

# TRAIN THAT BRAIN & GET THOSE GAINS

*Double up on the benefits by  
doing exercise that trains your body  
and conquers stress at the same time*

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According to Hans Selye, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who first identified stress as a cause of illness in the 1940s, it's not stress that kills us – it's our reaction to it. Stress is your body trying to protect you from harm, and yet it can also cause some of the worst long-term health issues and conditions. Types of stress are not created equal, therefore the experience and effects it may have are unpredictable, but the less stress you feel, the better off you'll be. Here's how to achieve zen and also gain strength – health for body and mind!

## Mindful movement

Getting into a consistent yoga routine will do wonders for your mind and body. Using physical postures to help alleviate, relax and release tension, pain and anxiety, yoga has been proven (over centuries of practice) to promote physical and mental relaxation. Stress is not just in the mind but held within the muscles of your body. Clearing your mind while intentionally concentrating on moving your body helps to unlock and unblock the stress, relieving you of any 'phantom anchors' that may be holding you down. According to HealthifyMe, there are eight different types of yoga that can aid and cure many ailments of the mind and body. Something to explore!

## Fun classics

Swimming, cycling, dancing... any aerobic exercise is your Willy Wonka-style golden ticket to balancing the yin and yang within your mind and body. Endorphins – the hormones your brain secretes to counter your stress and pain – are released when you exercise, to fight off the steroid hormone cortisol (the body's main stress hormone). Ladies especially, if you're finding it hard to lose that stubborn fat around your waist, it's probably weight caused by an increase in your cortisol levels. According to a 2023 study at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, "Women have long reported higher stress levels than men. The resulting higher cortisol levels in women may lead to anxiety-related weight gain and cause obesity-associated metabolic disturbances." Eating a balanced diet rich in greens will help for this, too.

## The soft martial arts

Tai chi and aikido are considered soft and peaceful martial-arts practices "because training includes becoming acutely attuned to the surroundings and acting in response to any changes. The response, even to an aggressor, aims to neutralise and bring harmony back to the situation," explains Scott Prath, a tai chi practitioner and teacher. Along with making your body strong and your instincts more acute, they also have a meditative nature, especially tai chi. Practising either of these two arts will not only bring peace into your life but strength and harmony too.

### Get your groove on!

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that regular dancing reduces the risk of dementia by 76 percent – twice as much as reading!

## PMR

Progressive muscle relaxation is a form of therapy created in the 1920s by a physician who found that you could relax a muscle by intentionally tensing and then releasing it. 'Intentionally' is the key word. Using a framework guiding you on how to perform PMR, you can not only alleviate your stress and tension but also improve your sleep, blood pressure and more! It is also a great way to create that mind-body connection needed to activate and fire the muscles you want to work and gain strength in. How do you PMR? It's quite easy and requires no gear! Just your body and mind and a quiet spot. Tense each muscle group and hold for five seconds, then as you exhale let your muscles fully relax for 10 to 20 seconds before moving on to the next muscle group. Free guides can be found on YouTube.

## Wilful breathing

Breathing with intention is important. Guided meditation, deep breathing and walking meditations are wonderful ways to activate your parasympathetic nervous system – the part of your brain that keeps you calm and rested. It's your body's natural energy conservation setting. Learning what methods help your body decompress and reach an *Avatar*-level meditative state of peace will greatly help your stress levels. And don't forget breathing is very important in gym strength-training too, as it helps ensure oxygen gets to your muscles most efficiently. Start with learning the difference between chest breathing and diaphragm breathing. **Q**



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