

# 50 Stress Busting Ideas for Your Well-being

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**We all have a variety of stressors in our lives. How we handle – or don't handle – these stressful situations goes a long ways toward defining our quality of life. Here are 50 creative and effective techniques you can use to minimize the negative impact of the things that stress you.**



## MontGuide

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### Manage the stress in your life, before it manages you! The following activities will help you:

- Alter, avoid or accept your stressors
- Build your resources or strengths, and
- Change your attitude or perception of the stressors

#### Getting Started

Before you look through this publication, stop to think about what kinds of things might be causing stress for you. First, identify a stressor, like a family problem or a difficulty with a co-worker.

Then choose an activity (or two) that you think would help you deal with it. Apply yourself to doing that particular activity for a day, a week, or a month. You may want to remind yourself with notes on your mirror, refrigerator or car dashboard, or by wearing a piece of jewelry that reminds you of your commitment to practicing the activity in your daily life. Then, look back and note the difference in your stress level. Return to the list of activities whenever you like and repeat the process.

#### 1. Use the Massage Buddy System

Arrange with a friend, spouse or co-worker to give each other a one-minute shoulder massage and back-rub a couple times a day, or as stress demands. Use this technique whenever you detect physical symptoms of stress. Massaging tense muscles feels good and is relaxing.

#### 2. Journal

We need an outlet for our positive and negative feelings. There are a variety of ways to express feelings, such as dancing, talking, painting, and writing. You might try writing your feelings in a private journal or notebook. Expressing your feelings in this way is harmless and can be therapeutic. Find a technique that works for you so that you can come in closer touch with your feelings.

#### 3. Exercise and Burn Calories

Exercise is a proven way to manage stress. If burning calories is on your mind, remember that you have to burn 3,500 extra calories (beyond your body's daily needs) to lose one pound of body weight. Consider spending the calories in these ways (estimates based on 150-lb. male).

Activity/Calories burned per hour:

Cycling (6 mph)	240
Cycling (12 mph)	410
Cross County Skiing	700
Jogging (5.5 mph)	740
Jumping Rope	920
Running (10 mph)	1280
Swimming (0.85 mph)	275
Tennis (singles)	400
Walking (2 mph)	240
Walking (3 mph)	320

#### 4. Honest Positive Appraisals

At the end of a day, we are often tempted to focus on what we did not accomplish instead of what we did accomplish. Get into the habit of praising what you did accomplish. Before you go to bed, write down three positive things you've accomplished that day, no matter how small you may think they are. Reflect on your daily successes!

#### 5. Find Meaning In Life

Who am I? What's the purpose of life? Answers to these questions help people find meaning in life. Finding meaning can help us remain calm during stormy times.

Some people find meaning through religion, some through learning, some through great literature, some through service. Take time regularly to proceed on your quest for understanding of life's purposes.

## **6. Be Your Own Best Friend**

Don't expect yourself to be perfect. Stop doing things that tear you down. Notice the good things you do, and dwell on those things. Don't try to force yourself to be perfect or always kind. Treat your feelings with respect. Other people may sound bigger and stronger and more sure of themselves, but your feelings are important. Listen to them. Instead of dwelling on a mistake, learn what you can from it and then let the mistake go. Examine the expectations you have for yourself. Check to be sure they are reasonable.

## **7. Celebrate Your Talents**

Your sister may be a wonderful cook. Your neighbor may be incredibly organized. But don't compare yourself to them. No one has every talent, but all do have talents. Discover yours. Build them. Celebrate them. Use them to help others.

## **8. Do A Little Something**

When you are feeling tired and discouraged and don't want to do anything, look for a small job. Maybe you could chop some wood. Maybe you could take out the trash. Look for a little job to get started. Once you finish the job, give yourself credit for it. Don't beat yourself up with a long list of all the things you still need to do. Once you get started with a little job, you may feel like tackling bigger jobs.

## **9. Create a Personal Mission Statement**

Successful people and organizations are often guided by mission statements. In these statements we state what we want to be, what we want to accomplish and the values we will follow. These statements help focus our daily activities.

Begin by imagining that, by some miracle, you were taken from the earth to another world. How would you like those of us who remain on this planet to remember you? What would people miss about you? Jot everything down.

Next, develop a statement that reflects these values. Take time to review it occasionally; you may want to modify it. One mission statement read: My mission is to discover and develop my talents, and to use my talents to make the world a better place.

## **10. Win the Race, Slow and Steady**

Pacing is the art of taking on no more, but no less, than you can reasonably handle while working at it steadily. Pacing skills can help us take control of our lives.

Begin by scheduling your time. Figure out how long each task is likely to take. Make allowances for interruptions. Then schedule tasks to fill but not overflow the time you have.

Don't allow yourself to get behind or to get ahead of schedule. Practice plodding.

Be consistent. Try to eat meals, sleep and exercise at a consistent time each day.

## **11. Be Patient**

Some problems solve themselves with time. Eventually children outgrow diapers. They get past teething. The rain stops and the sun comes out. Work on the things you can change. Be patient with things that take time.

## **12. Say No**

Learn to say no to requests you can't reasonably handle. Memorize a variety of ways to say no: "No, I'd rather not," "Thank you for asking, but I'd better not take on another commitment right now," or simply "No, thank you." Don't feel guilty or make excuses for your response. If you need to say "no" now but want to say "yes" at a later time, say something like this: "I'd be happy to serve on that committee in the future, but right now I'm booked up."

## **13. Re-label Your Experiences**

Everyone tends to label their experiences. The labels you choose for stressful situations influence their effect on you.

List your stressors and write down the meaning you assign to each. Cross out the negative meaning and assign a more positive statement.

Put your troubles into a broader perspective. Step outside the situation and ask yourself, "Will this matter in 50 years? Or even in five years?"

Try to find ways to be grateful for whatever happens to you. Remember: We may not be able to control what happens to us, but we can control our attitude toward it. Practice re-labeling with others.

## **14. Learn to Rely on Supportive Relationships**

Draw strength from friends and family members. You may have some friends who help you to make decisions, to feel loved, and to feel hopeful. Call them. Talk to them. Tell them how you feel. You may have some friends or family members who make you angrier or sadder. It might be good not to talk to them when you feel stress. Anger makes stress worse.

## **15. Get Help**

Stress may become unmanageable, to the point that we feel that there is no way out. If you are feeling overwhelmed or unable to deal with stress on your own, seek professional help. Your doctor can help rule out physical problems. If no physical problems exist, you may want to consider talking with a professional counselor or minister who can help you understand your feelings. If you are feeling so stressed that you are considering taking your life, GET HELP IMMEDIATELY!

## **16. Try Autogenics**

In this technique, your mind tells your body how to feel. Find a place where you can sit comfortably. Close your eyes and try to clear your mind. It may help to breathe slowly and deeply a few times to put your mind at rest.

Next, focus your attention on your left arm and repeat in your mind, “My left arm feels warm and heavy” until it actually feels that way. Do the same thing with the right arm, left leg, right leg and so on.

End the exercise as you began, by breathing deeply. Open your eyes and do a full-body stretch. Try using this technique for 10 minutes a session.

## 17. Surrender

Surrender doesn't mean giving up. It means letting go of things you cannot change. You may worry that an earthquake or flood is going to destroy you and your family. While it is possible that you could move to a safer house or city, it may be better to throw away that worry. You may want to close your eyes and mentally tie the floods in a knot and throw them in the trash or lock them in a closet. Decide which of your stresses you cannot change. Think about ways to adapt to them. If you're unsure about whether you should surrender to something in your life, seek professional help.

## 18. Control Life Changes

Do what you can to schedule life changes so they don't occur all at once. For example, if becoming a parent is in your near future, prepare the baby's room and clothing well in advance, and try to plan the birth so that it doesn't coincide with other life changes such as a new job or moving to a new city. When one part of your life changes, make an effort to continue to do the things that bring you pleasure? Don't give up all the things you love to do simply because one part of your life has changed.

## 19. Breath Deeply

Deep breathing is a basic technique for relaxation. Breathing slowly and deeply can help turn off stress and turn on peaceful feelings.

Find a place where you can sit comfortably. Close your eyes. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose until you have filled your stomach cavity as full as possible. Purse your lips and exhale slowly. Try doing this activity for five minutes.

## 20. Stretch

Muscle tension is a common reaction to stress. Here are some common stretches you can do at home or at work:

**Neck Stretch**—While standing or sitting up straight, gently tip your head to the left, hold for 30 seconds, then return to center. Do the same on the right side.

**Side Stretch**—With your feet comfortably apart and right hand on your hip, reach your left arm overhead and stretch to the right side. Hold for 30 seconds, then switch sides.

**Chest and Back Stretch**—While standing, clasp your hands behind you, arms straight, then lift your arms up slightly. Hold for 30 seconds. Next, clasp your hands in front of you. Rotate your shoulder, reaching as far forward as you can. Hold for 30 seconds.

**Progressive Muscular Relaxation**— This 15-minute technique can help make you aware of the difference between tension and relaxation. The process is to tighten the muscle, release the tension, then feel the difference.

Settle back comfortably, either sitting or lying down. Clench your left fist. Clench it tightly and study the tension in the hand and in the forearm. Notice how it feels. Hold the tension for a few seconds. And now relax the left hand. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation.

Do this with the right hand and every major muscle group of your body. You can start with your hands or move from head to toe.

## 21. Exercise

Physically active people handle stress better than those who are not active. Make time in your schedule for regular exercise. Choose an aerobic activity you can do 20-30 minutes every other day. Walking, running, swimming, and bicycling are all excellent choices. Give yourself five minutes of warm-up and five minutes of cool-down each session. Do it with friends who can help you keep your commitment, or do it alone and use the time for reflection.

## 22. Rest

A well-rested body is more resistant to stress. Try getting to bed at a reasonable hour, especially if you're under stress. Master the art of getting ready for bed. Do something relaxing before bedtime - a peaceful walk, a warm bath, a warm drink. Try to let go of the trouble of the day. As you lie down, visualize your body restoring itself with slumber.

## 23. Find Peace

Take time to fill your spiritual reservoir each day. Different things work for different people. Some fill their reservoir through prayer, meditation, thought, or pondering inspirational writings. Others fill it through admiring the beauties of nature or gazing into a star-filled sky. Do what brings you peace.

## 24. Think Positive

Having a positive approach to life can help us meet stresses head-on.

**Try the following techniques:**

**Positive Self-Talk**—Tell yourself “I can,” then set your mind to meet the challenge at hand.

**Mental Creation**—Think through a stressful situation before it occurs, and plan how you will react to it. Be as detailed as you can. Envision yourself being successful.

**Action Plan for success**—Always make an alternate plan (plan B and C) in case the one you rehearsed doesn't work.

### **25. Nourish Your Body**

A properly nourished body is more resistant to stress. Adopt a consistent practice of healthy eating. Choose foods high in fiber and low in saturated fats and cholesterol. Eat plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grain products. Limit your use of salt, sugar, fat, caffeine and alcohol. Use the recommendations found in the Food Guide Pyramid.

### **26. Take It Easy**

Try to slow down and enjoy your leisure time. Sometimes the best thing you can do for yourself is nothing at all. Don't cram your days off with endless chores—make an effort to relax and enjoy your free time. Loaf a little. Set your overscheduled life-style aside occasionally. Play regularly, but don't compete. Put some fun into your life every day.

### **27. Take Control**

Take control of your life. Helplessness is a terrible feeling. While you may not be able to change everything, notice the things you can change. Accept the things you can't do anything about, and don't worry about them.

### **28. Enjoy a Diversion**

Learn the art of diverting yourself into something you really enjoy. Go see a movie. Get a hobby and do it often. Take a class. Read a good book. Join a club. Take up a musical instrument, sing, write music, or simply listen to the stereo. Play a game. Goof off. Go out with friends. Volunteer.

### **29. Sweet Nothings**

You've heard of whispering sweet nothings into your lover's ear. How about giving yourself positive messages? List on an index card all the positive messages you would like to send to yourself. Carry the card with you. When you feel distressed, prompt yourself. Take out the card and read all the positive messages, adding to them when you can.

### **30. Enjoy the Journey**

On a long automobile trip, young children often ask, "Are we there yet?" Learn to master the skill of enjoying life's journey. Don't postpone happiness only for when you have arrived at your destination. Take time to smell the flowers, listen to birds singing or to nature's whispers in the wind.

### **31. Face Reality**

When a stressor occurs, face reality and begin doing something about it. Avoid the "Why me?" syndrome.

Determine to get busy and do something about your situation. Doing nothing only makes things worse.

For example, if you have suffered a substantial economic loss, make a realistic assessment of your losses. Next, prioritize needs and outline steps toward financial recovery.

### **32. Help a Worthy Cause**

Sometimes we worry so much about our problems that we can't see anything else. Investing ourselves in a cause greater than ourselves helps to put our personal problems into perspective. Invest yourself meaningfully in a church or community group. Helping others can bring us peace and satisfaction.

### **33. Use Your Humagination**

Humagination is the art of creating colorful and humorous situations in your mind, and letting the laughter flow.

For example, picture a man walking in a rainstorm. It's pouring. He is wearing a new, three-piece suit and marching with dignity down the street, an umbrella over his head. But the umbrella has no cloth or plastic. It's just a skeleton of spokes. Give him a red tie. Now give him short pants, white socks and cowboy boots. Have him meet someone. What do they say?

### **34. Listen to Your Body**

Pay attention to what the voice of your body is telling you. The body speaks to us in many ways: by headaches, stiff necks, high blood pressure, or an upset stomach. When you "hear" these messages, you may be pushing yourself too hard. Slow down. Relax.

### **35. If You Can't Sit Still, Don't**

Some people are too fidgety to sit still and meditate. Herbert Benson says that jogging can elicit the same reaction as deep breathing while repeating a word. Here's how:

As you jog, focus on the cadence of your feet—left/right/left/right, rather than repeating a word. While most runners experience a high during their third or fourth mile, those who use the relaxation response often reach that high during their first or second mile. This strategy works with any other continuous, rhythmic activity, such as swimming or bicycling.

### **36. Fill Your Life With Things You Love**

Think about the things you love. Do you love to sing? Do you love to be alone in nature? Do you love to talk with friends? Make a list of 20 things you love to do.

Now pick out some of the ones you love most. Ask yourself: "What can I do to make time for the things I love most?" Then make a plan to do them. Set aside money for them. Ask others to help you do them.

### **37. See the Humor**

Sometimes stress can be reduced if we see the humor in tense situations. For example, when kids have left the lights on throughout the house, you may feel like screaming at them. Instead, call them together and announce, very seriously, that there has been a sad report from Roachville that the lights left on in your home are disturbing the slumber of the local roaches, especially the babies. Maybe we could all help the roaches get to sleep by going through the house and turning off all the lights. Be sure to avoid sarcasm or insults. Make your statements as ridiculous as possible. You'll find everyone starts laughing, including yourself!

### **38. Put First Things First**

What's important to you? That's a first step before deciding how to spend your time and energy.

Begin by doing nothing for five minutes. This will give you time to relax and clear your mind. Next, make a list of the five things you value most, and five things you enjoy doing the most. Finally, take a look at how you spend your time during the day. Are you spending time and energy on things that you truly value and enjoy doing? Is there a conflict between your values and the way you spend your time? How can you reduce the conflict? You may want to keep this list handy, such as in your wallet or purse. The list can help you focus on what is most important to you.

### **39. Use Time Efficiently**

Ever find yourself saying, "Where did all the time go?" Try this strategy to maximize use of your time.

Name your time wasters. Don't lie to yourself. What are they? Procrastination? Going from one task to another? Watching TV out of habit, not out of interest?

Start with the biggies. Divide all your tasks into three categories. A's are essential to your life goals. B's are important but not essential. C's are trivia. Forget about them. Do A's first, and at the time of day when you are most alert and creative. Blast away at your top priorities and let others fall by the wayside. Stop running late. Arrive at appointments five minutes early. Check yourself. Keep a log for one week detailing your time use.

### **40. Take Mental Vacations**

Sometimes we feel so worn out or frustrated that we reach the "I can't cope" level. That's a good time for a mental vacation. Find a place where you can be alone. Lie down, close your eyes, and imagine you are lying on a beautiful beach. Imagine the sun on your face. Listen to the sounds of birds and waves. Feel the warm sand. Breathe deeply and slowly. Enjoy relaxing for several minutes. Then imagine yourself jogging, swimming, shopping, or anything you would enjoy doing on your vacation. When you are feeling

better, open your eyes. Think of what needs to be done immediately and what can wait until later. Take it one small step at a time!

### **41. Don't Forget the Funnies!**

How about a daily habit of funnies? Read comic strips, poems, newspaper columns, stories, videos and books that tickle your funny bone. Develop a collection of favorites.

Tell jokes and humorous stories to others at mealtime, while driving in the car or at any other time!

### **42. Do Some Personal Planning**

Do you want to live by your decisions, and not your conditions?

Master the art of setting goals. You can write your diary in advance!

Begin by deciding what you really want out of life. What can you do in the next five years in pursuit of your life goals? In the next year? Next month? This week? Be as specific as possible. Check your plan every three months to make sure you're on track, or to make adjustments.

Make a daily plan. Label the most important tasks A, the next tasks B, C, and so on. Estimate the amount of time for each task. Begin with the first task and work down the list. Try to spend some time, even five minutes, working on an "A" priority every day.

### **43. Do Some Emotional Gardening**

Replace stressful thoughts with pleasant ones. Think of it as emotional gardening. You pull the ugly weeds out of your garden, and you cultivate the good plants. Instead of dwelling on a hurt or injustice, think about someone you like and perhaps about some way you can help that person. Don't blame others or become preoccupied with blaming. Remember, a beautiful garden is very satisfying. A garden of weeds can be very discouraging.

### **44. Stand Your Ground**

We are confronted with conflict situations daily. But we can't spend our energy confronting every situation. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Is there really a threat here?
- Is it really worth a fight?
- If I fight, will it really make a difference?

If the answer to all three questions is yes, set an appointment for the discussion. State the issue clearly. Avoid "always" and "never." Don't hit below the belt, but stand up for yourself. Answer back only after you've paraphrased what you've heard. Let the fight end when it's over. Don't insist on having the last word. If the issue isn't fully resolved, set another appointment for a later time.



can be to write your own ideas on blank cards, and practice your own advice in the way you practice the other ideas listed here. Have fun!

### 50. Analyze Your Stress

Make a list of your current stressors. Add two columns to the right of the stressor labeled “IMP” for Important and “CON” for Control.

For each stressor, ask yourself, “Is this really important?” Put a V, S, or N in the column labeled IMP, showing if the stressor is Very, Somewhat or Not Important. Next

ask yourself, “Can I do anything about it?” In the column labeled CON, place a Y for “Yes”, N for “NO”, or an S for “Some Control.”

Draw a large square on a sheet of paper and divide it into four square boxes. Label the top two boxes 1 and 2 (left to right), and the bottom two 3 and 4. In boxes 1 and 2, put the unimportant stressors that you can’t and can control; in boxes 3 and 4, place the important stressors you can’t and can control, respectively. Look over your grid and summarize your insights.

**Figure 2.** Stressors: Most Important to the Least Important

<p><b>1. Unimportant</b> stressors that you can't and can control</p>	<p><b>2. Unimportant</b> stressors that you can't and can control</p>
<p><b>3. Important</b> stressors that you can't and can control</p>	<p><b>4. Important</b> stressors that you can't and can control</p>

**Many of the Stress Busting ideas originated in the following publications:**

- *Replacing Stress With Peace* by Dr. Wallace Goddard
- *Rethinking Family Stress* by Dr. Wesley Burr
- *The Relaxation Response* by Dr. Herbert Benson
- *A Guide to Managing Stress* by Krames Communications
- *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Dr. Stephen Covey
- Some activities were reprinted with permission from *Kicking Your Stress Habits*, 1981, 1989. Donald A. Tubesing, Ph.D. Published by Whole Person Press, 210 West Michigan, Duluth, MN 55802, (218) 727-0500.



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