

## Learn to Manage Stress

**It can seem as though we're always at work.** First, there's the long list of tasks to tackle at our "day jobs." After hours, if texts, emails and calls from work intrude, it can be hard to turn the job off. Then there are our "second jobs." This can include actual part-time work, or the countless unpaid tasks we do such as picking up kids and taking them to activities, studying for school, paying bills, cooking meals, and running errands.

The packed schedules of life today can cause anxiety and stress. This can lead to illness, depression and strain on relationships. So it's important to take time for yourself and learn how to...*relax*! You have the power to gain some control over the many stressful elements of life.

In this issue of *Your Source*, we look at ways that you can begin managing your stress better. You can learn to:

- Adopt some proven relaxation techniques that can relieve stress and tension.
- Gain a better balance between work and your personal life.
- Improve your overall wellness by being more aware of the mind-body connection.

**Go online today!** Log on to access *Stress Relief* under the Library/In the Spotlight section. There you'll find ideas on how to slow down and manage stress better.

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## Make a Plan for Balance

Perhaps the one-two punch of work and home life stress is getting you down. Signs that you're getting out of balance can include trouble concentrating or not being as creative as usual. You might feel emotions such as anger, sadness, guilt, or frustration. Developing a strategy for better balance can help.

- **Keep your goals realistic.** Be flexible and realistic in planning your schedule. Focus on things you know you can accomplish. Don't expect yourself to be the perfect parent or sibling or friend.
  - **Drop activities that sap time and energy.** Take a close look at how you spend your time. Identify and exclude things that don't help your career or personal life.
  - **Quiet the electronics at home.** Try to respond to work-related texts, emails or calls only during work hours.
  - **Build downtime into your schedule.** Make it a point to schedule time in your week with family, friends and activities that help you re-charge.
  - **Ask for help.** If you're feeling overwhelmed, get some support. Seeking advice from a counselor through your program can help you build a plan for better work/life balance.
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## Learning to Relax

It sounds easy enough. When life gets too busy, you just chill out. But do we always take the time to really relax—to the point where the body can begin to recover from stress?

With practice, relaxation techniques can benefit many areas of your life. When you take time to do a relaxation exercise even briefly, you can get a quick energy boost or a time-out from a problem or project. Then when you return to the challenge, you're often able to develop fresh new solutions.

Here are just a few of the easiest relaxation methods that you can do almost anywhere:

- **Deep breathing** – Deep breathing can be used at any time, and no one will know but you. It involves taking slow, deep breaths, and exhaling slowly to let the whole body relax a little more with each breath.
- **Meditation** – Practiced in many cultures for centuries, meditation involves resting in a comfortable position without distractions. Focus your attention on only one thing. This can be a word or phrase, your breathing, a sound, or an image or object. Re-focusing your attention each time you become distracted, you learn to be more present and alive in every moment.
- **Progressive (deep) muscle relaxation** – This involves alternately tensing, and then releasing, groups of muscles throughout the body. Start with your facial muscles then move on to other muscle groups—shoulders, arms, chest, legs, etc.—until you've tensed and relaxed all muscle groups.
- **Imagery or visualization** – This involves relaxing while using your imagination to create a visual image of a relaxing, soothing or healing place or thing. Every part of this image—sight, sound, taste, action and texture—is imagined to make it as real as possible.

Sources such as your program can help you find more detailed instructions and coaching on relaxation techniques.

## Exercise Benefits Body and Mind

***Get your body and mind working better together.*** Studies show that exercise helps reduce depression, stress and anxiety. It improves short-term memory and brain function. It also increases the natural “feel-good” chemicals in the body.

***Start with walking.*** Walking is free and easy. In addition to the mental health benefits, walking is a weight-bearing exercise that strengthens bone and burns fat.

***Pencil it in.*** Schedule exercise sessions on your day planner, phone or computer.

***Make it fun.*** Find an exercise activity that meets your needs and that you find enjoyable. Otherwise, you may forego it.

***Just do something.*** Squeeze in a bit of active movement, even if you only have ten minutes.

***Get support.*** Working with a personal trainer or a friend may provide the support you need to keep going.

***Reward yourself.*** Take lessons to improve your technique, subscribe to a health magazine, or buy yourself some cool new athletic gear.