

Our

MAY + JUNE 2017

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HEALTH

IN TOUCH
WITH YOUR
HEALTH

matters



UNCHECKED STRESS

**Can Seriously Affect Your Health
Put Your Personal Well-Being and Health First**

Dr. Lori Boyajian-O'Neill, D.O.
is passionate about helping people
develop lifestyles that promotes health and happiness.



Have you checked us out online? If you haven't, you will be pleasantly surprised. *Our Health Matters'* new website allows you to be more interactive with us. We know you'll like the new look and timely local and national health news and information. We are populating the site with more content, including these stories that you will want to read online.



ONE WOMAN'S BATTLE TO MANAGE HER STRESS

Our Health Matters reader, Kate has battled stress-related illnesses for years. After undergoing treatment for her chronic health conditions, she is finally on a healthier path. She has made some important lifestyle changes, and through her journey, she is now more aware of how stress affected her health. She told us that she wants to help others by telling her story. We agree. Check out the full story at www.kcourhealthmatters.com.



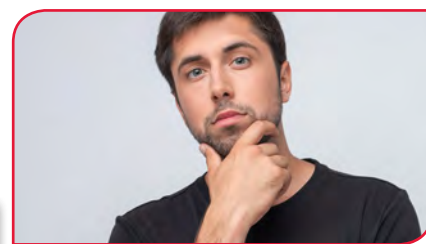
WHAT IS CONSCIOUS TRANSFORMATION™?

How can you benefit from this meditation and mind-focusing practice? *Our Health Matters* reached out to Kansas City-area Conscious Transformation trainer, Diane Breneman to learn more. Head over to www.kcourhealthmatters.com to learn more about Conscious Transformation and how it is helping more people to transform their lives in a positive way.



What Does Cortisol Have to Do With My Health?

Unless you are a medical doctor or a mental health professional you may never have heard the word "cortisol." What you don't know about it could make the difference between you getting or avoiding some serious or life-threatening health conditions. This article is a must read on our "new" website platform at www.kcourhealthmatters.com. Also Join the conversation on [facebook.com/kcourhealthmatters](https://www.facebook.com/kcourhealthmatters). Knowledge is power!



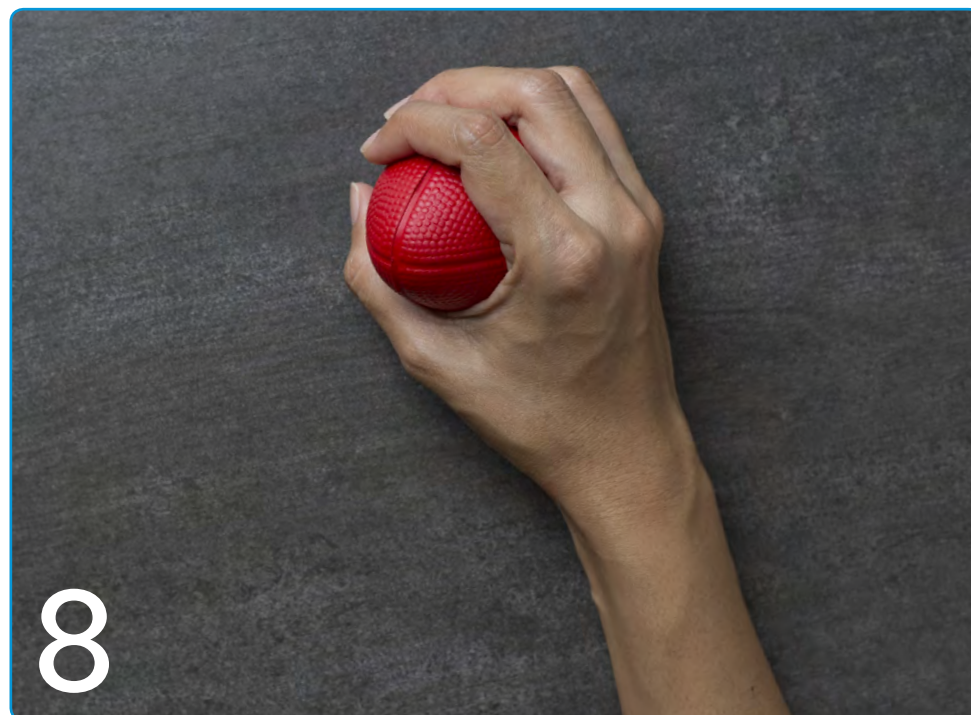
Looking to increase your audience reach? *Our Health Matters* can help. Our ever-expanding readership consists of everyday people wanting to know how to lead healthier lives, health care providers, decision-makers and stakeholders who are interested in health and wellness issues.



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Contents



COVER STORY

Prescription for De-Stressing

Lori Boyajian-O'Neill, D.O.

Overland Park Regional Medical Center and Centerpoint Medical Center

Stress is a normal part of life, but do you really know when it is beyond normal? Your health may be more at-risk than you know. Be aware of the signs of excessive stress.



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**What is Conscious
Transformation™?**

**What Does Cortisol Have
to Do With My Health?**

**One Woman's Ongoing
Battle to Manage Her Stress**



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6

HEALTH

Overwhelming Stress Can Spiral Out of Control

By Maurice Pearl MSW, LMSW, CCDP-D
Robert Shermer, MS, LPC

Did you know that your body has a "fight or flight" system that shoots the hormones cortisol and adrenaline into your muscles preparing you to either run or fight? However, too much of these hormones can cause heart disease, weight gain, anxiety and depression, to name just a few.

10

Religion and Spiritual Practices Help People Cope with Stress

By Dr. Robert Hill,
Community Consultant

Minister Emeritus -
Community Christian Church

When people of faith encounter stressors in their lives, prayer and meditation are automatic responses. Learn why many people embrace this centuries-old practice.

12

OUR KIDS MATTER

Parental Stress Can Affect Children

Támara Hill, MS, NCC, LPC-BE,
Anchored in Knowledge Counseling

Parents who exhibit overwhelming stress need to understand how their stress affects the mental and physical health of their children.

14

Deep Breathing Health Guide

Are you breathing deeply enough? Most of us do not, which can adversely affect our health. Practice breathing deeply from the belly and see how much better you will feel.

Stressed?

As much as we may try to live a life free of stress, we soon discover that some things are just beyond our control. When stress starts to interfere with our relationships, our work, our eating habits, and wreaks havoc on our health, it's time to take action. These are red flags that could signal impending unhealthy weight, high blood pressure, a misdiagnosed rash, excessive smoking and alcohol abuse, insomnia, inflammation and pain in areas of the body not experienced before. The list goes on.

Needless to say, many people ignore the level and depth of the stress they are experiencing, and they may not know it is damaging their health. Eventually, they might receive a diagnosis of heart disease, uncontrollable high blood pressure, or some other serious ailment.

In this edition of *Our Health Matters*TM and on our website kcourhealthmatters.com, we introduce the discussion about cortisol and the hormone's relationship to stress, which can have a devastating impact on one's health. It's a conversation we all need to have with our doctors to determine if further testing is necessary.

There are a variety of techniques that are recommended to help manage and relieve stress. First, talk to your doctor, let him or her know that you "feel stressed" more than usual. Explain your symptoms, i.e., excessive crying, depression, erratic eating, anger issues and more. Second, take action to manage your stress and protect your health.

However, some stress is considered "normal." Read our articles in this edition to recognize the difference, and learn more about how stress can affect your life.

Some people find that practicing prayer and meditation, mindfulness, yoga, deep breathing, stimulating exercise routines and other forms of creative activities helps them to dramatically curb stress.

I encourage you to stop and take a look at yourself. Do something that makes the space around you calming and peaceful. Get help before it's too late.

Thank you for 12 years of being a part of the conversation shared in *Our Health Matters*. Visit our updated website and let us know that you're reading, listening and becoming more "in touch with your health!"

Be Happy, Be Healthy!



Ruth Ramsey, Publisher and CEO



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Overwhelming Stress Can Spiral Out of Control

It's OK to seek the assistance and the support of a mental health counselor.

**Robert Shermer, MS, LPC
and Maurice Pearl MSW, LMSW, CCDP-D**

Heartland Center for Behavioral Change

MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS:

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816-254-3652

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Re-Discover

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Tri-County Mental Health

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816-404-5700

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7840 Washington Avenue
Kansas City, Kansas 66112
913-328-4600

Mental Health America of the Heartland

739 Washington Avenue
Kansas City, Kansas 66101
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Have you ever been walking down a sidewalk and jump in terror thinking you've come across a snake but in reality it was a stick? That response was your fight or flight system shooting the hormones cortisol and adrenaline into your muscles preparing you to either run or fight. The body normally returns to a *homeostasis when stress or a potential threat like the "snake" is gone, but if that stress is constant, then the body could start to react with negative physical or mental responses.

If stress is always or often present, the increased adrenaline will keep the heart rate and heart pressure at an elevated state. The increased cortisol amounts can affect the immune system causing various health and mental problems such as heart disease, weight gain, anxiety and depression to name just a few.

Now let's take a look at stress and alcohol and drug use specifically. Let's say you've been worried about a meeting all week. The day finally arrives and your presentation doesn't go well. You decide you need to go have a few drinks after work to deal with such a stressful week. Does it make you feel better? Does it relieve some of your stress? Yes, it does, but only in the very short term, and at what cost? Thus the problem begins, looking for immediate short term fixes to make us feel better or cope with long term and everyday stress.

So how does a person manage or cope with stress in a healthy way free from the use of mind altering substances?



Robert Shermer, MS, LPC



Maurice Pearl, MSW, LMSW, CCDP-D

- > Learn and practice ways to take care of yourself physically, by eating healthy, getting adequate amounts of sleep and regular exercise.
- > Develop small manageable goals to focus on to avoid from getting overwhelmed.
- > Talk with others and develop healthy support systems to discuss and share problems with.
- > Avoiding the use of alcohol and drugs. They may seem to provide some relief, but will increase problems with stress in the long run.

It has been said that the definition of neurosis is ruminating about the past (depression) and worrying about the future (anxiety). If we as a society can focus on the present more, and develop and practice healthy ways to cope we might not have the level of stress we currently are experiencing. So take that walk to clear your mind of the stressor(s) of the day...just be mindful of the sticks!

Faith-based organizations are always a valuable resource that often goes under-utilized. Contact your local church, synagogue or other faith-based organization for counseling services or support.

Most jobs often provide access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). Contact your HR director for more information. •

*Homeostasis, from the Greek words for "same" and "steady," refers to any process that living things use to actively maintain fairly stable conditions necessary for survival.

WHEN PEOPLE FIND THEIR OWN STRENGTH, THEIR COMMUNITY ALSO PROSPERS

"Imagine what it might feel like to have nothing but what you stand up in. You don't even have enough money to buy yourself a bar of soap."

This plea for compassion comes from a woman named Nora. She knows what it's like to be without the basics that make a life of dignity possible. Today, thanks to her determination and Reconciliation (RS) Services, Nora has those needs met.

At RS, men and women find ways to overcome abuse, addiction and other problems that have held them back. They often begin their journey with a visit to the RS Café, a welcoming place where they can meet with staff not only to chat but also to have their needs assessed, schedule appointments and find immediate assistance.

But RS is about more than offering emergency assistance and helping people become self-sufficient. Founded more than 30 years ago, RS has put down deep roots along the Troost Ave. corridor in Kansas City, Mo. Its long-term goal is a city, long divided by



Father Justin Mathews, Executive Director

Troost, "reconciled, thriving and vibrant, inspiring a nation to reconciliation."

To fulfill this vision, RS has launched a program of economic community building. It includes Resolve KC, a social venture employment program that partnered with HSG and helped employ 300 people last year, most of them from the urban core. This kind of social venturing promotes self-sufficiency among RS clients and others within the Troost community and adds to the entire city's vitality.

RS needs community champions willing to donate, volunteer, provide gifts-in-kind or other support. Make donations on our website at www.RS3101.org, or call 816.931.4751, Ext. 204, with questions, or to schedule a tour.

For more information contact Jodi Mathews, Communications and Event Manager at jmathews@RS3101.org 816-797-2241, or Father Justin Mathews, Executive Director, frjustin@RS3101.org, 816-931-4751, Ext. 204

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Unchecked Stress Can Seriously Affect Your Health

Reduce the negative impact of stress and put your personal well-being and health first.

Lori Boyajian-O'Neill, D.O., Overland Park Regional Medical Center and Centerpoint Medical Center



Dr. Lori Boyajian-O'Neill, D.O.
Overland Park Regional
Medical Center and
Centerpoint Medical Center

reactions quickly ratchet down—both physically and emotionally—following the taxing situation.

Unchecked stress can affect health if you're facing a constant barrage of challenges with no relief. That's when nega-

Stress is a normal part of life no matter your age—and, in fact, a limited amount of stress can actually be good for you. The human body is engineered to experience stress and react to a normal amount of stress. But it's when we remain in a state of heightened arousal that our physical and mental state can get out of whack. Being "stressed out" as you prepare for a presentation or race to meet a deadline is okay, as long as your body's

Cortisol is a life sustaining adrenal hormone essential to the maintenance of homeostasis (homeostasis, refers to any process that living things use to actively maintain fairly stable conditions necessary for survival.) Called "the stress hormone," cortisol influences, regulates or modulates many of the changes that occur in the body in response to stress including, but not limited to:

- > Blood sugar (glucose) levels
- > Fat, protein and carbohydrate metabolism to maintain blood glucose (gluconeogenesis)
- > Immune responses
- > Anti-inflammatory actions
- > Blood pressure
- > Heart and blood vessel tone and contraction
- > Central nervous system activation

tive stress-related tension and an increased flow of stress hormones, like *cortisol, build to the point where you're more in danger of worsening or developing conditions like high blood



pressure and sugar levels, heart disease, obesity, asthma, diabetes, gastrointestinal problems, depression and anxiety, accelerated aging and even premature death.

As a sports medicine physician, I help athletes of all ages focus on self-care, both on and off the field to improve performance and maintain health. Often that includes elements of incorporating meditation, exercise, plenty of rest and a healthy diet into a daily routine. My passion is to ensure people develop a lifestyle that promotes health and happiness. An important component of any healthy physical foundation is to know not only how to manage stress, but to reduce it so it doesn't adversely impact health.

A significant part of coping with stress, whether it's personal, like job or family issues, or broader, such as worrying about the world at large, is to balance your life. The big challenge here, of course, is to keep life in balance, just like your car. That includes listening to your body and taking responsibility for how you react to and deal with stress on all levels.

De-stressing is up to you. The good news is that once you recognize your triggers, you can get a better grasp on managing, balancing and maintaining for a happier, healthier you. •

Dr. Lori Boyajian-O'Neill, D.O., is a board certified Sports Medicine Physician at Overland Park Regional Medical Center and Centerpoint Medical Center, part of HCA Midwest Health, Kansas City's leading health-care provider. For more information, visit <http://hcamidwest.com>.

Stress Busters

Prescription for De-Stressing

The opposite of a body in constant stress mode is a body that knows how to relax, regardless of the situation. Here are five proven stress-relieving tips that don't require a weekend at a spa or a retreat from the world—just invest 15 minutes of your time for an “ahhhh” moment.

MEDITATE. Set up a quiet place in your home where you can practice 10 - 15 minutes of meditation every morning. Light a candle, sit on the floor with good posture and close your eyes. Concentrate on reciting out loud or silently some type of positive mantra, like “I am good” or “Peace come to me.” Synch the mantra with your breaths by placing one hand on your belly.

BREATHE. Quietly pay attention to your pattern of inhaling and exhaling throughout the day. Take five-minute breaks and, slowly inhaling through your nose, feel the breath start in your abdomen and gradually work its way to the top of your head. This conscientious exercise can help reduce blood pressure and slow your heart rate, both of which speed up during stressful times.

EXERCISE. Develop a routine that works for you—it doesn't have to be running, although that's an excellent way to elevate your heart rate and log in good cardio activity. Choose yoga, walking, bicycling or swimming, for example, to help your brain release some feel-good chemicals and encourage your body to work with stress. Even stretching exercises or a brisk walk from your car to the office or grocery store (the objective is to park as far away as possible) is a positive move in the right direction.

DECOMPRESS. Keep a wrap in your office that you can warm in the microwave. Place it around your neck and shoulders for eight to 10 minutes; close your eyes and relax face, neck, upper chest and back muscles. Then use a small ball (tennis ball or foam roller) to massage away tension by placing it between your back and wall, leaning into the ball and sustain gentle pressure for 15 seconds. Continue the routine for another five minutes and then resume your activity.

PRACTICE GRATITUDE. This is a big one that can have far-reaching effects on both keeping stress at a minimum and enhance your emotional spiritual outlook. Keep a lovely journal by your bedside and, every night before you turn the lights off, record five things for which you're grateful. The trick is not to repeat and to authentically reflect on all the good things in your life. Before you know it you're kicking negativity to the curb, where it belongs.

Religion and Spiritual Practices Help People Cope with Stress

Prayer has long been valuable and beneficial to overcoming difficult situations.

Dr. Robert Hill, Community Consultant, Minister Emeritus - Community Christian Church



Dr. Robert Hill,
Community Christian
Church

Prayer and meditation have been and continue to be rich resources for relieving stress. From centuries-old Benedictine spiritual exercises to the intercessory prayers that occur during Wednesday night prayer meetings all over America, spiritual disciplines are trusted as effective means for overcoming difficulties and coping with ordinary and extraordinary times of duress in human life.

A 2016 Pew Research Center study found that highly religious people “are generally happier” and more inclined than less religious people to use meditation as a way to cope with the experience of stress.

The spiritual practices of countless faith communities are rich in their variety but almost always include: (1) the reading of sacred texts, recol-

lecting forbearers who have been where human beings are now; (2) the regular recitation of prayers, instilling peace and confidence; (3) meditation that centers on key essentials; (4) physical fasting as a way of paying less attention to things that are ephemeral and more attention to aspects of life that are ultimately valuable; and (5) participating in rituals (annually or weekly) that can infuse existence with hope and grace.

It should be pointed out that spiritual practices are lived out best in community, where one can encounter: a sense of belonging (helping to fend off isolation and the lure of self-absorption); experiences of beautiful art and music; oratory that inspires and comforts; and religious leaders who provide guidance and counsel. All of these can also serve as sustaining means for countering stress.

Spiritual practices and religious disciplines are not magical strategies that can immediately lower one’s blood pressure or erase the ravaging effects of hypertension. But religious people abound in their testimonies — and science has likewise testified — to the efficacious power of prayer and meditation to enhance one’s quality and quantity of life. •

SOURCES: www.pewforum.org (Pew Forum)
www.cac.org (Center for Action and Contemplation)





SECONDARY TRAUMA
RESOURCE CENTER



**Julia Westhoff, Executive Director
Secondary Trauma Resource Center**

THERE'S HELP FOR HEROES WHEN THEIR JOB CAUSES TRAUMA

After several years at her demanding and sometimes emotionally draining job, an emergency medical technician starts frequently calling in sick. When she's at work, she's moody, and her performance level drops significantly.

This EMT could be the individual face of secondary trauma. But, when the problem develops in more than a few employees, it can negatively affect an organization's culture. The emotional and psychological toll may result in increased absenteeism, retention and recruitment challenges and other undesirable consequences.

Studies show that secondary trauma leads to:

- Turnover, illness and poor service to clients.
- Annual health-care and hiring costs of up to \$50,000 for mid-sized organizations .
- As much as \$190 billion annually in U.S. health-care costs.

Back in 2011, six women from Kansas City-area social service agencies came together to study secondary trauma. Their efforts led to forming the nonprofit, Secondary Trauma Resource Center. The center now operates a model that has taught hundreds of social service and emergency response agencies across the nation how to prevent secondary trauma and its side effects.

The Secondary Trauma Resource Center works with any organization that has a high-stress environment where staff members experience work-related burnout. The objective is to reduce the consequences of stress by:

- Increasing individual and organizational resiliency.
- Reducing stress levels and stress effects.
- Supporting sustainable and positive culture change.

The program clearly works and shows stark evidence of its success. On completing it:

- 80 percent of organizations decreased turnover, saving the Kansas City community \$250,000 in 2016 alone.
- 92 percent of clients reported improved coping strategies.
- 100 percent of managers felt better equipped to deal with overwhelmed or depressed staff.

The Secondary Trauma Resource Center is a highly regarded, award-winning national leader in its field. With workplace stress on the rise, its work will grow more important each day. The organization welcomes funding support for operations and staffing, marketing expertise and community awareness. Contact Julia Westhoff, executive director, at julia@secondarytraumaresourcecenter.org or call 913.669.3086.

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Parental Stress Can Affect Children

Learn and use techniques that can help you manage stress.

Támara Hill, MS, NCC, LPC-BE, Anchored in Knowledge Counseling



Támara Hill, MS,
NCC, LPC-BE

Being a parent can be one of the most overwhelming experiences in today's world. Although parenting can be rewarding, the fact that you are the only reliable adult in the life of your child is stressful. Sadly, parenting may not be the only thing you are stressed about. You may be

stressed about bills or financial stability, your child's education, becoming a better parent, maintaining your marriage, etc. All of these things can subconsciously pressure you. But the ways in which you manage stress is extremely important.

In fact, in 2015, the American Psychological Association highlighted in a research study titled "Stress Snapshot" that about 5.3% of women and 4.9% of men report feeling they weren't managing their stress well. The study also examined the cause and found that "family responsibility" was a major factor. Chronic stress, stress that lasts for a long period of time, can be found in the lives of single parents, immigrants, or any other groups of people living in constant fear or anxiety.

Can you imagine what children of parents of immigrant status or parents living in impoverished neighborhoods feel when they discern stress in their parent(s)? It's no surprise chronic stress can result in 42 million U.S. Immigrants feeling stressed, and 27.4% of African Americans feeling overwhelmed by poverty.

It's important we remember stress can affect children:

PSYCHOLOGICALLY: Stress can trigger uncertainty, worry, and anxiety. When kids are stressed, their young minds react in major ways. They may begin to show signs of regression (i.e., reverting to a younger stage of development) or increased emotional reactivity (i.e., becoming very emotional or fearful).

EMOTIONALLY: Children may become very clingy to the parent by wanting to sleep in the same room or bed, asking for bedtime stories every night, not wanting to sleep without a nightlight, or waking up after nightmares.

PHYSIOLOGICALLY: Kids may begin to complain of gastrointestinal problems such as vomiting, nausea, or upset stomach. They may also report tight muscles and frequent headaches.

NEUROLOGICALLY/MEDICALLY: Children who experience trauma such as severe abuse (sexual, emotional, physical, psychological), a natural disaster, or some other kind of terrifying event can result in increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol which can then result in changes in the brain or terminal illnesses. Traumatic stress, especially when prolonged, can lead to signs of mental health conditions, learning disorders, or cognitive decline. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, children may begin to struggle with attachment to others or develop high risk behaviors such as substance abuse or unprotected sex.

It is very important that you, as the parent, be reminded of ways to cope with your own stress. When you cope with stress well, so do your children. Here are a few tips:

ENGAGE IN PRAYER OR MEDITATION: Prayer and meditation has been two of the most important tools in my "self-care tool box." Any time I would feel overwhelmed, I go to my "tool-box," choose a tool, and then use it. I encourage you to do the same. Think of ways you can build your own "tool-box" and then commit to using it. Perhaps that "tool-box" consists of a list of soundtracks or songs you like, food you love, exercises you like, TV shows you enjoy, etc. The goal is to have a variety of options to choose from.

EXERCISE: Being active releases chemicals in the body known as endorphins which are the "feel good" hormones. When these

hormones are released, your brain gets a “surge” of energy. This “surge” of energy can help lift your mood, prepare your body and mind for potential stress, and renew your spirit. I truly enjoy Zumba, especially the YouTube based fitness group known as REFITREV. Check them out!

EAT HEALTHIER 90% OF THE TIME, ENJOY TREATS 10% OF THE TIME: When you eat healthy, you feed your mind and body nutrients that it needs to survive. God created an interesting “system” that craves nutrients. We must put into our bodies what we hope to get out of it. If we want a clear mind, we have to eat food that help us achieve that. You don’t have to get on a diet or avoid good food. You can eat healthy 90% of the time (maybe 4 days a week), and eat your treats 10% of the time (maybe Friday, Saturday, and Sunday).

SEE A THERAPIST: Therapy can be helpful. You’ll want to “interview” your therapist to see

if you two are a good fit. If you are a good fit, therapy can truly be a supportive avenue for you. But you won’t know how helpful it can be if you don’t commit to trying it.

ACTIVATE OUR “VILLAGE:” The “village” may consist of your parent(s), a mentor, pastor or spiritual guide, close neighbor, family member, etc. who has your best interest at heart. Activate your village by reaching out to these people.

I hope you feel motivated to put these things into action. You have no other choice, your family depends on you. •

Támara Hill, MS, NCC, LPC-BE, is a therapist in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania specializing in child and adolescent behavior and mood disorders, including trauma-informed care. Hill is dedicated to empowering families within the mental health system.

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- Child care resources and referrals
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- Many other services

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Deep Breathing

With its focus on full, cleansing breaths, deep breathing is a simple yet powerful relaxation technique. It's easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as aromatherapy and music. All you really need is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.

How to Practice Deep Breathing

The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.

Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.

Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.

Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale. Breathing techniques can be practiced almost anywhere and can be combined with other relaxation exercises, such as aromatherapy and music. All you really need is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.

Take a deep breath and live in the moment.

Source: helpguide.org

Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as aromatherapy and music.



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