with your right foot, curl your toes tightly in toward the arch of your foot to the count of five.
3. Stretch them far apart for a count of five.
4. Relax your foot.
5. Repeat with your left foot.
6. Stand up with your legs hip-width apart.
7. Stand on your tippy toes for a count of five then stand flat footed again.
8. Squeeze your buttocks together for a count of five and then relax. Repeat.
9. Make fists with your hands for a count of five.
10. Spread your fingers wide apart for a count of five.
11. Relax your hands.
12. Make a fist and flex your left arm. Hold for a count of five. Relax to a count of five.
13. Repeat step 12 with your right arm.
14. Hunch your shoulders up to your ears for a count of five. Relax to a count of five.
15. Shake out your arms.

How do you feel? Did particular parts of your body respond by feeling less stressed after you relaxed them? Record your results below.

TAKE A SHOWER

Let water wash your cares away by taking a shower. Rethink your shower as simply a way to get ready for bed or the day and reframe it as a calming, mini spa treatment. Find a shower head that adds to the spa-like experience by providing a massage or a rain-like spray. Make sure to set your timer for 10 minutes before you start your shower, because it's easy to lose track of time as the water runs over you and sends your stress down the drain.

A bath can do wonders for stress relief, too. Though a 10-minute bath is short, you can still reap its benefits, particularly if you add Epsom salts, lavender oil, baking soda, or other stress reducers to the tub.

COLOR YOUR CALM

One of the more creative stress management strategies involves coloring books and coloring pencils or crayons. If you haven't yet joined the coloring craze, maybe it's time to give it a try. Choose a coloring book with a theme that calms you—mandalas, animals, and famous paintings will work, depending on your interests. Focus on coloring between the lines and using your imagination to explore nontraditional color schemes. Put your timer on, grab your crayons, and color yourself calm for 10 minutes. If being with friends calms you, consider coloring with others (if you have more time).

PAINT OR DRAW A PICTURE

If artistic expression reduces your stress levels, try creating original artwork. Use plain paper or a sketchbook, pencils, pens, markers, or watercolors to create your own masterpiece. Whether you work in an art studio or doodle at your kitchen table, devoting 10 minutes to your artistic passion will reap rewards for you (reduced stress levels) and the recipients of your work. Try committing 10 minutes a day to creating a work of art for a friend. You may find that your new hobby becomes a vital part of your less stressed life.

CARD PLAY

A pack of cards holds a wide range of possibilities for letting go of some of the toxic stress of the day. You can use cards to play a non-computer game of solitaire, enjoy a low-key game of Crazy Eights with a friend, or learn some cool card tricks to show off to your family. Ten minutes is plenty of time to reduce stress with a cut and shuffle of the deck. Below are some stress-less games you can play alone or with two players.

- Card games for 1 player:
 - » Solitaire: Klondike, Spider, Emperor, Accordion
- Card games for 2 players:
 - » Rummy
 - » Go Fish
 - » Crazy Eights
 - » Double Solitaire
 - » Old Maid
 - » Concentration
 - » Blackjack

Record your favorite card games on the lines below.

NAME YOUR GAME

Add playtime to your stress management toolkit by spending 10 minutes with online games. Getting your frustrations out on some Angry Birds or trying to beat yourself at a game of solitaire requires focus on an activity that is not part of your productivity plan for the day—which helps reduce stress. This is a great activity for your commute if you leave the driving to someone else. List your favorite games here:

JUGGLE GYM

Take your dexterity to another level by learning to juggle. Juggling requires a lot of concentration, which will free your mind from your troubles or your demanding project and give you a sense of accomplishment. Here's how to start juggling, using two balls:

- Start with two soft balls so you don't break anything as you master your new skill. (You may want to use beanbags so you don't have to chase down bouncing balls.)
- Choose an open area where you won't knock over or break anything.
- Begin by tossing one ball into the air from one hand to the next and back. The ball should reach eye-level or higher. Repeat this 10 times.

- Add a scooping or dipping motion to your toss so that each hand makes a small circle as you catch and toss the ball from one hand to the next. Repeat 5 times.
- Hold one ball in each hand.
- Toss the first ball into the air. When it reaches its highest point (around eye level), toss the second ball. Catch both balls. Repeat.

Practice juggling for 10 minutes a day for immediate stress relief and to learn a long-term skill. It may just become your next hobby!

RAKE THE SANDBOX

Flash back to those days when you made sandcastles and moats at your local playground or at the beach. Zen gardens don't leave you with sand in your hair or your shoes, but like the beach, they leave you with a sense of peace. Zen gardens are a wonderful way to reduce your stress through mindfulness. Make your own tabletop Zen garden by filling a small, shallow container (like a bowl or plate) with sand from a craft supply store. Shake the container to settle the sand evenly. Add small stones. Set your timer for 10 minutes, and mindfully rake the sand with a bamboo skewer, fork, or mini rake if you can find one. Let your stress melt away as you focus on the patterns you make in the sand.

DO THE DISHES

Cleaning can be great for getting your mind off your troubles and feeling a sense of accomplishment when you're done. You cleaned items from your work or living space as a five-minute strategy, but now you can extend your stress-reducing exercise by taking on the dishes. Instead of putting your dishes in the dishwasher, spend 10 minutes at the sink with some elbow grease and mindful concentration. You'll lose stress and gain clean dishes and glasses all at the same time!

RANDOM ACTS

A study from the Yale University School of Medicine shows that extending small acts of kindness toward others makes the giver of kindness happier and less stressed. In fact, the more random acts of kindness a person performed, the less their mood was affected by stressful events. By showing kindness, you focus less on yourself and more on the feeling you get when you make someone feel good. Spend 10 minutes thinking about a way to gift someone with a positive feeling. Go through your clothes and donate them to a worthwhile cause. Find a small present for a coworker in appreciation of their work each day. Send your mother or your child a card or gift just because. Write some ideas for random acts of kindness on the lines below.

[illegible]

NOTHING FOR 10

In many workplaces, smokers go outside to puff for 10 minutes. But if you don't smoke, you probably stay inside working because you feel like you have no reason to do otherwise. But why should smokers get a break and not you? Go to a separate room or outside, zone out, and regroup for 10 minutes.

Chapter Check-In

Chapter 5 required you to pay more attention to how you move, think, and eat in terms of your stress level. Instead of reverting to “I don't have time for that!” you proved that you are willing to dedicate time to caring for yourself. You may also have realized that those 10 minutes of respite and restoration result in a more effective and efficient you. Review your notes from each exercise you tried, and record the 10-minute exercises that work best for you.

CHAPTER SIX

Strategies for Long-Term Relief

AS YOU READ THIS BOOK, you discovered how stress works on your body and what your stressors are. You learned to identify your triggers and worked through dozens of strategies to help you deal with stress in the moment. Hopefully, you have made these exercises a regular part of your day to quickly reduce your overall stress levels.

The larger, wholesale stress-reduction strategies presented in this chapter are the type you'll want to integrate into your life so you have less stress and a more peaceful life, without sacrificing your productivity on an ongoing basis. These longer-term stress relief strategies won't reduce stress immediately, but they will lower your stress levels over the long run. You may need to change the way you interact with people, and you may meet with some resistance as you become someone your loved ones and colleagues no longer recognize. But that's okay. When you are less stressed, you will be a happier person and have better relationships. Long-term stress relief will change the way you live and love in big and healthy ways.

Scale Back and Down

A lot of stress is caused by having too many things to do and too little time in which to do them. And since your time has restrictions, your only solution to this dilemma is to take some to-dos off that long list of yours. So how do you attack your list and start doing less?

PRIORITIZE

Start by accomplishing what you absolutely have to do. That will include the work you get paid to do and the kinds of things you can't get out of doing. Rank your list with A for the must-dos, like visiting your mother or spending time with your partner, B for the things you want to do but don't have to do, like coaching your child's athletic team or sitting on the board of your favorite nonprofit, and C for the things you neither like nor want to do, like laundry or house cleaning. On busy days you can skip the C's and put them off until you have more time.

A	B	C

OUTSOURCE

You can pay other people to do the chores that keep you busy in the little down-time you have. For example, you can skip the long line at the grocery store by shopping online and having the groceries delivered. Can you afford to hire a housekeeper to clean the bathrooms, dust your tchotchkes, and polish the floors? If so, go for it. If your need for healthy meals has you spending too much precious time in the kitchen, consider a meal preparation service that delivers chopped veggies and herbs and meat by the serving. Find someone to mow your lawn, shovel the snow, and clean your gutters.

LEARN TO SAY NO

Your list is plenty long, and though you may enjoy the ego boost of being in demand, your body and brain are telling you that they need a break. Whether you're being asked to take on more at home or at work, think about how this new task or obligation will affect you. Will it benefit you or just add to your stress? If it adds to your stress more than it benefits you, gently say no.

The quiz below will help you understand where your soft spots are and assess where you want to focus your no. On a scale of 1 (an easy no) to 5 (can't say no), rate how hard it is to say no to some of these common demands on your time and energy.

1. Can you watch my child/dog/house/cat?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Can I borrow some money?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Would you like to volunteer for this cause?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Can I stay with you when I visit your town?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Want to go out for drinks tomorrow?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Can you help me move this weekend?	1	2	3	4	5

For those requests that are hard for you to decline, think about why that is and develop a strategy for saying no the next time you get asked. Before you automatically say yes, say, "Let me think about it and get back to you." Take at least one day to think about how this new task or obligation will add to your life and add to your stress. Ask yourself:

- Is it busy work?
- Is this something I hate to do?
- Do I have time for this?
- Is this something I want to do?
- Will it get me something I want?

Look at your answers and decide if you want to say no. How do you do that without feeling guilty? Be assertive. Look the person asking in the eye and state your position clearly and firmly. Add a smile to make your answer easier to accept. Thank them for thinking of you and offering you the opportunity.

If you feel a sense of obligation, you can also add one of these caveats:

- It sounds like a great opportunity, but it doesn't work for me right now.
- I'm not sure I'm the best person for the task, but thanks for asking.
- I wish I could, but I can't.
- I'm flattered you thought of me, but I can't.
- This is probably not the answer you want, but I can't.
- I'm not comfortable doing that.

If you want to say yes but want to change one of the conditions, try to negotiate the time required or the details of the task, or ask for help getting it done. For example, you can say, "I can't right now but I can in a week when I get this project completed" or "I'd love to but would need some help getting it done in time." You can also specify what you're currently working on and note that you can discuss the request when you're done.

LOWER YOUR STANDARDS

You may like your car neat and tidy and your rims all shiny, but if you wash it once every two weeks instead of once a week, it won't fall apart. Let go of your only-the-best and find your just-good-enough. Shift from always doing your best to doing what you can. Not with everything, of course, but start to focus on what really matters in your life, and let the other things slide just a bit.

Prepare for Life

Being prepared makes life less stressful. Make your mornings go smoother by preparing your lunch the night before. Lay out your outfit the night before, too, from underwear to shoes, and don't forget the accessories. Hang reusable bags on the door so you can grab them on your way to the store. Place all the stuff you need to take with you in the morning—your backpack, purse, books, and so on—by the door the night before to make sure you don't forget anything. Leaving things for the last minute means last-minute stress as you try to meet that deadline or mail that birthday card.

Being prepared also means anticipating situations that may create stress. Though you can't prepare for every eventuality, you can prepare for enough to positively affect your stress levels. Here's how.

GET THERE EARLY

Find yourself always running late? Plan to get to your destination early so if one thing goes wrong, your whole day won't fall apart. That will reduce your road rage and anxiety as you sit in traffic or wait on the platform for a delayed train. When you get to your destination with a few minutes to spare, take time to relax. Use one of your one-minute, five-minute, or 10-minute strategies to center yourself before your next obligation.

DO IT NOW

Sure, you can pull off finishing your report the night before, drinking pots of coffee or sipping on energy drinks. And you may have convinced yourself that you do your best work under pressure. But the sleep deficit and post-caffeine crash means that you are not your best on the following day, which can make you more susceptible to the detrimental symptoms of stress. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today." If necessary, divide your task into manageable chunks that you do by setting aside time each day until you get it done. You will be more productive and less stressed.

AVOID TRIGGERS

There are people and places that really add to your stress, and sometimes it's easier to avoid them than to deal with them. Is there a colleague who gets under your skin? Sit far away from them at meetings, take a different lunch break, and be polite but disengaged the next time you cross paths. In chapter 1 you made a list of stressors and triggers (page 25). Go back to that list and strategize below about how you can avoid them.

STRESSOR/TRIGGER	AVOIDANCE STRATEGY

MANAGE YOUR TIME

Some people seem to run around like chickens with their heads chopped off, and others seem to be masters of their universe. The difference between the two is often better time management. Once a week—perhaps when you have some free time on the weekend—plan out your next seven days. List your tasks, their urgency, and exactly what you need to do to complete them. Group similar tasks or chores. Writing down what you need to do can help alleviate stress by turning a vague, overwhelming mass of work into concrete steps going forward.

TASK	IMPORTANCE	STEPS TO BE TAKEN

CREATE A LESS STRESSFUL ENVIRONMENT

You already have a head start on this stress-reduction strategy if you did the quick decluttering and cleaning exercises in chapters 4 (page 78) and 5 (page 111). With more time, you can implement several strategies that will help you create a less stressful environment. Start with a dedication to do a deeper decluttering job.

Plan a clean-up day. Prepare by shopping for organizers to hold your stuff (after you get rid of the stuff that you don't need). Start with a purge. Room by room, area by area, clear out the stuff you no longer need or that belongs in another space. Once you see what you have left, you can decide how to organize it. If you need suggestions on ways to organize, consult any of the popular decluttering books and websites. You may even want to consider outsourcing this task by hiring a professional organizer or taking pictures of your space and showing them to a consultant at a store that specializes in organizing spaces.

Along with decluttering, there are other easy ways to reduce the stress in your living environment.

- **Create scented spaces.** Lavender, chamomile, lilac, and vanilla are popular scents that promote relaxation. Using them in a room can make you feel relaxed with little effort. You can use candles or a myriad of diffusing methods available at your local home goods store or online to scent your living spaces.
- **Make soft-lit spaces.** Bright lights are harsh lights, and they are used in many buildings to keep people alert and moving. Making your rooms less stressful means turning down the lights and making your lighting different colors. You can buy lower-watt lightbulbs, put dimmers on your switches, use lamps instead of overhead lights, and take advantage of smart home technology to warm up the colors of your lighting with an app like Nest and compatible lightbulbs.
- **Use calming colors.** Blue is the color of the sky and the ocean and a relaxing hue for your walls. But if blue is not your favorite, a muted, dusty shade of any other color will add a calming feel to your rooms. Take a trip to your nearest paint store to choose room colors that relax you.

GO PAPERLESS

A pile of unopened mail can be a stressful sight. And chances are, most of it is recyclable junk mail and bills. Remove yourself from marketing mailing lists and go electronic for all the bills you can. Here's how:

Register on the National Do Not Mail List by completing the form at www.directmail.com/mail-preference.

Unsubscribe from unsolicited mail at catalogchoice.org (for free), DMAChoice.org (for a small fee), and OptOutPrescreen.com. You can also call catalog companies and asked to be removed from mailing lists.

When you get junk mail addressed to current resident, resident, or current

occupant or that says Return Service Requested, Forwarding Service Requested, Address Service Requested or Change Service Requested, draw a line through your address and write, "Refused. Return to Sender," cross out all bar codes, and put it back in the mail.

Go digital for all the bills you can by using online portals or calling individual providers.

After you clean up your physical mailbox you can take on your e-mail inbox. Instead of constantly deleting e-mail spam, set a spam filter and use the "unsubscribe" buttons you find at the bottom of e-mails you want to stop receiving.

Help Yourself and Others

Long-term stress relief depends not only on how you treat yourself, but also how you interact with and treat others. Connecting with yourself and with others is key to lowering your stress levels and maintaining your health. Here are a few ways to do both.

RECONNECT AND RELAX

If you find that you go from home to work to home to bed to work to home to bed to work to home to bed, then perhaps it's time to up your engagement socially with friends and family. Being around people you like and love can give you the social support that research says makes people happier, healthier, and less stressed. If you are religious and haven't been to your house of worship in a while, restart your fellowship practice and attend the service or activity that appeals to you. Set up a standing date with your friends to play board games, meet for weekend brunch, or play trivia at your local pub. These outings give you a place and time to vent, find support, give support, and have some laughs. Social occasions that become part of your routine are less stressful because time has already been carved out in your schedule for the people who are important to you. Use the steps below to get this started.

1. Make a list of people in your life whom you would like to see more often.
2. Find time in your schedule, whether once a week or once a month or once a year, for regular meetups.
3. Reach out to these people and set up your meeting times. You can decide on location later on. If you need to take a plane or a bus or a train, purchase the tickets as soon as you can.
4. If you can't see some people as often as you would like, schedule time in your calendar for a phone call or e-mail to stay connected.

SLEEP

The data is overwhelming: Good sleep leads to better physical and mental health. It will also make you feel more connected to your life. Good sleep is restorative, good for your immune system, helps your brain be clear and sharp, and improves your memory. It also makes you more able to deal with stress. But if getting sleep were so easy, there wouldn't be a need for a sleep revolution. Circle the answers below that apply to you to help you assess what your sleep issues are and take the relevant steps to fix them.

I can't fall asleep.	TRUE	FALSE
I can't stay asleep.	TRUE	FALSE
I don't feel rested when I wake up.	TRUE	FALSE
I don't get enough sleep.	TRUE	FALSE

To fall asleep, follow these simple steps:

- Turn off your screens an hour before bedtime because the blue light emitted by your phone, computer, and television interfere with your melatonin production (the hormone that makes you fall asleep).
- Read a novel instead of watching TV.
- Remove the TV from your bedroom to make it a sleep-friendly space.
- Drink a cup of relaxing tea such as chamomile or mint.
- Turn down the lights an hour before bedtime because darkness triggers melatonin production.
- Don't drink caffeine or an energy drink after noon. Take a walk or eat a high-protein snack instead when you feel that 3 p.m. energy dip.

To stay asleep:

- Don't eat right before bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol and nicotine an hour before bedtime, which may help you fall asleep but interfere with your REM (rapid eye movement) sleep.
- Make sure your phone is not glowing in the dark so that if you do wake up, you are not triggered to stay awake.
- Wear eye shades because if your eyes can't open, you won't be tempted to sneak a peek at your phone.

To feel more rested when you wake up, try to get more REM sleep by having a dark and cool room (the optimal temperature is between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit) and a comfortable bed.

Eight hours of sleep is best, but seven will do. If you've been getting less than the optimal number of hours of sleep, start going to bed 15 minutes earlier each night until you are getting the hours of shut-eye that you need.

SERVE OTHERS

The social connection that is associated with volunteering has significant positive impacts on your mental health and well-being and can lower your stress levels. Think about what change you want to see in the world and help an organization work toward that change. Giving to others may be altruistic, but it also feels good. It makes you feel useful, keeps you connected to something bigger than yourself, and puts your life in perspective.

Use the checklist below to help find your calling. Once you have an idea of what you want to do, search websites like [allforgood](#), [Idealist](#), [DoSomething](#), [Volunteer.gov](#), and [VolunteerMatch](#) for opportunities to help.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ I want to work with young children. | ☐ I want to work on homelessness. |
| ☐ I want to work with adolescents. | ☐ I want to work on child welfare. |
| ☐ I want to work with adults. | ☐ I want to work on addiction. |
| ☐ I want to work with the elderly. | ☐ I want to work on women's issues. |
| ☐ I want to work directly with people. | ☐ I want to work on climate change. |
| ☐ I want to work with animals. | ☐ I want to work with/on _____ |
| ☐ I want to work on the environment. | |
| ☐ I want to sit on a board or a committee. | ☐ I want to work with/on _____ |

GO AWAY

Another way to relieve stress is to take regular breaks from your routine. In addition, breaks from work have been proven to make you more effective and efficient. If you only get two or three weeks of vacation, focus on adding a day or two to a long weekend to space out your vacation days. You don't have to leave the country or your state to feel the benefits of a vacation. Find a nearby town and book a hotel for a couple of nights. Research tourist attractions or sit by the pool and do nothing. Just having a change of scenery will lower your stress levels.

Change Your Mind-set

Changing your mind-set, especially if you consider yourself a pessimistic person, is extremely important, particularly for stress reduction. Shifting how you think is so powerful that there is a psychotherapeutic model built on it. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) posits that if you change the way you think, you will change the way you behave, and vice versa. Positive psychology, which studies how humans thrive and live meaningful lives, has also shown that focusing on your strengths enhances your experience of love, work, and play. You can become more positive by becoming more aware of cognitive distortions and reframe the source of these thoughts. Review Shift Your Perspective (page 72) and try the exercises below.

GIVE THANKS AND PRAISE

One of the more powerful shifts in perspective—which is essential to stress reduction—comes when you focus on the good in your life. Go back to the Gratitude Minute exercise (page 60) and the Write What Went Right exercise (page 84), and use what you wrote there to reinforce a more positive mind-set. Make a point of finding and recording the good and giving thanks all day, every day.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

You learned earlier how to focus on small positives in your life in order to instantly reduce stress. Now you need to look at the bigger picture and shift your entire outlook on life. Here are a couple of more time-consuming ways to practice focusing on the larger good of your life:

- Create a photo album that showcases all the positives in your life: your family, your friends, the trips you've taken, your pets, and so on. Whether you make an old-school photo album that you can flip through or an online version, create a collection of memories that you can come back to over and over again. Revisiting cherished moments will calm you down, put a smile on your face, and make you happier.
- Write a handwritten letter to someone you love. A postcard lets you send a short message, but a letter lets you share news, feelings, dreams, or plans for the future—all of which can remind you of the positive in your life. Plus, you'll reap the stress-reducing benefits of reinforcing an important relationship.

Chapter Check-In

This chapter is designed to help you make bigger stress-reduction changes in your life. Many of these lifestyle changes are built on a lot of the work you have been doing for one minute, five minutes, and 10 minutes. If you can implement lifestyle changes, you will be building resilience that will make you less vulnerable to stressful moments and help you bounce back from a setback much faster. Look back on the exercises in this chapter to determine which strategies you want to implement on your journey to a healthier and happier you.

Conclusion

YOU DID IT! YOU MADE IT ALL THE WAY through to the end of this workbook and have learned a lot about yourself. You have checked boxes, answered questions, filled in the blanks, and evaluated your feelings. You have looked at the good in yourself and affirmed your ability to be awesome. You have stretched your muscles and improved your posture. You are eating healthier and relishing the tastes during your mindful mealtime. Your spaces are cleaner and more relaxing. And the best part is that you have learned how to manage your stress.

You have also learned how stress works and how it can impact your physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being. You have tried different strategies for managing your stress both in the moment and for the long-term. You have changed the way you live, love, and work, and you should be very proud of your progress.

You may now find that the world has changed in the way it reacts to you as well. Your friends and family will most likely appreciate how much calmer and happier you are. At work, you are probably more productive, effective, and efficient, and this may help you move up the career ladder.

But this does not have to be the end of your stress management journey, as you can find resources in the following pages that will help you learn more and do more about your stress. You will also find lots of references about the theory and science of stress. Thank you for following me on this journey to a happier, healthier, and less stressed you. May you continue to find—and keep—your stress managed and under control.

APPENDIX

Stress Tracker

In order to determine the impact of your stress reduction strategies, you may want to track changes in your stress level, your stressors, and your responses to those stressors as you work through the book. Tracking your progress is one way of staying motivated as well as seeing what is working and what is not. On a scale of one to 10 (with one being the lowest and 10 being the highest), rate how stressed you felt today and note the time. In a few words, describe your most stressful moment and what your response was to that event. You may decide to monitor your stress level at various times of the day and describe the moment that was most stressful since the last time you logged your stress level.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

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ORGANIZATIONS

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<https://www.stress.org/>

The Stress Management Society
<http://www.stress.org.uk/>

American Psychological Association
<http://www.apa.org/topics/stress/>

American Psychological Association, Center for Organizational Excellence,
Resources for Employers
<http://www.apaexcellence.org/resources/creatingahealthyworkplace/>

Stress Research Institute, Stockholm University
<https://www.stressforskning.su.se/english/research/>

STRESS MANAGEMENT TIPS

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STRESS ASSESSMENT TESTS

Perceived Stress Scale by Sheldon Cohen: <http://www.mindgarden.com/documents/PerceivedStressScale.pdf>

Holmes and Rahe Stress Test: Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_82.htm

Stress Test by Grant J. Devilly: <https://www.psychologistworld.com/stress/stress-test>

Stress Screener by Mental Health America: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/stress-screener>

Individual Stress Test by Stress Management Association: <http://www.stress.org.uk/individual-stress-test/>

Healthy Place: <https://www.healthyplace.com/psychological-tests/online-stress-test/>

SUPPORT GROUPS

Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/groups/stress/>

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