

8 Heart-Healthy, Low-Cost Stress Reducers



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Stress is a normal part of life, so it's important to learn to manage it in healthy ways. Carrying too much stress around is hard on your heart, immune system and body in general. So when your to-do list is more than three pages long, your patience is wearing thin and you're feeling a little cranky, try these tried-and-true stress relievers.

1. **Run, Forrest, run!** Or just walk briskly, if that's more your speed. Either way, walking and running have both physical and psychological benefits. For starters, you'll feel better because you're doing something healthy, and second, the alone time is a perfect opportunity to sort out what's bothering you. Find a scenic route in your neighborhood or hit the trail!
2. **Got bubbles?** Soaking up some suds in a hot bath is an effective way to quiet your mind. Add Epsom salt to the water to replenish common deficiencies in your cells; your skin will absorb the minerals to fight stress-related illnesses. But really, who needs an excuse for some tub time?
3. **Follow your nose.** The area of your brain that processes smells is close to the part that houses emotions and memories, so smelling things that are nostalgic or pleasing to you can have a calming effect. Some common stress-reducing aromas include green apple, vanilla, citrus, lavender and coconut. And, of course, your mom's homemade bread.
4. **Breathe in. Breathe out.** Repeat. Deep abdominal breathing increases the supply of oxygen to your brain and promotes a state of calmness. Just 20 to 30 minutes a day is all you need. Do it at your desk, in rush-hour traffic, while you're lying in bed or before your in-laws come over.
5. **A drink with jam and bread.** Whether you brew it at home or order a cup in a coffee shop, black tea has been found to ease anxiety. Simply taking the time to sit down and sip it is therapy in itself, but the flavonoids in black tea also can have a calming effect. Throw a tea party today!
6. **Tune in.** A lot of new research supports the physical and mental benefits of listening to music—one of those benefits is stress reduction. Music has the power to improve the body's immune system and lower cortisol levels. So crank up the volume, it just might quiet your mind.
7. **Feel the love.** A gentle hug can stimulate nerve endings under the skin, sending a calming message to the brain and slowing the release of cortisol. The next time you're ready to melt down, hug it out instead!
8. **Give a little.** Doing something for someone else is a great way to forget your own worries, and some research shows a correlation between volunteering and lower blood pressure. Chances are, after helping someone else you'll realize you didn't have much to worry about in the first place.