



## Let's Talk More About Stress!

Ahhh, spring is just around the corner! Soon you'll see blooming flowers, trees heavy with buds, and the array of nature's beautiful colors. So the question arises: do you stop and smell the roses? No doubt you've heard that saying before, but have you ever really considered it? And how many of you have actually stopped and smelled those roses?

Stress has become an all too common part of our daily lives. Sometimes the effect is not noticed right away, but can take months or years to become apparent. Some people handle stress well, and display few, if any, symptoms. But other people have difficulty handling even the smallest amount of stress. "I'm stressed" is a complaint I hear again and again from patients. Although my patients would like to reduce stress in their lives, they don't know where to begin. Here are a few easy tools that you can incorporate into your daily routine to help you combat stress.

The information I am providing can be found in several places. One of my favorite books is *Unstuck*, by James S. Gordon, MD. I reference this book often and utilize the exercises to decrease the symptoms caused by stress such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and fatigue. It is my hope that eventually you will learn how to *prevent* stress and anxiety before they become a problem.

A couple of years ago I recommended the following exercises to a patient who was depending on medication to help with her insomnia and anxiety. To this day, the patient uses 'dancing to music' to decrease anxiety and improve her mood. It is a good technique to practice, "having patience" and "keeping an open mind" when embarking on this de-stressing journey.

Let's begin with a simple breathing exercise that physiologically allows your body

to decrease anxiety, blood pressure, pulse rate, panic, and much more.

1. **Position:** yourself comfortably with your feet on the floor or lay on your back.
2. **Breathe in:** through your nose. Do not move your shoulders. Completely fill your lungs. You will feel your belly expand (soft belly). Hold the breath for 2-4 seconds.
3. **Breathe out** through your mouth. When you have completely forced out all the air, your belly will be curved inward towards your ribs and will feel soft.
4. **Relax** in this rhythm for as long as it feels comfortable, on average 2-10 minutes.

Once you are comfortable with this technique you can perform it while sitting at your desk, standing in line at the grocery store, or while driving. It is an exercise you can use in all sorts of places and situations. No one will even know you are doing it! For a demonstration refer to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4pUerloSck](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4pUerloSck).

Now let's move on to a more advanced technique that may take a bit longer to learn. This exercise should not be confused with deep forms of meditation. This is simply a form of relaxation used to decrease stress and the symptoms that accompany it.

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# Preventive Medicine, Varsha Rathod, M.D.

## Breathe...

### Relaxation

1. Pick a focus word, short phrase, or prayer. For example: "I am breathing IN all that I need, I am breathing OUT all that I need to let go."
2. Sit quietly in a relaxing position.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Relax your muscles, starting at your feet. Then move to your calves, thighs, abdomen, shoulders, head, and neck.
5. Breathe slowly and naturally. As you breathe, repeat your focus phrase silently to yourself as you exhale.
6. Do not focus on how well you are doing the technique. Thoughts will come to mind and when they do softly push them back and return to your focus phrase.
7. Continue for the time you have allotted. You may find that you need to start out at 5 or 10 minutes and gradually work up to 20 or 30 minutes as you become more comfortable with the technique.
8. Do not stand immediately. Allow yourself to sit quietly for a couple of minutes until your thoughts gradually return. Open your eyes and sit for a minute until you feel you are ready to stand.
9. I recommend setting aside time for this exercise 1-2 times a day. Before breakfast and before dinner are optimal times to perform this relaxation technique.



To read more about this technique refer to the book *The Relaxation Response* by Herbert Benson, M.D.

These two techniques that I have presented constitute a brief introduction to the practice of stress reduction. You will also want to incorporate a movement/exercise program, see more on page 3, and improve your diet.

Changing your diet is more involved than decreasing your trips to McDonald's each week. It is a lifestyle change that not only helps the body deal with stress but also will help you prevent illness and disease in the future. This includes mindful eating, decreasing dairy and meat consumption, and eating more whole, plant based foods. For more information on nutrition and lifestyle changes you can call my office to schedule an appointment for nutritional counseling.

*"We can either change the complexities of life...or develop ways that enable us to cope more effectively.*

*Herbert Benson, MD*

### Did You Know...

that journaling is a useful tool. In a study done at the University of Texas, students demonstrated decreases in stress & stress hormones and decreased chronic physical illness, after only 3 days of writing.

References: *Unstuck* by James S. Gordon, MD

*The Relaxation Response* by Herbert Benson, MD

Resources: *Music for Sound Healing* by Steven Halpern

*Oriental Sunrise* by Riley Lee

# Preventive Medicine, Varsha Rathod, M.D.

## Movement For The Mind, Body, & Soul



Movement of your body to music, or a 'held-stretch', exercises muscle control and sensory perception. This kind of thoughtful movement works both sides of the brain as well as the frontal lobes. Physical exercise is a way of developing control of your brain, eventually releasing it of feedback loops that lead to anxiety, stress, and panic. These responses are not under your voluntary control. For example, a sound, person, or event can trigger an uncontrollable firing of brain cells that cause anxiety or other symptoms. The anxiety reinforces this pattern and strengthens the feedback loop. In order to change this chain of events, you need to activate other areas of the brain, release some of the anxiety and therefore free the frontal cortex (an area of the brain) to make decisions that are positive, which is not possible when feeling stressed.

Yoga, Tai chi, Xigong and any of the martial arts are excellent ways to train and strengthen body-mind control. Last year, a friend introduced me to a simple Yoga book called *The Five Tibetans*. This book, written by Christopher Kilham, is a 15-20 minute daily routine that keeps you in 'mind-body control'.

For those of you who cannot stand the quiet serenity of Yoga, try 'shaking'. Dr. James Gordon taught me this at a workshop. Using the first 10 minutes of a CD called *Osho*, which

can be purchased on-line or at your local bookstore.

### How to begin:

1. Start the music
2. Stand with your feet slightly apart. As the music starts, stand in the same spot, and start shaking your hands, then slowly incorporate your forearms, shoulders, and neck into the shaking. Shake to the beat of the music.
3. Now move your trunk and hips, then your lower extremities. You do not need more than 3-4 square feet of space as you are not dancing. Instead, you are moving all your muscles to the beat of this unique music designed to make you move, relax muscles and free tension.

After a few days of shaking, you may be ready for the quieter pace of Yoga. You may use soothing music while doing Yoga. If the serenity of Yoga distracts you, the music gives you something to focus on.

The key with all movement is to be in the moment with your body and therefore free the brain feedback loop to ease anxiety. Then you can progress to more advanced tools such as meditation, nutrition, and detoxification.



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In Yoga this is known as the Child's Pose. It is a very relaxing pose and can be used before bed to help calm the body.



1. Kneel on the floor, preferably on a padded mat for comfort, then sit back on your heels.
2. Bend your upper body forward.
3. Extend your arms out over your head with your palms flat on the floor.
4. Breathe slowly and deeply.
5. Continue the pose for 2 or 3 minutes, do not allow your knees to become stiff.

## Questions and Answers

### Can I do these breathing techniques before bed?

Yes, the exercises I have provided in this Newsletter can be performed before bed. I also recommend performing these exercises in the morning before breakfast, a nice relaxing way to start the day and help you remain balanced.

### Can food affect my stress levels?

Yes, items such as caffeine and sugar commonly cause havoc in our bodies which increase the internal stress mechanisms. Eventually, internal stress reveals itself with external symptoms such as weight gain, eczema, moodiness, just to name a few. To learn more about how nutrition can affect your life, visit our website at [www.preventivemedicinstl.com](http://www.preventivemedicinstl.com).

### What can I do if I do not have time for these exercises?

Making time in your day to relieve stress and help calm the body is essential to maintain a healthy body, both mentally and physically. You may start by taking 5 or 10 minutes a day. You may want to start out with the 'shaking' technique and then eventually begin a relaxation technique working your way up to 20 or 30 minutes a day. Find a technique that works for you so you will be motivated to continue the practice every day.

Seasonal allergies getting you down?  
NAET might be the right answer for you.  
For more information, visit our website at  
[www.preventivemedicinstl.com](http://www.preventivemedicinstl.com)

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