

Stressed Out? Work Out!

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As you step out into the street, out of nowhere comes a truck heading right for you! With lightning speed and almost superhuman strength, you jump out of harm's way.

Isn't it reassuring to know that your brain and body are wired for such a life-saving reaction? Too bad your body can react the same way to imagined threats. If you need the fight-or-flight response for survival, can you do anything about your stress reaction when daily demands and worries trigger it? Yes—you can exercise regularly.

Move the body, soothe the mind

Exercise can increase a chemical in the brain that calms the stress response. Exercise also helps you:

- Handle stress with less damage to your health
- Develop a longer “fuse”—you are less over-reactive
- Practice dealing with stress—you get a physical demand without any threat

Other benefits of exercise are:

- Increased sense of well-being and relaxation
- Decreased anxiety and depression
- Improved sleep, energy, and memory

Find what suits you

It's important to find exercise that you enjoy. You can walk, run, bike, swim, take fitness classes—just get your body moving and your heart pumping faster. You can also try a machine such as a stationary bike or elliptical trainer and read a book or watch TV while you work out. Need help getting started? Work with a personal trainer for a program designed for you.

The bottom line is to be consistent. Try to get 150 to 300 minutes of moderate aerobic activity each week. Be sure to check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

Quick fix

Regular exercise helps change your brain and body over time so that you can cope better with stress, but what about right now? Same Rx—get moving, if possible. A quick walk around the block or up a few flights of stairs can calm your stress response in the moment.

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