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# Self-care for Stress Relief

To feel your best, you must take care of yourself. That means eating well, exercising, keeping work and home life balanced and maintaining good relationships. There are times, however, when even these things can't prevent stress and anxiety from creeping in. That's why self-care is so important. Taking a small amount of time out of your busy schedule just for yourself is key to handling all your duties while getting the most out of life. Try these other tips to give yourself the attention you need to be your best.

- **Exercise.** Physical exertion is a great way to relieve or reduce stress, so try exercising a little before you start work. Put in some time on the treadmill or sign up for a morning spin class.
- **Take a vacation.** How long has it been since you were away from the office for more than a three-day weekend? There is a reason you get vacation days every year, and that is so you can take an actual vacation where you are not checking your email or voicemail every two hours for messages. Go someplace, leave your work behind and spend time doing things for yourself, not for your employer.
- **Get enough sleep.** Lack of sleep affects your immune system and your judgment and makes you more likely to snap over minor irritations. Most people need seven to eight hours a day.
- **Stretching.** Stress often appears as tension in our necks, shoulders and head. Stretching exercises can relieve tension, make your body more flexible and produce a calming effect. Even just shrugging your shoulders, stretching your arms and rolling your neck a few times a day can have positive effects.
- **Be positive.** Our thought patterns often cause or contribute to the stress that we are feeling. The next time you encounter a stressful situation, take a moment to tune into your thoughts and feelings. Write these thoughts down and then write down a more positive replacement.

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# Achieving Balance

If you are feeling pulled in too many directions at once, or if there never seems to be enough time to accomplish everything on your “to-do” list, you may need to assess your work-life balance. The following suggestions can help:

- **Delegate tasks.** Do not be afraid to ask for help or to delegate responsibilities, both at work and at home.
- **Set priorities and limits.** Consider what is really important to you and what you value most in life. Once you identify your priorities, it will be easier to make decisions about how best to allocate your time.
- **Stay flexible.** Staying flexible and keeping a sense of humor can ease the stress associated with changing demands.
- **Talk to your manager.** Often, they have been in the same situations and can offer the best advice for dealing with them.
- **Build a support network.** We all need someone to have our backs. Cultivate friends and maintain family ties. They can help shoulder some of the load.

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# Benefits of Meditation

The purpose of meditation differs depending on whom you ask: For some it is self-purification, others relaxation, still others deep concentration. Yet most would agree that meditation is a way to reconnect to ourselves by learning to listen, observe and stay in the present moment. Through meditation, we become aware and mindful, and we wake up.

Regardless of purpose, meditation is a method to relax and free ourselves from anxiety and fear. If we learn to stay in the moment, then we tend to not reflect on the past, which can cause depression, or focus on the future, which can cause anxiety.

Studies using MRI technology indicate that people who meditate achieve deep states of relaxation in three areas of the brain: the frontal lobe, the parietal lobe and the limbic system. Along with this deep state of relaxation, meditation also results in:

- Stress reduction
- Lower blood pressure
- Increased immune function
- Clarity of mind
- Better focus
- Improved memory
- A greater sense of calmness and well-being

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