
RELAX!

Take the Time to De-Stress

The struggle to get the kids off to school, the morning commute, the midday deadlines, and the frantic scramble to leave the office on time to pick up the kids or make dinner... Does this sound like your typical day? Most people lead such busy lives that they never seem to have enough time to relax and unwind after a long day. But if you don't remember to take time to relax, you may be harming your health and well-being.

The Cost of Stress

Everyone experiences stress in some form. You probably recognize the tension you feel when job pressures, troubled relationships, or other worries arise. But although you may realize that your mind isn't at ease, what you may not know is that this tension can cause many health conditions, including high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, stomach ulcers, and migraine headaches.

Stress also affects your well-being -- it can lead to anxiety, depression, feelings of dissatisfaction, and a decline in quality of life. In the workplace, stress is believed to decrease productivity, job satisfaction, and morale, and to cause more frequent absences from work. These effects may cost American businesses up to \$150 billion per year.

Managing your stress can reduce its adverse effects on your health and well-being. Once you learn how to relax, you may find that you have time to slow down and take a break after all.

Stress Management for Everyday Life

Recognizing stress is the first step toward minimizing its negative effects. The next step is to find ways to relieve your tension. One way is to exercise -- join a dance class, learn a new sport, or take a brisk walk every morning. Aim for 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three to five times a week, but remember not to overexert yourself -- physical strain is *another* form of stress.

You may also be able to ease stress by practicing relaxation techniques. Sitting quietly with your eyes closed and breathing deeply, for example, are two techniques that have been shown to lower heart rate and reduce stress. Meditation or relaxation audiotapes also may help. Alternatively, doing anything that makes you feel calm and gives you peace of mind is a good way to relax.

Some people suffer from recurrent tension headaches, and the stress of day-to-day life only worsens the pain. In fact, studies show that as many as 80% of tension headaches are caused by everyday stress, whereas fewer tension headaches are caused by major life changes. If you are prone to tension headaches, there are several nonprescription pain relievers that may ease your discomfort.