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Beat Stress with Meditation and Relaxation Exercises

Meditation is a simple practice available to everyone which can reduce stress, increase calmness and clarity and promote happiness, as well as provide medical benefits such as improving blood pressure. And it does not have to take a long time. There are different styles of meditation, including mindfulness meditation and concentration meditation. Most include quiet, and a focus on something specific such as your breathing, a specific calming word, or observing your thoughts without judgment. Try different styles and give each one a chance to see what you benefit from. Here's a simple meditation to try:

Follow these instructions for a 2–3 minute meditation. Set a timer if you'd like so you can just focus on the meditation.

- Sit or lie comfortably.
- Close your eyes.
- Breathe naturally.
- Focus your attention on your breath and on how the body moves with each inhalation and exhalation. Notice the movement of your body as you breathe. Observe your chest, shoulders, rib cage, and belly. Simply focus your attention on your breath without controlling its pace or intensity. If your mind wanders, return your focus back to your breath.
- Continue for 2–3 minutes simply breathing and noticing your body's response.
- Try it for longer periods if you find that it is beneficial.

Popular Meditation Apps

Meditation apps include a wide variety of meditation styles so you can try different ones. **Headspace**, **Insight Timer** and **Calm** have a variety of excellent meditations. Note: Some meditations in these apps are free and others are fee-based.



Shining a Light on Alzheimer's

Worldwide, 50 million people are living with Alzheimer's and other dementias.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive brain disorder that impacts memory, thinking and language skills, and the ability to carry out the simplest tasks.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. Dementia itself is not a disease, but a term used to describe symptoms such as loss of memory, loss of judgment and other intellectual functions. Alzheimer's disease can cause dementia.

Some warning signs of Alzheimer's include:

- Memory loss, especially of recent events, names, places and other new information.
- Confusion about time and place.
- Struggling to complete familiar tasks such as brushing one's teeth.
- Trouble finding appropriate words, for example in a sentence.
- Difficulties in judging situations.
- Changes in mood and personality.

Can Alzheimer's and Dementia Be Prevented?

There is growing evidence that shows certain lifestyle and diet factors may help prevent and/or slow down the progression of Alzheimer's and dementia, including developing these healthy habits:

- **Exercise.** There is strong evidence that physical exercise helps prevent the development of Alzheimer's or slow the progression in people who have symptoms. The recommendation is 30 minutes of moderately vigorous aerobic exercise, three to four days per week.
- **Eat a plant-based diet.** This has been shown to help thwart Alzheimer's or slow its progression. A recent study showed that even partial adherence to such a diet is better than taking no action. A heavily plant-based diet, such as a Mediterranean Diet, includes fresh vegetables and fruits; whole grains; olive oil; nuts; legumes; fish; moderate amounts of poultry, eggs, and dairy; moderate amounts of red wine; and red meat only sparingly.
- **Get adequate sleep.** Growing evidence suggests that improved sleep can help prevent Alzheimer's and is linked to greater amyloid clearance from the brain. Aim for 7-8 hours per night.

Go Purple

You've probably seen the Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month campaign that encourages you to "go purple."

Consider joining the Alzheimer's Association in going purple and raising awareness this June.

Their campaign website has everything you need to spread the word.

Resources

- **Alzheimer's Association®**
Check this website to find: <https://www.alz.org/abam/overview.asp>
- **Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA)**
<https://alzfdn.org>. Provides support, services and education to individuals, families and caregivers affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias nationwide, and fund research for better treatment and a cure. National Toll-Free Helpline: 866-232-8484
- **US Department of Health and Social Services**
<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers>



If You Need Help With Mental Health

The amount of stress Americans have faced in recent years is unprecedented and many people are still reeling from physical, emotional and financial strains.

Chances are your employer offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that can help you or your dependents can receive the support you need whether it's online, on the phone, or in person. Most programs cover from 3–10 visits to an in-network EAP provider for help with issues such as life changes, depression, and stress. Check your benefits for more information.

The Staycation: Tips for Fun Without Leaving Home

Our budgets may be tight, but that doesn't mean we can't plan an entertaining staycation spent at or near home. Here are some ideas for a fun, relaxing and cost-effective staycation:



Take a mini road trip

A scenic drive is one of the best ways to maintain social distancing while also getting out of the house. Hop in the car and take a road trip to a spot just an hour or two away. Enjoy the day by exploring new sights, having a picnic, hiking or simply watching nature.



Read a good book

Curl up on the couch or go outside and laze in a hammock or on a blanket under your favorite tree, then dive into a good book. A glass of lemonade would be nice, too.



Have a spa day

Make your home feel like a retreat. Light some fragrant candles and turn on relaxing music. Apply a moisturizing treatment to your hair, smooth on a moisturizing face mask and cucumber slices, and soak your feet in Epsom salts. Whatever you do, just focus on using that time to relax.



Go camping in the backyard

Pitch a tent, create a campfire, roast hot dogs and make s'mores. The kids will love it if you tell spooky stories and sing camp songs around the fire. When it's time to call it a night, have everyone crawl into the tent and sleep under the stars (or you can bring the gang back inside to sleep in your comfortable beds too).



Plan a game night

Dust off your board games and gather the family around to enjoy a simple game night. Or, plan a virtual game night with friends and family through one of the many video conferencing services like Google Hangouts and Zoom, smartphone apps, and interactive websites. You can play traditional classics like Monopoly and Scrabble or check out the host of new and interesting virtual game hosting sites.



Have a movie night

You don't have to leave your house to catch a good flick. Rent a movie – or even better, stream one for free. Grab some popcorn from the store or pop your own, and you have all the makings for a great (and really cheap) movie night. You can watch movies with loved ones who live outside your home by hopping on a video chat and pressing play at the same time. Or, you can watch content with friends and family and chat online through Netflix Party and Prime Video.



The Serious Issue of Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity has been called “one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century,” and with good reason. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 17 percent of 2- to 19-year-old American children are obese, as measured by their body mass index (BMI) percentile. The rate of childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years.

Obesity can harm nearly every system in a child’s body – heart and lungs, muscles and bones, kidneys and digestive tract, as well as the hormones that control blood sugar and puberty – and can also take a heavy social and emotional toll. Children and teens who are overweight or obese have substantially higher odds of remaining overweight or obese as adults, increasing their risk of disease and disability later in life.

Help Your Kids Eat Healthy and Move More

The National Institutes of Health’s **We Can!** program provides a few tips on helping kids eat right, increase physical activity and reduce sitting/screen time:

Make healthy choices easy

- Put healthy food where it’s easy to see.
 - Put a bowl of washed fruit, like grapes or apples, on the table.
- At snack time, offer fruit, veggies, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk products.
- Limit foods with high calories, fat, and added sugar in your home.
- Keep balls and other sports gear handy for playing active games outside.

Focus on fun

- Cook a healthy new meal together.
- Do physical activities together as a family.
- Plan fun and active things on the weekends, such as:
 - Jump rope or double-dutch.
 - Walking through the zoo or on a nature trail.
 - Playing in the park.
 - Going to a farmer’s market or community garden.
 - Picking a project like building a tree house or painting a room in the house.

Remember that small changes every day can lead to success!

For more information (and free resources) about childhood obesity and how to build healthy, nutritious habits, visit:

- The Department of Agriculture’s **MyPlate** website for meal tips, games and apps, and more resources.
- The **Dietary Guidelines for Americans**. (Be sure to download the free edition of guidelines booklet.)
- The AAP Parenting website, **Healthychildren.org**, from the American Academy of Pediatricians.
- We Can! is a program from the National Institutes of Health that offers resources for parents, caregivers and communities. To learn more, go to <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call 1-866-35-WE CAN.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **Tips to Help Children Maintain a Healthy Weight**.