

# Relaxation for Better Health



## You might find it helpful to keep important information handy.

Write it below.

### Primary health-care provider

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

### Other health-care providers

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

### Health plan

Plan name \_\_\_\_\_

ID number \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

### Pharmacy

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

### An emergency contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

### Other important numbers

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\_\_\_\_\_  
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#### Please read:

Talk to your health-care provider! This handbook is not a substitute for the advice of a qualified health-care provider. • The photos in this handbook are of models. The models have no relation to the issues presented.

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## If you're interested in relaxation techniques, this handbook is for you.

It can help you better understand—and manage—the connection between the stress in your life and your health.

### High stress levels are common

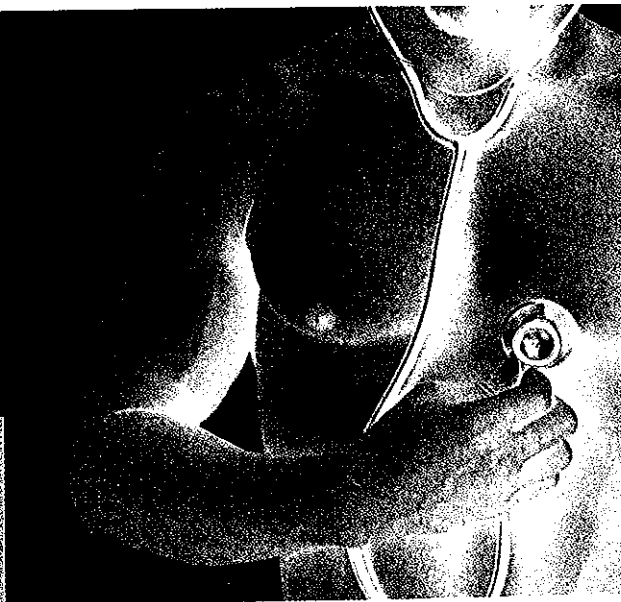
in our culture. The daily demands of work, family, community and technology affect most of us to one degree or another.

### Many relaxation techniques are available

to help you offset the negative effects of stress. This book can help you choose—and use—the ones that are right for you!

# Stress is part of life.

It's your body's reaction to significant changes—negative or positive (for example, developing a serious illness or landing a great new job)



## Stress causes physical responses.

In the face of stress, your body prepares for “fight or flight”—to take on a perceived danger or to run away from it. This involves a series of reactions:

- Your body releases adrenaline and other chemicals into your blood.
- Your heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure increase.
- Your muscles tense.
- Your digestion slows.
- You may begin to sweat.
- Fats and sugars quickly enter your bloodstream to fuel your body for action.

## Some stress is helpful.

Stress can raise your energy level. It can give you that “pumped up” feeling that helps you rise to the challenge of exciting events.

Examples include:

- beginning a romantic relationship
- buying a home
- getting a promotion— or landing a new job.

## Unrelieved stress is a problem.

Ongoing stress can sap your energy and leave you feeling tired.

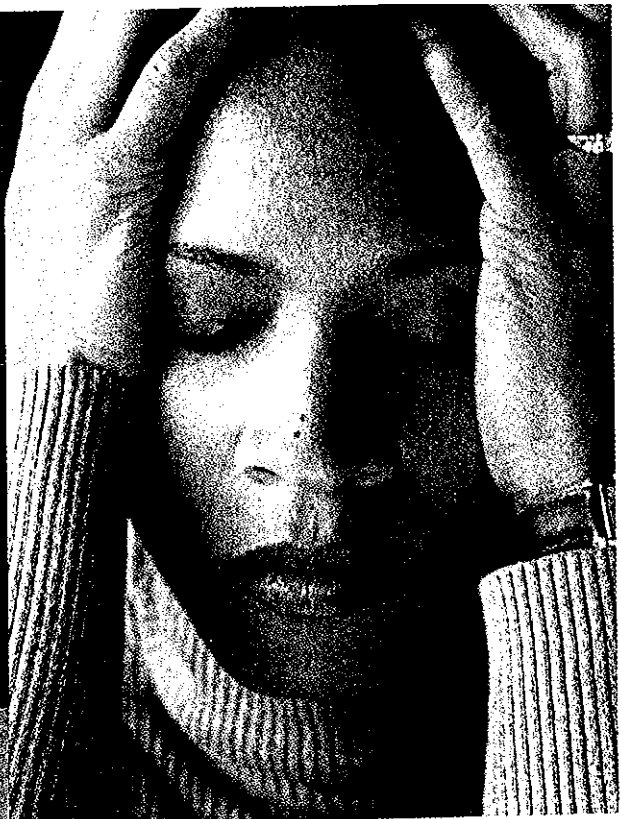
## Is stress a problem for you?

It may be, if you are experiencing any of these warning signs:

- development or worsening of certain health problems (see the next page)
- difficulty concentrating or remembering
- changes in appetite
- tendency to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes more often than usual
- withdrawal from people in your life
- chronic sense of worry or fear
- loss of sense of humor.

If you notice these signs, too much stress may be the culprit.





## What are the effects of too much stress?

Ongoing stress can be both physically and emotionally taxing.

### Physical health problems

caused—or worsened—by stress may include:

- back and neck pain
- headaches
- gastrointestinal problems (diarrhea, ulcers, etc.)
- heart disease
- high blood pressure
- a weakened immune system (your body's defense against disease)
- skin disorders (such as acne or hives)
- menstrual irregularities
- arthritis
- asthma
- diabetes
- chronic pain.

### Other problems

related to stress may include:

- trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- depression
- anxiety
- hostility
- loss of sex drive.

### Unhealthy responses to stress just make matters worse.

Some people may try to cope with stress by:

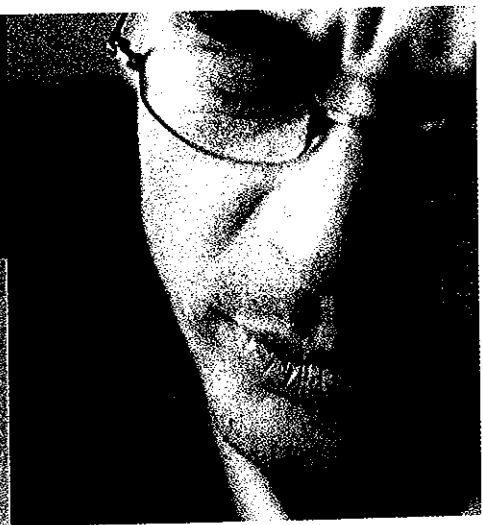
- overeating or eating a lot of junk foods (see page 28)
- drinking, smoking or using other drugs (see page 29)
- sleeping too much
- watching a lot of TV
- making a lot of social plans to avoid facing problems or responsibilities
- repeating tasks over and over unnecessarily
- lashing out at others.

The following pages can help you discover healthy, effective ways of dealing with life's stressors.



# Assess your stress.

We all have different stresses in our lives. To get a better idea of your stress levels, place a check next to the stressors that apply to you. Then, write in any other stressors—major or minor—you're experiencing in the lines below each category. Remember that minor stressors can add up to lots of stress!



## Family

- recent or upcoming marriage
- pregnancy, adoption or birth of a child
- recent divorce or breakup
- death of a spouse
- death of a close family member
- getting back together with your mate
- not enough time for loved ones
- child leaving home
- deployment of a family member or loved one to military service

Other:

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## Job/career

- promotion, demotion or transfer
- start of a new career
- job loss
- retirement
- more work with less time
- time conflicts between work and child care
- trouble getting along with your supervisor
- trouble getting along with co-workers
- reorganization/merger

Other:

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## Day-to-day pressures

- difficult commute
- getting kids off to school
- preparing meals
- household chores
- running errands
- transportation hassles
- finding time to exercise
- volunteer or other commitments

Other:

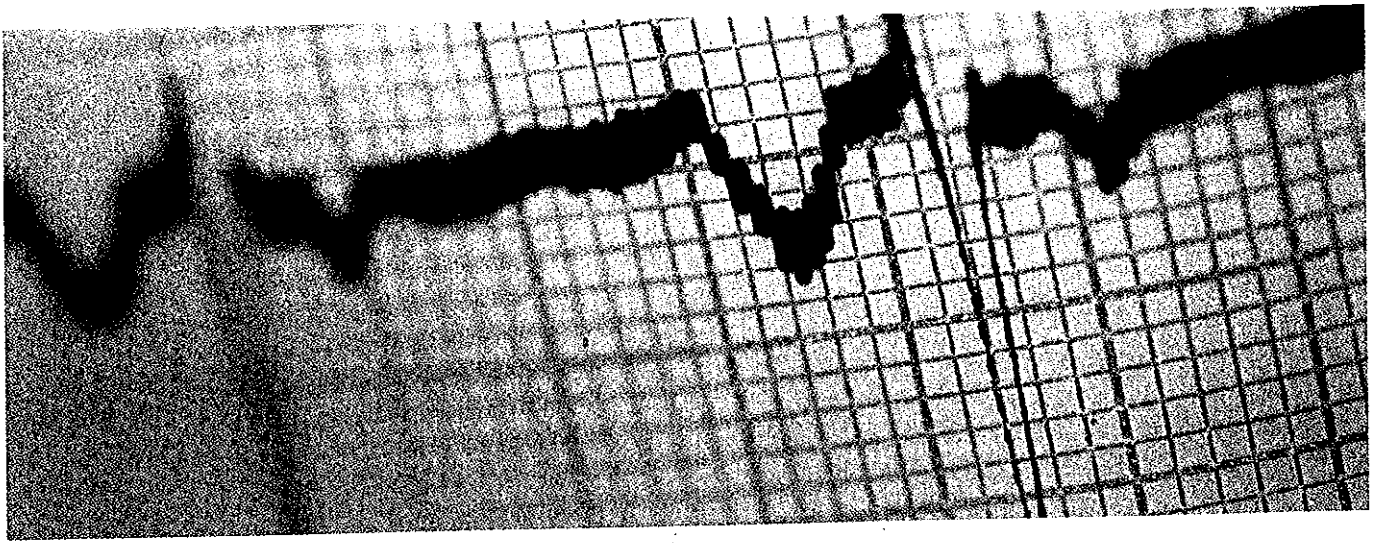
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**Health**

- personal injury
- personal illness
- illness or injury of a spouse, close family member or friend

Other:

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**Finances**

- sudden financial windfall
- sudden dip in income
- new mortgage or major loan
- mortgage or loan foreclosure

Other:

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**Personal**

- major personal achievement or failure
- major increase or decrease in your level of participation in recreational activities
- major change in sleeping or eating habits
- sexual difficulties
- relocation or major change in living conditions
- jail sentence or legal problems
- starting or finishing schooling

Other:

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**Social**

- decrease or increase in family gatherings
- vacation
- major change in social activities (friends, clubs, etc.)
- joining or leaving a religious group

Other:

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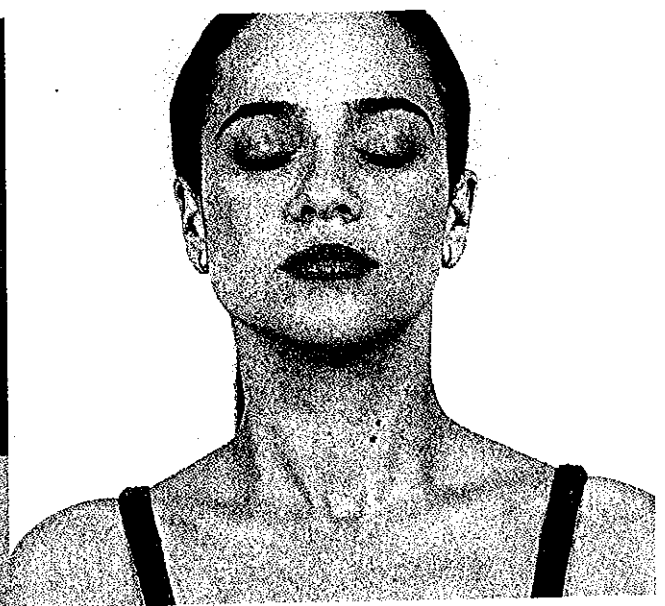


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**Not all stressors affect us equally. But keep in mind that stress in one area can add to stress in another. Chances are the more items you've checked the more you'll benefit from relaxation techniques!**

# Relaxation is freedom from tension.

While life's stressors are hard to avoid, learning to control your responses to stress puts you in charge!



## It takes practice and commitment.

Like anything worthwhile, the more you put into your relaxation techniques the more you get out of them. That means practicing on a regular basis.

## Relaxation can improve your physical health.

Many relaxation techniques have been shown to lower blood pressure. Since high blood pressure can lead to heart disease and other serious health problems, learning to relax may mean helping to prevent these.

Some techniques, such as visualization (see page 17), are also known to lessen pain.

## Relaxation has other benefits, too.

These may include:

- enhanced balance and flexibility (if physical techniques are used)
- more energy
- a greater sense of well-being
- increased confidence and courage
- increased motivation, creativity and productivity in your life.

## What does relaxation mean to you?

Write down the first thoughts that come to mind when you hear the word "relaxation":

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Now, write about what you hope to achieve by learning relaxation techniques—or in what ways you think these techniques will help you:

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# Relaxation techniques can be used in many situations.

For example, you can practice relaxation:



## As part of your daily or weekly schedule

Simpler techniques, such as breathing exercises (see pages 14-15), may require only a few minutes per session. For skills requiring regular practice, such as meditation, you'll eventually want to devote about 45 minutes to each session. This means you will probably need to set aside time in your schedule. (Keep in mind that these skills are the ones that will give you deeper, longer-lasting benefits.)

## On an "as needed" basis

For example, once you've learned how to do breathing exercises, you can use them just about any time you feel pressured or tense. Try them when you:

- are caught in traffic
- need to interact with or have just interacted with a difficult person
- are about to enter a job interview, make a presentation or do something else that may be nerve-wracking to you
- feel like you need a break.

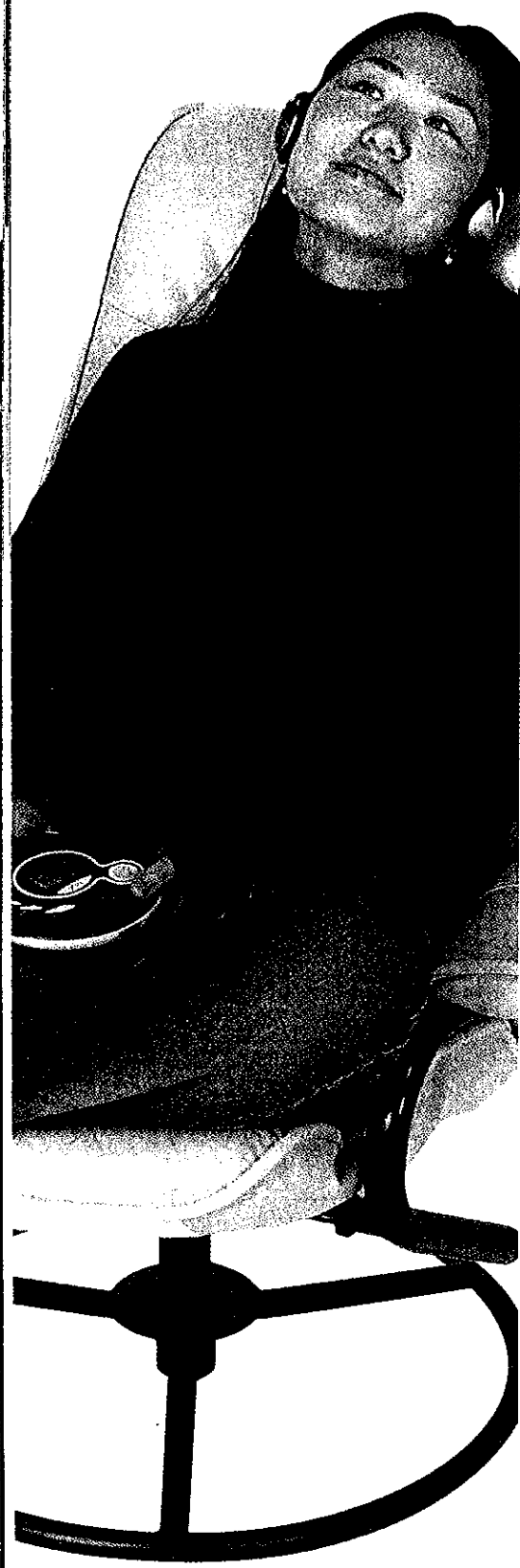
Depending on where you are and how much time you have, other techniques—such as visualization and progressive muscle relaxation (see page 16)—may also be useful in "spontaneous" situations.

## It's important to set aside time for daily practice.

When creating a relaxation schedule, you may want to consider some basic questions:

- Are you a morning, afternoon or evening person?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What times of day are easiest for you to practice undisturbed?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Is a friend or family member willing to practice with you or help you remember your schedule? If so, who?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Can you link your relaxation practice to other daily activities—for example, as you cool down after exercising (see page 25)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Try not to skip sessions. If something comes up, try to reschedule.



# Meditation

involves calming your thoughts by completely focusing your mind on one thing.

## What does it do?

Meditation helps your body relax and recover from the effects of stress. It may also help:

- lower heart rate and blood pressure and relax breathing
- increase energy levels
- boost self-confidence
- relieve headaches
- curb anxiety and depression
- promote creativity.

## How do you do it?

It requires concentration. For example, you may choose to focus on:

- a sound—such as recordings of the ocean, bird songs or flute music
- an image—for example, of a favorite tree, work of art or scene in nature
- a word or phrase (called “mantra” meditation)—“peace,” “one” or “love,” for example
- your breathing.

## Simple mindfulness: getting the full experience

At the core of meditation techniques is the concept of “mindfulness”—being fully aware of a task at hand. For example, next time you reach for a piece of fruit:

- Notice the color and texture of its skin.
- Breathe in its aroma. Try to describe it in your mind.
- Think about where it came from and how it got to you.
- As you bite into it, think about how it affects your senses. How does the bite sound? Feel? Taste?

Practicing simple mindfulness can help you live in the moment—a key to inner peace and calm.



**Learning to meditate takes time.**

Start by meditating for short periods (5 to 15 minutes at a time). With daily practice you'll be able to lengthen your meditations. Here are some meditation basics.



**Choose an approach that feels comfortable to you.**

For example, you might choose to concentrate on a mental image of a flower or on a word or phrase you can repeat easily to yourself.

**Situate yourself.**

You will want to:

- Wear comfortable clothes.
- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Choose a place that's quiet and free of distractions.

**Try to relax and focus.**

As you concentrate on the object of your meditation:

- Close your eyes.
- Relax your muscles.
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Keep your breathing slow but natural.
- If your focus is on a word or phrase, repeat it silently as you exhale.

**Refocus when your mind wanders.**

Simply return your thoughts to the object of your meditation. But remember that a passive attitude is important when meditating. Don't worry about how you are doing. Your mind is likely to go off in many different directions—with practice you'll learn to stay focused!

**Helpful reminders to get you going**

My daily meditation space(s):

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My daily meditation time(s):

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My reasons for practicing meditation:

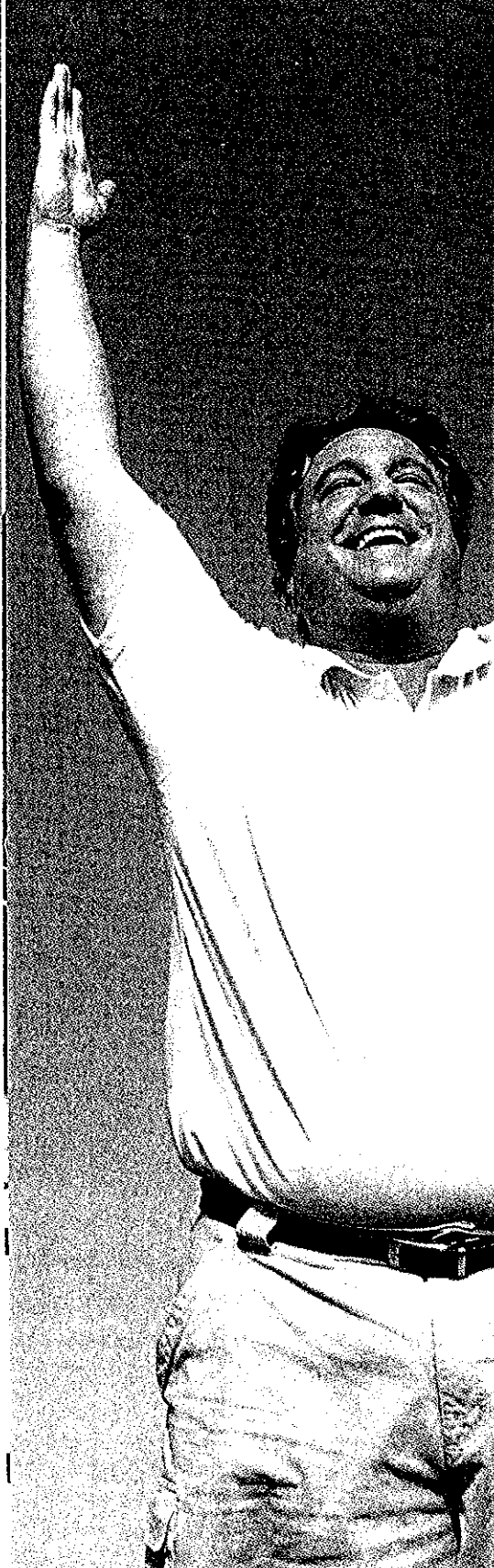
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# Stretching

is a good way to keep muscles flexible—and help you relax.

## Why stretch?

Stretching feels good! Along with aiding in relaxation, stretching can help:

- relieve tension in your head, neck and shoulders—the muscle groups most affected by stress
- keep your muscles less prone to injury (when exercising, for example)
- strengthen your joints.

## What are the basic rules of stretching?

- Go slow. Start with easier stretches, and never hold painful stretches.
- Don't stretch cold muscles. Take a short walk or do some easy warm-up exercises first (such as jumping jacks).
- Hold stretches for about 5-15 seconds. Don't bounce!

## “Office” stretches are great tension busters!

Here are a few examples:

- shoulder rolls—sit straight and shrug your shoulders. Roll them forward making big circles. Do the same thing going backward. Repeat 5 times in each direction.
- neck stretch—tilt or turn your head toward one shoulder. Hold the position for 15 seconds, then relax. Repeat the exercise, tilting or turning your head toward your other shoulder. Stretch each side 3 times.
- midback stretch—sit up straight and extend your arms in front of you. Interlock your fingers and turn your palms face out. Turn your shoulders to the right, back to the center, then left and back to center.



# Here are some popular stretches

that will help you keep loose and relaxed!

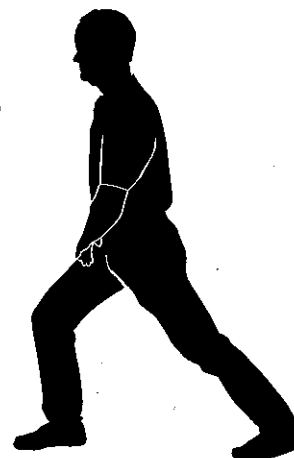
## Side stretch

Stand straight. Keep your feet hip-width apart and your knees slightly bent. Extend your right arm over your head and lean to your left. Hold for 5-8 seconds, then repeat on your other side.



## Calf stretch

This is a good warm-up stretch to do before walking or jogging. Stand with your left leg extended behind you. Point your left foot forward and keep it hip-width apart from your right foot. Keep your right knee bent and put your hands on it as you drop the heel of your left foot to the floor. Hold for 5-8 seconds, then repeat on the other side.



## Lat stretch

This helps stretch the muscles along your sides and in your upper back and shoulders. Kneel on the floor and extend both arms straight out in front of you touching the floor. As you do this, lower your chest to the floor and your knees. Hold for 15 seconds.



## Hamstring stretch

This stretches the muscles in the backs of your thighs. Stand with one leg straight out in front of you and the other slightly bent beneath you. Plant the heel of your straight leg on the floor, pointing your toes upward. Slowly bend forward from your hips (not your waist)—you can help ensure this by keeping your back as straight as possible. Hold the position for a few seconds, then relax. Repeat on the other side.



## Toe touch

Sit on a flat surface with your legs out in front of you, slightly bent. Extend your arms straight out in front of you. Slowly bend forward at the hips, reaching toward your toes. Keep your back straight as you bend. Hold for a few seconds, then relax.



# Deep breathing

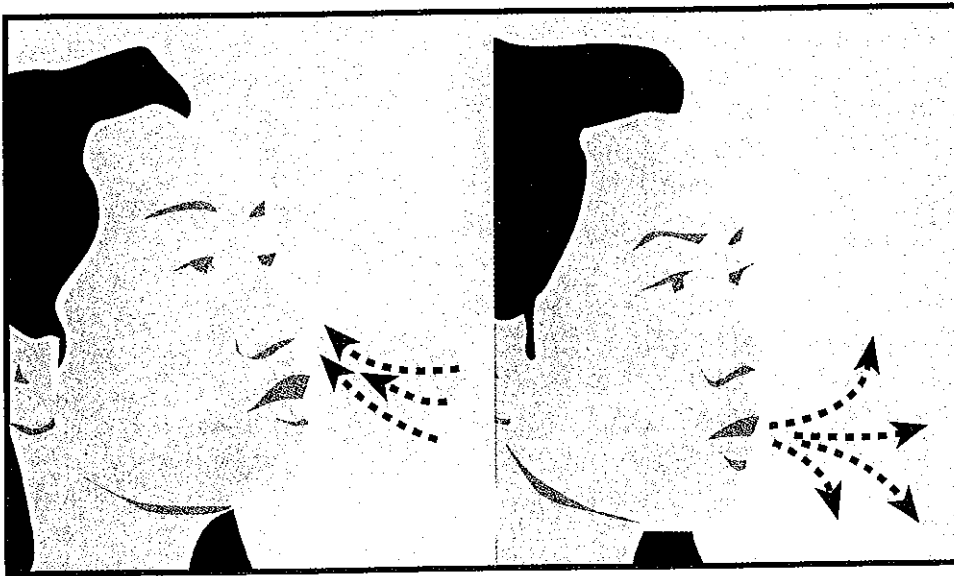
can help quiet the mind, relax the body and ease pain.

## Chest breathing

is shallow breathing that's often accompanied by anxiety, depression and hyperventilation (rapid breathing that can lead to fainting). This type of breathing can reduce oxygen flow in the body and increase heart rate and muscle tension.

## Abdominal breathing (deep breathing)

is the relaxed breathing we enjoy during sleep. It is the goal of most breathing exercises. Abdominal breathing involves contracting and expanding the diaphragm (the large muscle between the lungs and abdomen) to allow air deep into the lungs.



## Proper breathing has many benefits.

It can help people who are experiencing:

- anxiety/panic attacks
- depression
- anger
- headaches
- fatigue.

Abdominal breathing has also been shown to slow heart rate, which, in turn, can lower or stabilize blood pressure.

## A difference you can see

Choose someone in your household, such as your spouse or child. Subtly observe the way he or she breathes when:

- sleeping
- awake and relaxed
- awake, and nervous or excited.

Describe your observations on the lines below. What differences do you notice among the three observations?

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# A number of breathing exercises

are based on the principles of deep breathing.

## First, find out how you breathe now.

Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Breathe the way you usually do. The hand that moves the most will tell you if you're a chest breather or a deep breather.

## Then, make deep breathing part of your daily ritual.

- 1) Lie down on your bed or a comfortable rug.
- 2) Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
- 3) Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose and let your stomach expand (your chest should only move a bit).
- 4) Purse your lips and exhale slowly through your mouth (make a slight whooshing sound).
- 5) You can use the hand on your stomach to push gently on your abdomen during exhales.
- 6) Practice for 5 or 10 minutes twice a day. Extend your breathing exercises to 20 minutes once you get the hang of it.



## Before and after

How did focusing on the way you breathe make a difference in the way you feel?  
After a deep-breathing session, fill in the blanks below.

Before the session, I felt:

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After practicing deep breathing for \_\_\_\_\_ minutes, I felt:

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# Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)

is based on the idea that in order to relax you need to be aware of how it feels to be tense.

## When can you do it?

You can practice PMR on a daily basis or as needed when stress and tension build up. As a first step, find a place where you can comfortably sit or lie down.

## Choose a muscle group to start with.

Make those muscles tense and tight, and then relax them. For example, if you start with your hands:

- Clench your fists for 5-10 seconds—focus on the feeling of muscle tension.
- Relax your fists completely for 20-30 seconds—notice the difference between muscle tension and muscle relaxation.

## Repeat the exercise throughout your body.

Tense and relax the muscles in your:

- lower and upper arms
- face and jaw
- neck and shoulders
- chest
- stomach
- back
- buttocks
- thighs
- calves
- feet
- toes.

Try to move systematically through the muscle groups. For example, if you started with your hands, you might move upward to your arms, shoulders, neck and head, then start downward.

## Personal observation log

In which muscle groups do you notice the most tension?

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In what daily situations do you notice greater—or less—muscle tension?

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What effects does PMR have on your body, your emotions and your energy?

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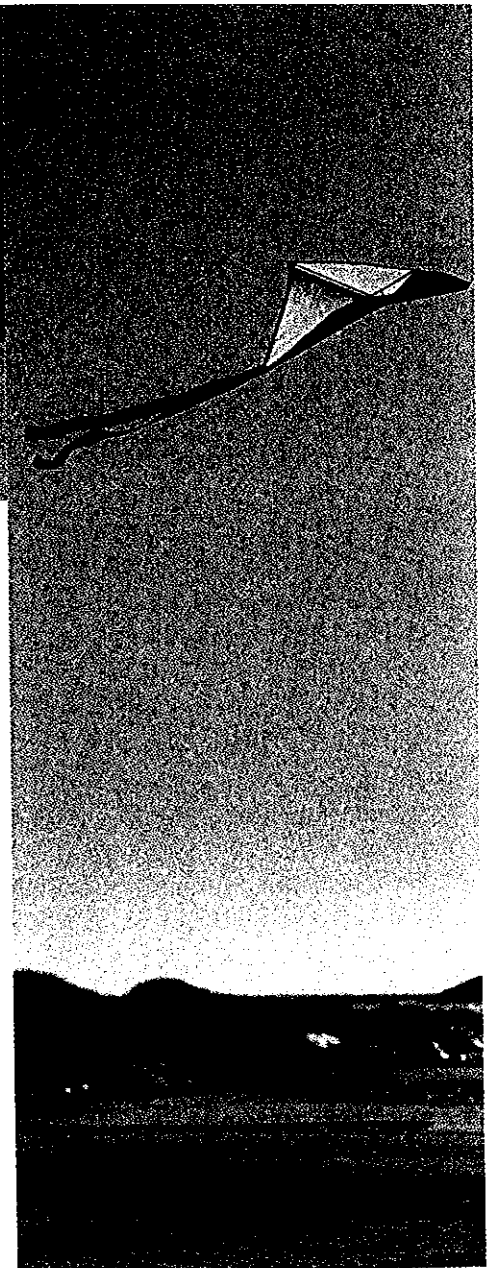
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# Visualization

uses mental images—or stories—to help you relax, reduce pain and sleep better. Visualization is also known as guided imagery.



## How do you do it?

Visualization is another relaxation technique you can do on your own. The basic idea is to use the power of your imagination to shape your mood.

## Visualization happens in steps.

Here's a basic approach for helping to relieve pain:

- Lie down in a quiet place and close your eyes.
- Scan your body and relax any muscles that feel tense.
- Imagine the pain in your knee (for example) is a kite stuck on the ground.
- In your mind, tie a string to the kite and launch it into the air. As the kite goes higher, imagine your pain fading away. Finally, let go of the string and watch the kite float out of sight.

## Describe a scene

you find safe and relaxing. Use it while practicing visualization.

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# Massage therapy

releases muscle tension, promotes relaxation and helps with pain relief.



## Self-massage

is a simple, inexpensive way to relieve pain and tension in your muscles. Consider taking a class (available in many communities) that teaches self-massage techniques.

## Informal massage

can be done by a friend, relative or other trusted person. Basic techniques include:

- gliding the hands across the skin
- kneading the muscles
- gentle pressure
- percussion (using gentle chopping or pounding motions).

## Professional massage

can bring about deep relaxation. It may also be used as therapy for certain physical problems such as muscle strains, pulled ligaments and repetitive motion injuries. Massage therapy may also help:

- reduce blood pressure
- boost the immune system
- improve joint flexibility.

My massage appointments with

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<b>Day and date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<hr/>	<hr/>
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<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
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# Aromatherapy

involves the use of essential oils (essences of various plant and flower fragrances) to balance mind and body.



## What are the benefits?

Aromatherapy may help:

- promote relaxation
- provide relief from insomnia
- relieve pain (headache, joint and menstrual pain, for example)
- enhance mood
- combat allergies.

## Essential oils may be used in several ways.

For example, they may be applied through:

- massage oils
- compresses
- warm baths
- lightly scented linens.

## Check it out.

Put a check next to the aromas that may help you:

- lavender—calming, sinusitis, depression, muscle pain
- chamomile—relaxation, allergies, joint swelling
- marjoram—menstrual cramps, muscle spasms
- eucalyptus—stimulant, decongestant.

## The scent of relaxation

What natural scents do you find soothing? Describe them here:

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# Pets can help you relax, too!

A pet can offer:

## Emotional rewards

For example, having a pet may help you:

- reduce loneliness
- relieve stress and depression
- boost your self-esteem
- adjust to major life changes.

## A physical boost

Research has found many positive effects of pet ownership on human health. Some of these include:

- lower blood pressure
- fewer colds, flus and backaches
- fewer visits to health-care providers
- lower cholesterol
- more exercise.

## Make sure pet ownership is right for you!

Before becoming a pet owner, consider both the pros and cons (for example, the type of pet that's right for you based on costs, time commitment, lifestyle, possible allergies, etc.).

Type of pet	Pros	Cons
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____



# Laughter is good for your health.



## It can have positive physical effects.

For example, laughter can help:

- relieve pain
- reduce muscle tension
- boost the immune system
- exercise the heart
- reduce blood pressure and improve circulation.

## It's also good for your emotions.

There's nothing like a good laugh to help:

- improve self-confidence
- create a sense of control
- release pent-up feelings
- minimize anger and other negative emotions
- shape a positive outlook.

## Make humor part of your life.

- Spend more time enjoying playful activities with others, especially children.
- Watch humorous videos.
- Post humorous comics, greeting cards, photos or other items in your home and workspace.
- Learn a new skill or try doing something you're used to in a new way—laugh at yourself as you expand your horizons.
- Look for humor in daily situations. This is where it often hides!

## Laugh log

Don't take a good laugh for granted—take note of what made it happen! Over the next week, notice the humorous things in your life. Describe your top 3 laughs below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Rate your success.

Fill out the chart on the next page based on the relaxation techniques you've already learned.

## Use this rating scale for the chart on the next page.

As you fill it in, describe yourself as:

- 1—completely relaxed
- 2—fairly relaxed
- 3—slightly relaxed
- 4—fairly tense
- 5—extremely tense.

## How—and when—does stress affect you most?

Use this chart—or one like it—to keep track of the daily stressors in your life. Symptoms of stress include headaches, irritability, muscle tension, etc.

Day/date/time	Stressful event	Symptom(s) of stress

Week of:	Pre-session rating	Post-session rating	Relaxation technique(s) used	Remarks/notes
Sun.				
Mon.				
Tues.				
Wed.				
Thurs.				
Fri.				
Sat.				

## It's no surprise—you relax when you exercise!



### How does exercise help reduce stress?

When you're physically active your body releases endorphins—natural chemicals that:

- improve your mood and overall sense of well-being
- improve your ability to cope with stress.

Exercises that involve repetitive movement, such as walking, running and rowing, can be especially beneficial.

### Exercise offers many health benefits.

For example, regular exercise can help:

- relieve muscle tension
- boost energy and stamina
- lower blood pressure
- improve sleep
- relieve pain
- treat or ward off depression
- raise metabolism
- keep you fit and active as you age
- reduce likelihood of injury
- protect the immune system
- prevent obesity and related diseases (such as diabetes).

### It helps in other ways, too.

Through exercise, you can:

- clear your mind and improve concentration
- enhance self-confidence and self-image
- develop a more positive outlook—and motivation to make other positive changes.





# Tips to help make exercise work for you



Try to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most—preferably all—days of the week.

## Warm up.

Spend 10-15 minutes doing gentle, basic movements similar to your chosen activity. Remember to stretch your muscles after you warm up.

## Take it slow.

Don't try to do too much too fast. A slow, steady start will help reduce your risk of injury and increase the chances that you'll stick with your plan.

## Cool down.

Slow your pace before finishing an activity. For example, end a brisk run by jogging, then walking. Stretching exercises are also a great way to cool down before you hit the shower.

**Talk to a health-care provider before starting an exercise program.**

## Play it safe.

Wear appropriate clothing, footwear and safety gear for your chosen activity. For example, always wear a helmet when biking. Make sure the helmet is certified by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Look for a label that states it complies with U.S. CPSC safety standards.

## Choose activities you enjoy.

If the idea of a daily jog sounds tedious, consider dancing, biking, walking, swimming—even regular yardwork. Exercising with a friend may help you stay motivated.

## Hidden fitness: daily activities as exercise

Being active doesn't have to seem like exercise. In the list below, check off any activities in which you engage regularly. Count them as forms of fitness!

- walking to school, work or the bus stop
- climbing flights of stairs
- dancing
- playing actively with children or pets
- other \_\_\_\_\_
- other \_\_\_\_\_
- other \_\_\_\_\_



# An exercise log

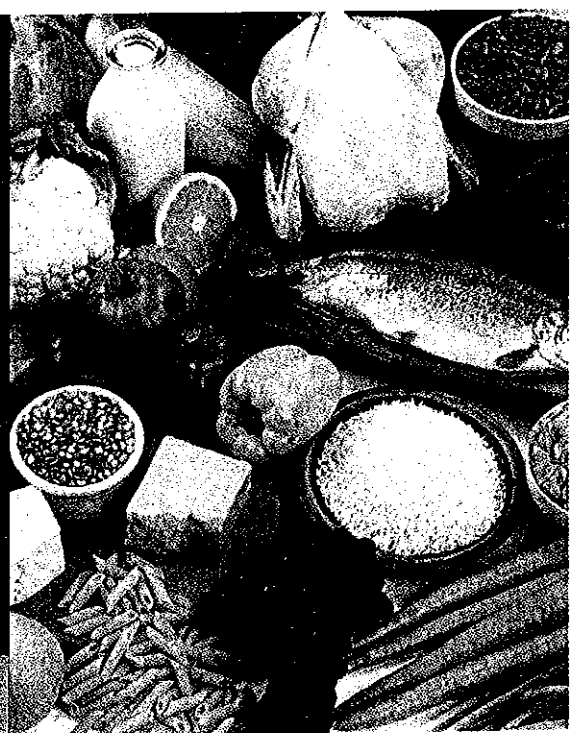
can help you keep track of the activities you like best and their impact on your physical and emotional health



Week of:	Activity and duration	Location	Time of day/conditions	Notes
Sun.				
Mon.				
Tues.				
Wed.				
Thurs.				
Fri.				
Sat.				

## A healthy diet can help

offset the effects of stress.



### Prolonged stress may rob the body

of important nutrients such as protein, calcium, vitamin C, potassium, zinc and magnesium.

### Supplements can help,

especially during times when it's hard to eat a balanced diet. But don't depend on them for your nutritional needs. Check with your health-care provider before taking supplements (including herbal supplements). Also, let him or her know what supplements you are taking any time he or she is prescribing medications for you.

### Eat a variety of healthy foods every day,\*

and try not to skip meals. This is the best way to maintain your energy and control your weight.

- Eat a variety of foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber. Limit fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars (in food and beverages). The Nutrition Facts label on foods can help.
- Choose lean, low-fat or nonfat items when possible. Bake, roast or poach instead of frying.
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables—fresh, frozen, canned or dried. And choose all different kinds. But limit juice.
- Vary your protein sources—meats, poultry, fish, beans, peas, tofu, nuts and seeds.
- Be sure at least half of all the grain products you eat—like bread, cereal, rice and pasta—are whole-grain products.
- Have enough milk products each day—for example, 3 cups of milk or yogurt for ages 9 and up. They're good sources of calcium.
- Don't overeat. Learn about healthy food portions and the right amount of calories for your gender, age and activity level.

\*Do not restrict fat for children under age 2 or give cow's milk to those under age 1. Ask your health-care provider about other nutritional needs for young children. If you avoid animal products, ask your health-care provider how to best get all the nutrients you need.

Talk to your health-care provider or visit [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov) to learn more.

# Eating the wrong foods

can make you more vulnerable to stress—even though they may help you feel relaxed at first.

## Avoid fast foods and junk foods.

These tend to be high in fat, sodium (salt) and sugar and low in nutrients.

## Limit sugar and salt.

Sugar has little nutritional value and can become a crutch for handling stress. Sodium (salt) contributes to high blood pressure in some people.

## Watch your caffeine intake.

Caffeine is a stimulant found in coffee, colas, teas and chocolate. Too much caffeine (over 200 mg a day, or the amount in 10 oz. of regular brewed coffee) can result in irritability, nervousness and poor sleep.

### Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)  
Servings Per Container 2

#### Amount Per Serving

**Calories** 260     Calories from Fat 120

#### % Daily Value\*

**Total Fat** 13g     **20%**

Saturated Fat 5g     **25%**

Trans Fat 2g

**Cholesterol** 30mg     **10%**

**Sodium** 660mg     **28%**

**Total Carbohydrate** 31g     **10%**

Dietary Fiber 0g     **0%**

Sugars 5g

**Protein** 5g

Vitamin A 4%     • Vitamin C 2%

Calcium 15%     • Iron 4%

\*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

## Stress test

If stress tends to send you running for the fridge or pantry, you may be making things worse. For the next week, assess whether some of your urges to eat are actually reactions to stress. If they are, try doing something else instead—for example, practice a relaxation technique or call a friend. At the end of the week, assess how resisting “stress eating” ultimately made you feel. Write about it below.

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# Unhealthy habits

do not help with long-term relaxation or pain reduction even though they may seem to aid relaxation in the beginning

If your goal is to be a healthier, more relaxed person,



## Avoid tobacco products.

The idea that tobacco use helps relieve stress is not true. Nicotine is a stimulant, not a sedative. Also, the need to constantly light up or dip to avoid nicotine withdrawal actually raises stress levels. Smoking also causes heart disease, cancer and other serious health problems. If you smoke, get help to quit. You can get help from:

- your health-care provider
- a mental health professional.

Or try a smokers' help line, such as:

- 1-800-QUITNOW  
(1-800-784-8669)
- 1-800-332-8615 (TTY).

These numbers will link you to a quitline that can help.

## Limit alcohol— or don't drink at all.

Drinking too much lowers your ability to handle stress and increases your risk of chronic health problems, such as depression. If you choose to drink, do so in moderation. This means no more than:

- 2 drinks per day for men
- 1 drink per day for women or anyone age 65 or older.

People who should not drink at all include recovering alcoholics, people under 21, people taking certain medications and women who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant.

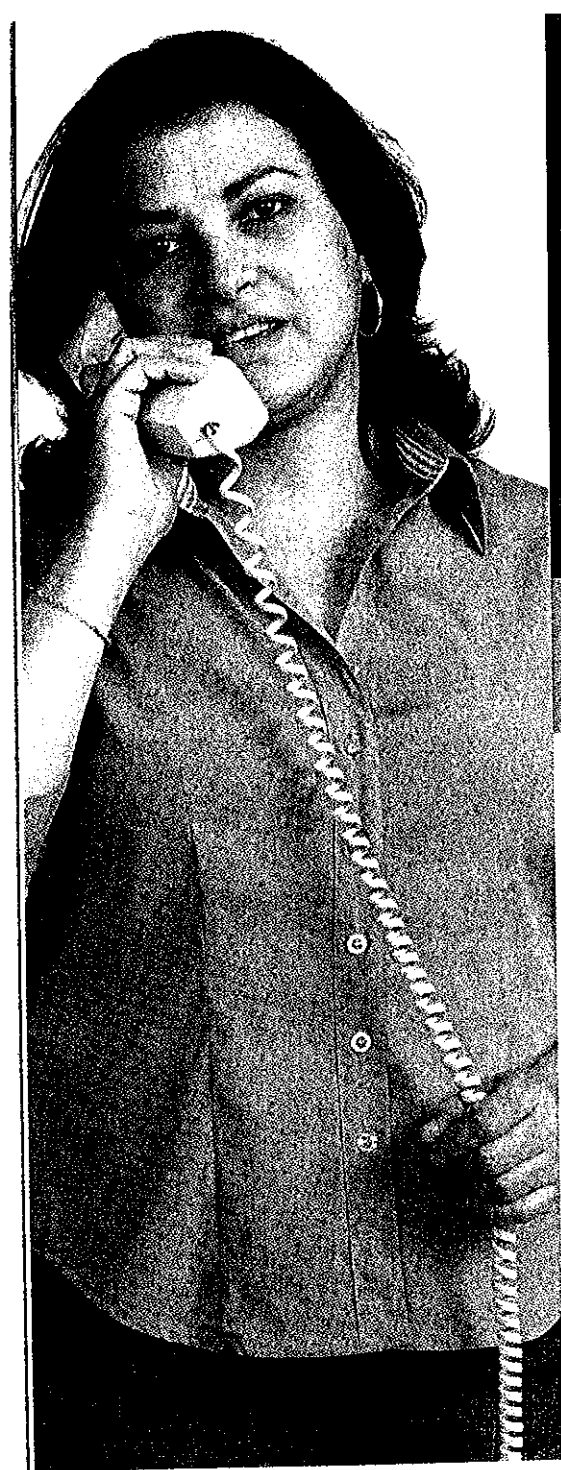
## Don't use illegal drugs.

Illegal drugs, such as marijuana and cocaine, are harmful to your health and should be avoided. (Your health-care provider may prescribe prescription or over-the-counter medications for relief of pain, anxiety, depression and other problems associated with stress. Use these exactly as directed by your health-care provider.)

**Note:** According to the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration), those taking some antidepressants should be on the lookout for worsening depression or thoughts of suicide. Fully discuss all risks and benefits of any medication you are considering with your health-care provider.

If you become more depressed or suicidal while taking antidepressants, get medical help right away. If you are already taking antidepressants, never increase or decrease the dose, or stop taking them, except as directed by your health-care provider.

**Breaking unhealthy habits is a great way to help reduce stress and improve relaxation.**



## Help is available.

Reaching out is a sign of strength—not weakness. Resources for handling stress and learning relaxation techniques include:

### Your health-care provider

He or she can offer advice and information on diet, exercise and other strategies to improve relaxation.

### Your local hospital or Veterans Administration hospital

Many hospitals offer classes on stress management.

### Libraries and bookstores

Many offer books, articles and video- and audiotapes on relaxation.

### Mental health centers

These offer counseling, classes and a variety of services, including referrals.

### Employee assistance programs (EAPs)

Free counseling and referrals are available to many people through their employers.

### Pain management clinics

These specialize in helping people cope with chronic pain through relaxation and other strategies.

Open your body and mind to relaxation—  
and breathe a deep sigh of relief!



# Learning healthy relaxation techniques takes time.

By now you've probably come across a few ideas that will help you meet your relaxation goals. Write down the ones that suit you best, and make a plan to start practicing them. Good luck!

Relaxation goal	Action plan	Target start date
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People who can help: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Reward for meeting my goal(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
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