

What exercises or techniques can I use to help cope with stress?

Try these exercises the next time you feel stressed out:

- **Deep breathing.** Drawing slow, deep breaths from the diaphragm promotes a more efficient exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide than chest or shoulder breathing. Exhale slowly and evenly. If you are highly stressed, try this while lying on your back. You also can try body-focus breathing: take a deep breath and close your eyes; sense where your body is contacting the environment around you. Take another deep breath, and move your body to get more comfortable and relaxed.
- **Yoga and stretching exercises.** These can relieve tension, make your body more limber and flexible and produce an overall calming effect.
- **Meditation and imagery techniques.** Sitting in a comfortable, quiet environment, closing your eyes and freeing your mind from its many concerns for a few minutes each day can help you achieve relaxation quickly. Try concentrating on an image that symbolizes your stress, such as a giant ball that slowly begins to shrink, or let your mind go blank.
- **Progressive muscle-relaxation techniques.** These involve systematically visualizing, tensing and relaxing each major muscle group. For example, make a fist, and hold it tight for at least five seconds. Feel the tension in your hand and arm. Finally, relax your hand, and visualize the tension escaping your body. Do the same with your other hand, your neck, your face, limbs, etc.
- **Head and neck massage.** Starting at your temples and forehead, use your fingers to massage your head, neck, eyelids, forehead, temples and scalp.

Resources

National Institutes of Health: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html