Be a Stress-Busting Detective

HOW TO DISCOVER THE QUICK STRESS RELIEF TECHNIQUES THAT WORK FOR YOU

You can use the five senses to soothe, comfort, and invigorate yourself almost immediately. All you need are a few short minutes. Use the following worksheet to identify the types of stress-busting sensory input that work quickly and effectively for you.

The stress-relieving power of the senses

The best way to reduce stress quickly and reliably is through the senses: through sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and movement. But each person responds differently to sensory input, so you need to find things that are soothing to you.

What works best for you?

We all have different preferences and needs. What some people find soothing may be unpleasant or even stressful to others. For example, certain kinds of music may relax one person but irritate another. So you need to be a “stress-buster detective,” spending time figuring out what works for you.

When it comes to managing and reducing stress quickly in the middle of a heated situation, it’s important to know whether you tend to become overexcited or underexcited when you’re stressed.

- **Overexcited** – If you tend to become angry, agitated, or keyed up under stress, you will respond best to stress relief activities that quiet you down.
- **Underexcited** – If you tend to become depressed, withdrawn, or spaced out under stress, you will respond best to stress relief activities that are stimulating and that energize your nervous system.
- **Both overexcited and underexcited** – If you tend to freeze: speeding up in some ways while slowing down in others, your challenge is to identify resources that provide both safety and stimulation to help you “reboot” your system.

Learning the sensory stress-busting techniques that work for you give you a powerful tool for staying clear-headed and in control. You’ll have the confidence to face challenges, knowing that you have the ability to rapidly bring yourself back into a state of equilibrium.
MOVEMENT

If you tend to shut down when you’re under stress, stress-relieving activities that get you moving may be particularly helpful. Anything that engages the muscles or gets you up and active can work. Here are a few suggestions:

- Run in place
- Jump up and down
- Dance around
- Roll your head in circles
- Do a few quick yoga stretches
- Stomp your feet
- Go for a short walk
- Squeeze a rubbery stress ball

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<td>How did the situation make you feel emotionally and physically (e.g. sick to your stomach, jaw tension)?</td>
<td>Describe the movement-based sensory activity you tried.</td>
<td>How did you feel afterwards? Emotionally? Physically?</td>
<td>On a scale of 1 to 10, how well did the activity work for you? Did you immediately feel better or not?</td>
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SIGHT

If you’re a visual person, try to manage and relieve stress by surrounding yourself with soothing and uplifting images. You can also try closing your eyes and imaging the soothing images. Here are a few visually-based activities that may work as quick stress relievers:

- Look at a cherished photo or a favorite memento.
- Bring the outside indoors; buy a plant or some flowers to enliven your space.
- Enjoy the beauty of nature—a garden, the beach, a park, or your own backyard.
- Surround yourself with colors that lift your spirits.
- Close your eyes and picture a situation or place that feels peaceful and rejuvenating.

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**SOUND**

Are you sensitive to sounds and noises? Are you a music lover? If so, stress-relieving exercises that focus on your auditory sense may work particularly well. Experiment with the following sounds, noting how quickly your stress levels drop as you listen.

- Sing or a hum a favorite tune.
- Listen to uplifting music.
- Tune in to the soundtrack of nature—crashing waves, the wind rustling the trees, birds singing.
- Buy a small fountain, so you can enjoy the soothing sound of running water in your home or office.
- Hang wind chimes near an open window.

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If you tend to zone out or freeze when stressed, surround yourself with smells that are energizing and invigorating. If you tend to become overly agitated under stress, look for scents that are comforting and calming.

- Light a scented candle or burn some incense.
- Lie down in sheets scented with lavender.
- Breathe in the smell of freshly brewed coffee or tea.
- Smell the roses—or another type of flower.
- Enjoy the clean, fresh air in the great outdoors.
- Spritz on your favorite perfume or cologne.

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**TASTE**

Slowly savoring a favorite treat can be very relaxing, but mindless stress eating will only add to your stress—and your waistline. The key is to indulge your sense of taste mindfully and in moderation. Eat slowly, focusing on the feel of the food in your mouth and the taste on your tongue:

- Drink a refreshing cold beverage.
- Chew a piece of sugarless gum.
- Indulge in a small piece of dark chocolate.
- Sip a steaming cup of tea.
- Eat a perfectly ripe piece of fruit.
- Enjoy a healthy, crunchy snack (celery, carrots, or trail mix).

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**TOUCH**

Experiment with your sense of touch, playing with different tactile sensations. Focus on things you can feel that are relaxing and renewing. Use the following suggestions as a jumping off point:

- Wrap yourself in a warm blanket.
- Pet a dog or cat.
- Hold a comforting object (a stuffed animal, a favorite memento).
- Soak in a hot bath.
- Give yourself a hand or neck massage.
- Wear clothing that feels soft against your skin.

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