

COVID stress relief tool kit

Easy things you can do today to help you navigate the stress
and anxiety of the pandemic

Steps to start taking today to ease stress

Below are several easy tools that you can start implementing today to better your health and overall well-being. This has been a challenging year for all of us and utilizing just a couple of these methods will help you manage your stress and anxiety throughout the day:

1. Get rid of the guilt
2. Practice makes perfect
3. Learn how to control your breathing
4. Move out of your head and into your body
5. Try some forest therapy
6. Practice mindfulness
7. Set appointments to worry
8. Use your joy triggers for a 60-second reset
9. Grounding
10. Weight training and exercise
11. Chew gum
12. Journal
13. Laugh

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1. Get rid of the guilt

Give yourself permission to relax. It's necessary to recharge our batteries, and we need to accept and allow for that. Recognize that relaxation is essential and not a guilty pleasure.

2. Practice makes perfect

Just like any skill you want to master, you need to practice relaxing. We usually attempt to move into relaxation mode when we're in crisis — and then try to learn to relax in that moment. That's like trying to learn to swim in the middle of a wave instead of in calm waters.

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3. Learn how to control your breathing

Studies have shown that you can lower your heart rate by controlling your breathing. Here's a technique called the squeegee breath:

- Close your eyes.
- Imagine a window squeegee at the top of your head.
- As you breathe out, imagine the squeegee pushing toxic thoughts and energy down to your toes and out your body, like dirty water at the bottom of a window.
- Then, breathe in deeply and imagine positive thoughts coming in like fresh, clean water.
- Continue to breathe in and out.

Playing a wind instrument, such as a flute or trumpet, can also be calming. They can help improve breathing patterns because you must control your breath while making notes.

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Another breathing technique to try: Rock and Roll breathing

The psychotherapist Lesley Alderman [outlined](#) a technique which she called rock and roll breathing. “Controlled breathing has been shown to reduce stress, increase alertness and boost the immune system.”

Rock and roll breathing, which can also strengthen your core, goes like this:

- Sit up straight on the floor or the edge of a chair and place your hands on your belly.
- As you inhale, lean forward and expand your belly.
- As you exhale, squeeze the breath out and curl forward while leaning backward; exhale until you’re completely empty of breath.
- Repeat 10 to 20 times.

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4. Move out of your head and into your body

Changing physical sensations during moments of stress can help quiet anxious thoughts. Anything soothing to the body can help. It can be as simple as cocooning in a warm blanket or doing some mindful movements or exercises.

Movements that release muscle tension are key. One is called the ragdoll. Let your shoulders drop down like a ragdoll – you'll be surprised as to how much tension you're holding.

5. Try some forest therapy

Forest therapy is simply getting outside into green space. Studies have shown it reduces blood pressure and boosts mood. Even if you can't get outside, sitting next to a window can help you unwind and relax.

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6. Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being present in the moment. When you look too far ahead, you can become anxious. So to relax, try to enjoy and take in each moment instead of worrying about what's happening next.

Another method: Follow the 3-3-3 rule.

Look around you and name three things you see. Then, name three sounds you hear. Finally, move three parts of your body -- your ankle, fingers, or arm. Whenever you feel your brain going 100 miles per hour, this mental trick can help center your mind, bringing you back to the present moment.

Download these top-rated apps to help you be more mindful:

Sanvello, Headspace, Calm

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7. Set appointments to worry

Whether it's the election, the pandemic, the economy or something else altogether, 2020 is just the year of ambient anxiety. But spending your whole day worrying about everything is damaging to your long-term health, so one strategy is to schedule discrete parts of your day when — ideally, but maybe not always — you'll get your worrying out of the way so you can move on, says [Dr. Jenny Taitz in an article for Smarter Living](#).

8. Use your joy triggers for a 60-second reset

Just getting by and not fully collapsing is more than enough right now. But if you find yourself particularly distracted or stressed out, try a 60-second reset, a wonderful tip from Arianna Huffington.

"I use my reset many times a day, it takes 60 seconds," Ms. Huffington said. "You basically put together the things that are joy triggers. It could be photos of people you love, pets, quotes, landscapes, music you love, a breathing pace." "Gratitude is the greatest antidote to stress."

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9. Grounding

- First, feel your feet on the floor. Really feel your feet on the floor.
- Are they warm or cold? Do they tingle at all? What does it feel like when you press down with one foot? Now try pressing down with the other, alternating between the two.
- Allow yourself to breathe fully. You don't need to take a huge, deep breath. Just let yourself really breathe.
- OK now, back to the feet. Press both feet into the ground as hard as you can, hold for 4, 3, 2, 1, and release.
- And now, just let your feet rest against the ground. Feel the actual gravity, that inherent connectivity between you and the ground.

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10. Weight training and exercise

Lifting weights might help your stress, according to a timely new study of anxiety and resistance training.

Scientists only recently have begun to investigate whether and how weight training might also affect mental health. A 2018 review of studies, for instance, concluded that adults who lift weights are less likely to develop depression than those who never lift. In another study, women with clinical anxiety disorders reported fewer symptoms after taking up either aerobic or weight training.

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11. Chew gum

A [study](#) out of Swinburne University found that people who chew gum while multitasking under stress had lower cortisol levels, reduced levels of stress and anxiety, and increased levels of alertness and performance.

[Another](#) found that chewing gum can improve a negative mood, and increase levels of peace and calm. Scientists don't know precisely why, but believe it's because chewing gum tends to improve blood flow in the brain.

12. Journal

According to psychologist L. Kevin Chapman, PhD, "When we experience stress and the negative emotions associated with it, we typically stay in our own heads and do little to address our thinking."

Instead of hanging out with toxic thoughts, he suggests reducing anxiety with "objective recording." Here's how you do it: Draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper. Mark the left column, "Negative things I'm saying to myself." Mark the right, "Alternatives." Fill out both.

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13. Laugh

Laughter is an easy, cheap, and surprisingly effective way of reducing anxiety and boosting mood. The Mayo Clinic says laughing stimulates your heart and lungs, bringing in lots of oxygen-rich air. It also ups your endorphins, the brain's feel-good neurotransmitter, and improves your immune functioning.

Get in a quick laugh: watch [news bloopers](#).

Sources & Resources to learn more:

Rally for Health:

- <https://www.rallyhealth.com/mental-health/8-techniques-to-help-you-master-the-art-of-relaxation>
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Sanvello:

- <https://www.sanvello.com/blog/if-youre-feeling-overwhelmed-anxious-or-depressed-read-this/>

Inc.com

- <https://www.inc.com/melanie-curtin/7-science-backed-ways-to-reduce-anxiety-now.html>

WebMD

- <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/ways-to-reduce-anxiety>