

How to Stop Stress in 60 Seconds or Less

By Lisa Girard

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Running a small business can require managing difficult situations every day. From funding issues to prickly customers, entrepreneurs have to solve problems all day, and the stress of it all can lead to burnout or worse. Instead of sliding into overwhelm, consider these stress-busting tactics to take it down a notch -- all in just 60 seconds or less.

1. Get physical fast. Stress expert Kathleen Hall suggests hanging a jump rope on the back of your office door and pulling it out for a quick minute of exercise when you need to de-stress. Also, consider jumping jacks or sit-ups, which you can easily pull off in your office. No gym necessary.

"Exercise relaxes tense muscles that become tight and rigid when you experience stress," says Hall, chief executive of The Stress Institute in Atlanta, Ga., an educational and training firm that focuses on the effects of stress and how to relieve it. "Exercise delivers oxygen to the brain, vital organs and muscles immediately and produces endorphins that soothe your mind, body and soul."

2. Stretch the stress out. Simple stretches can also restore a sense of calm, according to Hall. She suggests three yoga stretches you can do while sitting in your office chair --and it's best to hold each stretch for up to five seconds. First, with arms at your side, put your head between your legs, trying to touch the floor with your head. Second, with hands on your thighs, stretch your entire body upward. Then slowly touch your chin to your chest. Third, with your feet firmly planted, grab the arm or side of the chair and turn your head toward the back wall. Hold for a few breaths and then repeat on the other side.

3. Focus on your breathing. Stress expert Wendy Duncan recommends a breathing exercise she calls "heart coherence," which is achieved in three steps: First, place your left hand over your heart, then imagine your breath flowing through your heart. Take four counts to breathe in, and another four counts to breathe out. Then imagine the feelings of love, joy or compassion radiating out of you like beams of light.

"This method was discovered in the late 1970s during heart transplant research," says Duncan, founder of Wendy Duncan International in Redmond, Ore., which offers stress-relief programs, retreats and workshops. "The key finding is that your heart has its own brain and intelligence. Heart activity impacts you dramatically and others around you. Synchronizing your heart and mind has immediate benefits in relieving stress."

4. Visualize a calming image. Start with your eyes closed and in a relaxed position -- either sitting or lying down. Then Duncan suggests imagining a lavender-colored, healing light moving through your body, taking away any stress or pain.

Another visualization technique comes from Cindy Kubica, a Nashville, Tenn.-based stress expert. She suggests putting your hand in front of you, palm up, and closing your eyes. Visualize a crystal sitting in your palm, or actually place one in your hand, if you have a stone. The healing properties of crystals are believed to date back centuries to many ancient cultures, including Egyptian, Chinese, and Native American. Some of the most popular ones are the amethyst (calms the mind), citrine (healing properties) and variscite (eases anxiety).

Visualize the stone glowing and spreading warmth into your palm and then into the center of your body, spreading the light and color throughout your chest, up to your head, down your arms to the fingertips, and then down both of your legs to your toes.

5. Soothe your senses with calming scents. Aromatherapy is another centuries-old form of alternative medicine, but with this technique the natural plant extracts are used to help boost psychological and physical well-being. According to the Alliance of International Aromatherapists, some of the most popular essential oils for stress relief are lavender and rose to relieve anxiety -- and marjoram to promote relaxation.



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A good way to use them to relieve stress is to first put a small amount -- a couple drops -- of your preferred essential oil on your first three fingertips, Kubica says. Then, place your hands under your nose in the prayer position, index fingers resting against your lips, and slowly and deeply breathe in the soothing scent. Repeat the breathing three to five times and you'll be well on your way to restoring calm and quashing the stress of the business day.

Lisa Girard is a freelance writer who covers topics as diverse as golf fashion, health and beauty, the hardware industry and small business interests. She also has been Senior Apparel Editor for PGA Magazine for more than a decade.

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