

NEW
HEALTH

5 science-backed WAYS TO DE-STRESS

REDISCOVER YOUR
ZEN WITH THESE
PROVEN STRATEGIES!

1 TAKE IT OUTSIDE

Studies have shown that if you look at an image of a natural environment, your stress levels drop and your mood and energy levels improve, says parenthood wellness coach Nikki Cox. "It's because you're allowing your brain to dial down and rest, like an overused muscle," she explains. "Your brain understands that natural environments contain highly complex sensory inputs and innately refuses to interpret or make sense of them, so it relaxes. And that's just by looking at nature! But actually getting outdoors and connecting directly with natural environments provide much greater benefits." Here, Nikki suggests some low-cost, low-effort ways to get outdoors:

- Go for a walk/run/bike ride.
- Eat outside on your lunch break.
- Have a picnic.
- Swim in a natural body of water.
- Do some gardening.
- Go stargazing.

Text: Sue Ramsey. Always consult your GP before making any changes to your health routine.

2 SQUEEZE YOUR FINGERS

The tapping technique EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques) has been shown to reduce blood pressure and the stress hormone cortisol and even make people happier. In EFT, specific meridian points on the body are tapped to restore balance. But there's also a simple way to use it to reduce stress and anxiety by squeezing the sides of the fingertips, says EFT trainer Khadine Aharon from Embrace Empowerment. "Focus on the issue creating the stress while squeezing, allowing thoughts, feelings and sensations to come and focusing on them until they are no longer present. Keep squeezing your fingertips for 5-10 minutes until you feel relaxed."

3 RELAX THOSE MUSCLES

Recommended as a stress management technique by Beyond Blue, headspace and the University of Sydney among others, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) teaches you how to recognise the difference between tension and relaxation in the body. "It involves tensing different muscles for up to 15 seconds and then relaxing them to create a deep state of relaxation," says Melbourne clinical psychologist Dr Lillian Nejad. "In addition to reducing stress and anxiety, progressive muscle relaxation has been shown to be effective in reducing insomnia and chronic pain."

5 GROUND YOURSELF

'Grounding', also known as 'earthing', has been scientifically shown to help reduce stress and pain, as well as improving sleep, according to the *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*. The theory is that because we spend so much time indoors, we've become disconnected from nature. So, by making direct skin contact with the surface of the earth, such as by going barefoot, our bodies benefit from exposure to the Earth's electrons. "Take off your shoes and plant your feet in the grass," suggests Melbourne nutritionist Melissa Finlay. Or take a walk on the beach and benefit from the soothing effect of negative ions from the ocean, as well.



4 HAVE A GIGGLE

Laughing helps decrease our levels of stress hormones, as well as reducing inflammation in our arteries and increasing levels of 'good' HDL cholesterol, researchers at Harvard Medical School have found. "Laughter is the greatest stress buster – there's nothing quite like it," says Laughter Yoga leader, Usuff Omar. "It's also very connecting. The late comedian, pianist and conductor Victor Borge once said, 'Laughter is the shortest distance between two people' – it can create instant rapport."

