

Stress Relief—Mental Activities

Definition and Symptoms

Stress is the non-specific physiological response to external stimuli. Some examples of stress include headaches, muscle tension, sweating, queasy stomach, fatigue, change in appetite, inability to concentrate, and moodiness. Stress experiences are different for all people. Relieving stress is an important life task. There are physical strategies to provide relief as well as mental strategies. The following examples are mental strategies for stress relief.

Meditation

Meditation is an exercise designed to quiet the mind. By quieting the mind, an individual can control the mental distractions and refocus on the tasks and issues at hand.

Meditation is an exercise that takes practice, but with regular devotion to meditation, it works quite well as a stress reliever.

First, find a quiet and calm area to be alone with no distractions. Find a comfortable posture to prevent any muscular tension: kneeling, swaying or sitting in a cross-legged position with a straight back allowing the spine to be positioned in its natural curve. Be comfortable and relaxed. Lying down may not be helpful for those new to meditation because the posture encourages sleep rather than relaxation.



To begin meditating, clear the mind of all thoughts. Counting “one” while inhaling and “two” on exhalation is a helpful trick. As thoughts begin to enter the mind, resume counting “one” and “two” to refocus. Allow the mind to focus on the exercise.

When ready, open the eyes and note the sense of calm and peace. Future sessions can last for short or longer duration, depending upon the circumstance. Keeping an eye on the clock or worrying that one “isn’t doing it right” are counter-productive. Meditation takes a positive attitude and willingness to try.

Imagery

Imagery is a technique that involves visualizing mental pictures of relaxing scenes, translating physical relaxation into mental relaxation. This technique allows the participant to travel, mentally, to a place that relaxes and calms.

As with meditation, start with a calm and quiet environment, free of distractions. Posture should be comfortable to allow for total focus on the mental images.

As the process begins, breathing should be slow and controlled. As the breathing slows, the mind can begin to “see” calming images: the ocean with gentle surf, birds flying through a clear blue sky, or deer foraging in the woods. The image should incite a sense of calmness and serenity. Explore this exercise and alter it for maximum personal benefit.

Mantra

A mantra is a tool on which one intently focuses to relax the mind while eliminating distracting thoughts. A mantra can be a simple picture, a symbol, or even a word.

Begin with the same environmental and posture ideas as the other exercises. But rather than focusing on a mental image, focus on a physical image, such as a candle flame, and let the mind empty itself of thoughts.

Instead of a visual image, repeat, in a rhythmic pattern, “I am calm. I am relaxed.” Repeating these words will be a powerfully calming experience. When ready, rejoin the world!

