



10 SIMPLE WAYS TO RELAX IN MINUTES

How to say goodbye to any stress in no time at all...

1 CHAT HAPPY

Yes, we all love a catch up with our best friends... but it could also benefit our health. In fact, a good gossip helps to boost levels of endorphins, otherwise known as the hormones that reduce anxiety and stress, making us feel happier and more relaxed.

2 MOOD CHANGING

Did you know something as straightforward as looking at the colour blue could have an impact on how you feel? Well, interior designers claim this shade is a key visual factor in helping to calm you down as blue has been shown to have a sedative effect.

3 CHOCOHOLIC CRAVINGS

You'll be glad to hear that chocolate isn't all bad! When you're feeling a little stressed or nervous, a square of chocolate, dark in particular, can calm your nerves. That's because the levels of cocoa in dark chocolate help to regulate levels of the stress hormone, cortisol.

4 SCENT-SATIONAL

Health experts have been raving for years about the powerful effects of lavender, especially when it comes to helping the body to heal, and we totally understand why.

The scent can either be applied directly to muscles or be inhaled, through a light spray or candle for example. The calming effect of lavender acts as a remedy for anxiety, stress or sleep problems.

Similarly, a spritz of citrus scent can also have the same effect. Smelling an orange can help to relax the body and eliminate stress.

5 BLOW AWAY YOUR WORRIES

When you feel like you're reaching boiling point, try blowing up a balloon. While it may sound strange, a balloon can help to regulate your breathing and pulse. Your body needs oxygen to relax but if you're feeling panicked, your breathing is likely to be short and sharp.

By inflating a balloon it forces you to take large exhales and breathe slowly, which will then help to reduce your heart rate and relax muscles.

6 SLURP SOME HONEY

A spoonful of honey not only helps stifle sweet cravings, but also works to balance out stress levels. Along with its many benefits, such as being rich in antioxidants, its ingredients also aim to reduce inflammation in the brain, which in turn, helps to fight anxiety.

7 BREAK IT DOWN

Although a to-do list can make us feel organised, one that includes 50 impossible tasks can be very stressful.

However, there are some list writing methods that we can use to take back control and time. One, for example, includes batch tasking. This method encourages us to split up our 'massive' to-do list into different sections. Experts say our brain can only hold three or four pieces of information at a time so batch tasking allows us to divide a list into the same number of sections.

Begin by collating tasks into similar groups (like emails, researching and planning into sections one, two and three) to make you more efficient.

9 MINDFUL MEDITATION

While there are many different methods, Sophrology, a type of 'moving meditation', is taking the health world by storm because you can do it in under five minutes. According to wellness expert, Dominique Antiglio, a simple Sophrology exercise, called The Tratac, will help to calm your mind, relax and focus, especially when it's filled with racing thoughts. Simply:

- Hold your arm out straight in front of you and focus your gaze on your thumbnail.
- Inhale through your nose and hold your breath while slowly pulling your thumb towards the space between your eyebrows. Your eyes will then naturally cross.
- Next, close your eyes and exhale through the mouth. Then repeat.

This technique, which engages your brain and body, increases your ability to focus on a single task. Research shows that a simple 'tracking the object' exercise like this causes increased interaction between the right and left hemispheres of the brain to calm the mind and sharpen focus. Repeat three times or until you feel calm and relaxed.

10 STOP STRESS EATING

We've all been there when you reach for another packet of crisps or a cupcake at lunch and, hey, why shouldn't you? You work hard!

However, if you find your cravings are sky rocketing during stressful periods, it could be time to step back and switch off to give your mind a break.

In fact, research shows that one of the best ways to distract yourself from stress eating is to play a game. A study called *Addictive Behaviours*

focused on participants who ranked their food cravings seven times a day. Then, half of them were asked to play Tetris for three minutes after logging their levels. Overall, the Tetris group saw their cravings decrease an average of 14% afterwards, compared to the group that reached for an alternative quick-fix snack.

The journal then revealed that stimulating games can help distract you from food cravings altogether. Sign us up!

8 POWER OF TOUCH

A simple, light tap on your neck can work wonders when it comes to relaxing. Gently place your fingers on the point where your jaw curves up towards your ear; this is called your vagus nerve. Next, tap in a slow and controlled manner to feel your pulse, heart rate and breathing slow right down.

DID YOU KNOW?

Stress can make you biologically older by about 10 years. Shockingly, that's two times more than smoking!