

Relieve Your Stress, Ease Your Heart

If you experience stress often, it can cause major upsets in your life, along with negative effects on your heart if you don't develop coping mechanisms to help relieve it. Although some stress is unavoidable, (such as that produced by other people or unexpected situations), developing ways to deal with it can help you feel less anxious and learn to make decisions in a calmer manner, resulting in a less-stressed heart. Below are a few ways you can help relieve the stress in your life and keep your heart healthy, along with a quick & easy heart healthy recipe!



Learn to let go.

Some problems that cause endless stress are often not really that important. By identifying problems that cause you stress, you will be able to let go of the minor irritations that are bothering you. If you feel you always have to be in total control of your life, you are bound to experience stress as things happen that you can't control. If your life has become tied to a strict timetable, try letting go of just 5 or 10 minutes of each day to do nothing. Step outside and look at the trees and flowers, feel the sun on your face, listen to the sounds around you, and just relax.

Watch your diet.

In stressful situations it's often easy to skip breakfast, grab whatever's most available for lunch and keep going with coffee and sugary snacks. This wrecks havoc on your body, as your blood sugar and energy go up and down all day. Plan your diet in advance to allow for small meals frequently, such as nuts, fruit, veggies, and whole grains, and try to avoid excessive caffeine, sugar, and alcohol. Eat breakfast, keep healthy snacks in your desk drawer at work, and eat frequently. When your blood sugar is low, your attention span suffers, so don't go all day without eating; that just adds to your stress and when you're starving it's easy to make unhealthy choices.

Sleep.

Not getting enough sleep can lead to stress, as you will feel groggy and unfocused the next day after tossing and turning all night. As insomnia can be a symptom of too much stress in your life, getting enough sleep is very important if you want to relieve it. Most people need at least 7 or 8 hours of sleep each night to function properly the next day; if you get more or less your performance can suffer. Deep sleep is especially important, and if you wake up frequently this can be impaired; if you can't seem to get to sleep on your own, your doctor may be able to help you with this problem. It may also be helpful to meditate lying down before bed to help calm your body and mind, making it easier for your body to drift off to sleep.

Learn to listen.

Have you ever been in a conversation where someone keeps finishing your sentences? It can be pretty frustrating, right? Or maybe *you* tend to finish people's sentences while they're talking, which can cause frustration for other people! We should all practice listening to one another. While you listen, hold back your thoughts on the next thing you'd like to say and instead focus on your breath. Really focus on what the other person is trying to say or express and allow yourself to be truly present in that moment.

Breathe deep.

Deep breathing is one of the best and easiest stress relievers. It has tremendous benefits on the body, including oxygenating the blood that awakens the brain. In the process the muscles relax and the mind quiets down. Breathing exercises are EASY because you can do them anywhere. They work fast, so you can de-stress in a jiffy.

Laugh a little more.

Laughing is good for the body and the soul, and humor can help relieve stress. Watch funny movies, read comic strips, or look up some jokes on the internet. Some hospitals have now included “laugh rooms” where patients with serious illnesses can relieve some of the tension by watching funny films and laughing, which actually causes a chemical reaction to occur in the brain.

Exercise.

Stress can cause serious physical problems in your body. Often people who don't show strong reactions internalize stress, which can lead to hypertension, indigestion, insomnia, headaches, or other ailments. Keeping your body in good physical shape is important even if you're not under stress, and in stressful situations it's even more important to be healthy. Exercising can be a great stress reliever; running on a treadmill, joining a yoga class, swimming laps, or cycling with friends are all good for your body and can take your mind off stress.

Heart Healthy Recipe:

GUACAMOLE

Ingredients:

2 avocados

1 small red onion chopped

Juice of one lime

Handful of cilantro, chopped

sea salt to taste

Optional:

1 clove garlic, minced

1 chopped tomato (or salsa)

Directions:

Cut avocado in half and remove pit. (Fun fact: If you won't be eating your guacamole just yet, save the pits and place them in the guacamole once you cover and refrigerate, it will keep the “guac” from turning brown) Scoop out the inside and place in bowl. Mash avocado with the back of a fork, add onion, lime juice, cilantro, chopped tomato and minced garlic. Mix well and serve with pita chips, your favorite tortilla chips or veggies! You could also spread it on a sandwich or wrap for some extra *healthy* flavor!

Benefits of Avocados:

Avocados have gotten a bad rap because of their fat content. However, fat is a macronutrient much needed by the body. Fat insulates the body, helps transport hormones and is a source of stored energy. Remember, it is the quality of fats that you take into your body that needs attention. Avocado is a quality source of monounsaturated fats which aids the absorption of its fat soluble vitamins E and K. It is important to note that avocados also contain B vitamins and Vitamin C and its potassium content is three times that of a banana!