

# Top tips for reducing stress and improving mental health

- **“Green” Exercise Improves Mental Health**

Exercising in nature gives a quick and significant boost to your mental health, improving your mood and self-esteem, with the biggest effects coming in just five minutes. After that point, the effects are still positive but not as dramatic as the initial gains. While every green environment studied improved mood and self-esteem, the presence of water seemed especially beneficial. And certain groups seem to benefit even more than others: **the youngest participants enjoyed greater improvements in self-esteem than all other age groups and the mentally ill showed some of the biggest self-esteem improvements.**

- **The Benefits of “Being kind to yourself”**

Recent research has explored the concept of “self-compassion,” which involves forgiving yourself for mistakes, accepting your flaws, and recognising that no one is perfect. In a recent study US college students completed surveys that measured their levels of self-compassion. People who had self-compassion were less likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, repetitive thinking, and worry. What’s more, the researchers found that self-compassion provided a strong buffer against negative thinking.

In the past we have set much store by the idea we should develop self-esteem but ‘self-compassion trumps self-esteem.’ Self-esteem implies a comparison with others and by definition it’s impossible for *everyone* to be above average at the same time. Although there are ways in which we each excel, there is always someone cleverer, prettier or more successful. To see ourselves positively, we tend to inflate our own egos and put others down so that we can feel good in comparison. But this strategy is flawed. How can we reach our full potential in life if we can’t acknowledge our weaknesses? We might *temporarily* feel better about ourselves by ignoring our flaws but when we inevitably come face to face with our shortcomings we are often very hard on ourselves. The idea of accepting that we and our achievements are “good enough” seems to remain out of reach. No matter how well we do, someone else always seems to be doing better. This way of thinking comes at a high price contributing to feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and depression

So what’s the answer? To stop judging and evaluating ourselves all the time, labelling ourselves as “good” or “bad” and simply accepting ourselves with an open heart. We need to treat ourselves with the same kindness, caring, and compassion we would show to a good friend.

## Additional Top Tips for reducing stress

- **Hobbies**

Finding a hobby can be a simple and effective way to relieve stress. A hobby can provide an outlet for stress, a source of pleasure and a break from the daily stress of life. E.g. Art and craft, gardening, cooking, singing, making music.

- **Play games**

Dig out the board games or cards and play with friends. Online games can also relieve stress for those who enjoy them. They’re convenient, they can take your mind off of stress for a few minutes, and they’re generally free. The downside with some of them is that they can be addictive, taking up more time than they should and causing additional

stress in the long run! Some suggestions are:

**Build your own kaleidoscope**

[http://www.zefrank.com/dtoy\\_vs\\_byokal/](http://www.zefrank.com/dtoy_vs_byokal/)

**Flowers**

<http://www.zefrank.com/flowers/>

- **Spend time with friends**

- **Have fun and laugh**

Having fun and laughing is really important. Studies have shown wonderful health and stress relief benefits from laughter and even the anticipation of laughter. Therefore we should all work on getting more giggles into each day. Having fun should be a priority in the life of anyone who wants better health and greater happiness

- **Tell Jokes**

Aside from forwarding emails that make us chuckle, most people don't just tell jokes anymore, which is too bad. If you cull the internet for just one or two good jokes, you'll find that the laughter is often contagious, others may share jokes right back, and you're suddenly having more fun in your life.

- **Take a break**

Holidays and even short breaks where we get some 'space' from the demands of life can bring many rewards. Obviously, we feel less stress when we're not in a stressful environment. But holidays do more than that: they interrupt the cycle of stress that can lead to overwhelm. They give us a break from chronic stress so we can restore ourselves physically and mentally to a healthier place. Stress can lead to decreased creativity, memory problems, mild cognitive impairment and other issues. Therefore a break in the stress cycle can lead to sharper thinking and increased creativity that can spill into all areas of our lives.

- **Keep a journal**

Keeping a diary or journal that explores thoughts and feelings surrounding the events of your life is said to be helpful. Journaling, in this context is not the same as simply recording the events in your life, like keeping a log.

- **Meditation and mindfulness**

Meditation brings short-term stress relief as well as lasting stress management benefits. A recent study revealed that meditating for just 30 minutes a day for eight weeks can increase the density of gray matter in brain regions associated with memory, stress, and empathy. The changes in the brain suggest that meditation improves people's ability to regulate their emotions, control their stress levels, and feel empathy for others. (Mindful colouring is a popular and simple way of developing mindfulness.)

- **Breathing Exercises and Progressive muscle relaxation**

Breathing exercises provide convenient and simple stress relief in that they can be used anytime, anywhere, and they work quickly. PMR is a technique that allows you to relax all of the muscles in your body, group by group. Beginning sessions take several minutes, and allow you to feel physically and emotionally relaxed when done. With practice, you can achieve full-body relaxation within seconds.

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/audio/wellbeing-sleep-quick-fix.mp3>

<http://www.stressandxietyinteenagers.com/>

- **Take a walk**  
Exercise is a fantastic stress reliever that can work in minutes. Taking a walk allows you to enjoy a change in scenery, which can get you into a different frame of mind, and brings the benefits of exercise as well.
- **Plan your time**  
Improving your time management skills can allow you to minimize the stressors that you experience, and better manage the ones you can't avoid. When you are able to complete everything on your "to do" list without the stress of rushing or forgetting, your whole life feels easier.
- **Listen to music**  
Creating playlists for various moods (a cathartic mix for when you want to process feelings, an upbeat mix for when you need more energy, etc.) can help you to relieve stress passively, enjoyably, and conveniently.
- **A balanced diet**  
A healthy diet can bring greater physical *and* emotional wellness.
- **Assertive communication**  
Relationships can be great stress relievers. Knowing how to keep your relationships healthy through effective communication is one of the best investments of time and energy for stress relief.
- **Reduce caffeine intake**  
Consuming caffeine too late in the day can affect sleep quality, which impacts stress levels. Consuming too much caffeine in general can make you more emotionally reactive to stress.
- **Don't procrastinate**  
Putting off a stressful or labour-intensive project will only increase the stress you experience. Learning how to stop procrastinating can allow you to get done what you need to do, without the added stress of rushing for a deadline.

