



## Suggested Activities and Resources

- **1-Minute Meditation Break**
  - **HOW:** Pause each day to take a break for one minute to reflect and breathe deeply.
    - In those moments when it all seems like too much, step away, and do anything but whatever was stressing you out until you feel a little better. Close your eyes and take 10 deep breaths. For each one, count to four as you inhale, hold it for a count of four, and then exhale for another four. This works wonders almost immediately.
    - Counting breaths can be especially beneficial if you're a heavy media multi-taskers.
  - **WHY:** A few minutes of deep breathing can improve your concentration.
    - Studies show people who multi-task have trouble taking tests or performing activities that require sustained concentration.
    - Taking a few deep breaths can provide an immediate boost in focus, which can improve performance.
- **Opt Outside**
  - **HOW:** Gather in a green space outside to move.
    - Do simple activities like going for a walk outside that includes picture-taking.
    - Organize a group to walk or run or play outside.
  - **WHY:** Green spaces reduce stress and sun releases endorphins.
    - Access to green areas such as parks and nearby countryside has been shown to enhance cognitive functioning, reduce stress, improve sensory and motor skills in both children and adults, and ameliorate the symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children.
    - Exposure to sunlight helps your body produce vitamin D, which increases your level of serotonin in the brain. Plus, time in nature is a proven stress reducer.



- **Get Physical**
  - **HOW:** Host a group movement activity at the start of the day, at lunchtime or at the end of the day.
  - **WHY:** Exercise reduces stress.
    - Your body releases stress-relieving and mood-boosting endorphins before and after you work out, which is why exercise is a powerful antidote to stress, anxiety, and depression. Look for small ways to add activity to your day, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator or going on a short walk. To get the most benefit, aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise daily, and try to do it outdoors.
    - Studies show 200 minutes of walking per week (which is less than 30 minutes per day) greatly reduces depression and improves quality of life. In fact, some studies show walking can be just as effective as antidepressant medication.
    - Taking regular walks boost emotional health in people who aren't depressed too.
- **Tell yourself something positive.**
  - **HOW:** Practice using words that promote feelings of self-worth and personal power. For example, try, "I didn't do as well on the last test as I would have liked, but that doesn't mean I'm not going to pass the class." Avoid saying things, "I'm such a loser. I won't get a good grade in this class because I am not smart."
  - **WHY:** Research shows that how you think about yourself can have a powerful effect on how you feel. When we perceive ourself and our life negatively, we can end up viewing experiences in a way that confirms that notion.
- **Write down something you are grateful for.**
  - **HOW:** Keep a gratitude journal or write a daily gratitude list. Find something to be grateful for, let it fill your heart, and bask in that feeling.
  - **WHY:** The best-researched method to increase feelings of gratitude is to record things for which you are grateful. Gratitude has been clearly linked with improved well-being and mental health, as well as happiness. Generally contemplating gratitude is also effective, but you need to get regular practice to experience long-term benefit.



- **Focus on one thing (in the moment).**
  - **HOW:** Start by bringing awareness to routine activities, such as taking a shower, eating lunch, or walking home. Paying attention to the physical sensations, sounds, smells, or tastes of these experiences helps you focus. When your mind wanders, just bring it back to what you are doing.
  - **WHY:** Being mindful of the present moment allows us to let go of negative or difficult emotions from past experiences that weigh us down.
- **Eat a good meal.**
  - **HOW:** Eat balanced meals.
  - **WHY:** What you eat nourishes your whole body, including your brain. Research shows that these nutrients can improve mood and restore structural integrity to the brain cells necessary for cognitive function.
    - Carbohydrates (in moderate amounts) increase serotonin, a chemical that has been shown to have a calming effect on your mood.
    - Protein-rich foods increase norepinephrine, dopamine, and tyrosine, which help keep you alert.
    - And vegetables and fruits are loaded with nutrients that feed every cell of your body, including those that affect mood-regulating brain chemicals.
    - Include foods with Omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (found in fish, nuts, and flaxseed.)
- **Open up to someone.**
  - **HOW:** Trust others and know your value.
  - **WHY:** Knowing you are valued by others is important for helping you think more positively. Plus, being more trusting can increase your emotional well-being because as you get better at finding the positive aspects in other people, you become better at recognizing your own.



- **Do something for someone else.**
  - **HOW:** Volunteer to help someone.
  - **WHY:** Research shows that being helpful to others has a beneficial effect on how you feel about yourself.
    - Being helpful and kind—and valued for what you do—is a great way to build self-esteem. The meaning you find in helping others will enrich and expand your life.
- **Go to bed on time.**
  - **HOW:** Shut down screens for at least an hour before bed, using your bed only for sleep or relaxing activities, and restricting caffeinated drinks for the morning.
    - Go to bed at a regular time each day, and practice good habits to get better sleep.
  - **WHY:** A large body of research has shown that sleep deprivation has a significant negative effect on your mood.
- **Smile.**
  - **HOW:** Just smile.
  - **WHY:** Studies show smiling influences your physical state. A smile can decrease your heart rate during a stressful activity, even if you don't feel happy.
- **Do Yoga**
  - **HOW:** Take a yoga class.
  - **WHY:** Research shows yoga increases the level of gamma-aminobutyric acid--a neurotransmitter--in the brain. Increased GABA levels may counteract anxiety and other psychiatric conditions.
    - Studies have also found yoga benefits people with PTSD. When compared to a control group, people treated with trauma-informed yoga classes show a significant decrease in PTSD symptoms.

**Sources:** <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/women-s-mental-health-matters/201510/9-ways-you-can-improve-your-mental-health-today>

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