

Balanced Living

January 2023



Reduce Work Stress by Learning to Relax

Working in a high-stress environment can take a toll on your mental and physical health. It can also take the joy out of life -- if you let it.

Fortunately, you can take steps to help relax and keep job stress from getting the best of you.

Moreover, "practicing relaxation techniques can improve your ability to think clearly," says Warren Huberman, Ph.D., senior psychologist at the Joan and Joel Smilow Cardiac Rehabilitation and Prevention Center at New York University Medical Center. "When you're relaxed, the quality of your work will improve."

Using the following techniques throughout your workday will help you manage your stress, feel better and get more done.

Breathe deeply

Taking a few deep breaths is one of the most powerful techniques available to quickly lower your blood pressure and slow your pulse.

"Pick a number, say 25, and count backward on each breath until you get to 1," suggests Dr. Huberman. Or teach yourself to relax on cue by picking a word such as "calm." Slow your breathing slightly while repeating the word.

"If you practice relaxation while repeating a word such as 'calm,' the word itself eventually becomes a cue to relax," he says.

Another technique: While concentrating on your breathing, close your eyes and picture yourself bathed in a blue light.

Go for a walk

To physically break the stress cycle, "walk around the block or to a different part of the building," says Dr. Huberman. "People often make jokes about feeling chained to their desks -- but very often, they're not."

Take time to reflect

Besides these short-term, stress-reducing techniques, investigating the causes of your stress also can help. It's vital to explore your life and its stress sources.

Ask yourself: Am I doing what I like with my life? Are the decisions I've made genuine, or am I living somebody else's expectations? What steps could I take to improve my life?

You can have the time of your life in a stressful job that you really want to do. The work doesn't affect your health adversely because you've made the decision and have control. You start running into problems with stress-related issues when you relinquish control.

Take care of yourself

Paying extra attention to your health when you're under heavy stress is crucial. The following suggestions can keep you on the right track:

- Exercise regularly. Walking, cycling, dancing and doing other aerobic exercise can improve your mood.
- Eat a healthful diet. To boost your energy, eat a healthful diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat foods.
- Don't abuse substances. Alcohol and illegal drugs are closely linked to depression. Their use can contribute to or worsen your condition.
- Get plenty of sleep.

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Tips for More Effective Time Management

When daily tasks build up and you feel overwhelmed, it's difficult to know where to begin. To make things more complicated, you may find yourself easily distracted by activities that are more fun or help you avoid doing what must be done. You may also be struggling to focus on completing one task at a time, instead trying to accomplish too much all at once, which can prevent you from succeeding.

There are many fast and easy ways to help you reorganize, prioritize, and start being productive. If you incorporate even a few of the recommendations below into your attempts to better manage your time, you'll start creating small successes that lead to big changes and even more time to spend on the things you enjoy most!

For better time management:

- Create a list of priorities on a daily, weekly, and/or monthly basis.
- Be sure your list is organized so that the most important and time pressing items will be completed first. For example, before you decide to do a task, think to yourself, "What should I be doing right now?" Let that thought be your guide as you look for which task to do next.
- If you're having trouble getting started, pick an easy task and when you're done, check it off your list. After one or two of these, you will begin to feel the accomplishment that comes with completing a task and will have the motivation to approach the more difficult items.
- Arrange your work day so that you can keep interruptions to a minimum. Try to turn on your voicemail at certain times to avoid getting off task.
- Schedule a specific time to check and reply to emails to avoid frequent interruptions.
- Set deadlines and create a daily/hourly workflow schedule to ensure your task will be completed before that deadline.
- Be realistic about your daily energy patterns. Complete important tasks when your energy is at its peak, and then save more routine tasks for when your energy is lower.

Factors that can hinder productivity:

- Don't be too much of a perfectionist as you move through tasks. Focus on getting the task done, rather than always getting it done perfectly.
- Don't take on everything yourself; delegate duties to appropriate coworkers or people in your life, when possible.
- Don't get off track. Learn to say "no" instead of sacrificing valuable time.
- Don't spend too much time on minor decisions. Save nit-picking for bigger things.
- Don't burn yourself out. Take breaks and go for a quick walk, talk to a friend, eat a nice lunch, etc. Giving your brain a rest and rejuvenating your body will make you more productive in the long run.

Try out the tips and see which ones help you most. Do you recognize any that have helped before? Mix and match or add your own; either way, it's time to increase your productivity, knock those items off your to-do list, and let go of unnecessary stress.

Written by Life Advantages - Author Dr. Delvina Miremadi ©2022

How to Set Rewarding Goals

The start of a new year is the perfect time to determine the goals you want to achieve in the coming months.

Looking at a calendar of open days that stretch across the academic year can feel overwhelming. However, seeing how much time you have available will help you plot out the weeks to come.

Choose Your Own Adventure

When you're setting goals, you want to make sure that you're not just looking at the goal itself, but also including any aspects of reaching the goal that will help you grow and develop as both a student and an individual.

Short-Term Goals Can Lead You to Big Rewards

Short-term goals are generally the tasks that you complete and the achievements that you collect along the way as you work toward completing a long-term goal. Short-term goals can help you to stay focused, keep you motivated, and provide a boost to your academic momentum that may challenge you to look for bigger and bolder goals to pursue.

Stacking Rewards on Top of Rewards

When you're thinking about the goals that will return the most reward for the effort, you're going to put into them, think about these three important questions:

1. Is focusing on this goal going to reward you right now or later on?
2. Will this goal help you prepare to achieve another goal in the near future?
3. Will focusing on this goal help you to achieve one or more other goals at the same time?

Working through your goals should lead you from one success to the next or potentially several successes all at once. How you plan and prepare to meet your goals will help determine how often and how many goals you're able to achieve, which maximizes the overall number of rewards you'll find at the end of each stage of your academic journey.

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Cervical Health Awareness Month

National Cervical Health Awareness month is a great time to raise awareness and educate ourselves of the effects of cervical cancer and HPV. The American Cancer Society estimates that about 14,000 new cases of invasive cervical cancer will be diagnosed in the United States next year.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix. It was once the leading cause of death for women in the United States. However, due to medical advances in cancer prevention and detection, cervical cancer is highly preventable and treatable if detected early. Prevention methods vary depending on your age. Talk to your doctor about which methods are right for you and your medical history.

Recommended Prevention by Age:

- **Preventative Care in your 20's:** Pap test every three years
- **Preventive Care from Ages 30 – 65:** Pap test and HPV test every 5 years
- **Preventative Care for Ages 65+:** Women with an abnormal diagnosis should be tested once a year for 20 years following the result, even if this results in testing continuing past the age of 65. A woman whose uterus and cervix have been removed for non-cervical cancer and who has no history of cervical or pre-cervical cancer should not be tested beyond age 65.

Ways to Promote Cervical Health:

- **HPV Vaccine** – Receiving an HPV vaccine can protect you against the types of HPV that cause 90% of cervical cancers. This vaccination is recommended for anyone ages 9 and up. If you are between 27 and 45, and have not been vaccinated against HPV, you can talk to your doctor about a “catch-up” vaccination.
- **Diet** – What you eat can affect your risk of cervical cancer! Remember to eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables. Studies have shown that following a Mediterranean diet can help lower the risk of several cancers.
- **Exercise** – As little as 30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day, such as swimming, walking, or cycling, has been shown to reduce the risk of cervical cancer!
- **Practice safe sex** - Sexually transmitted infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and HIV/AIDS are major complications of cervical cancer.

sources:

[How to promote cervical health | HCA Florida \(hcafloridahealthcare.com\)](https://www.hcafloridahealthcare.com/health/cervical-cancer-prevention/)

[Cervical Cancer Prevention \(PDQ®\)–Health Professional Version - NCI](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4026111/)

[Cervical Health Awareness Month – NCCC \(nccc-online.org\)](https://www.ncccoffice.org/cervical-health-awareness-month/)

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/about/key-statistics.html>



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Mindfulness via the 5 Senses

What is Mindfulness?

The meaning and practice of mindfulness is often misconstrued, oftentimes making mindfulness seem daunting and unobtainable. However, mindfulness is simply the ability to pay attention to the present moment with purpose and without judgment. In its simplest form, mindfulness pairs breathing techniques to relax the body and mind. It is something everyone is capable of.

What are the Benefits of Practicing Mindfulness?

Mindfulness has been shown to reduce stress, enhance problem-solving abilities, create awareness, and unleash creativity. The beauty of mindfulness is that it can be explored anytime and anywhere.

Let's Practice! 5 Senses Tap In

A quick, on-the-go mindfulness practice involves tapping into the five senses to ground into the present moment. To begin, sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor, and hands in your lap. Begin with a deep inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth.

Sight

What do you see? Are your eyes opened or closed? What colors, textures, or objects do you see?

Feel

What do you feel? Are you sitting outside with a breeze? Are you comfortable? Are any muscles tense that you can relax?

Hear

What do you hear? Do you listen to birds chirping outside? Can you hear the breeze ruffle through the trees? Do you have music playing? Are you listening to your breathing sequence?

Smell

What do you smell? Can you smell a candle? Do you smell hand sanitizer or lotion? Can you pick up any scents from the weather – a breeze, wet leaves, cold rain, or heavy snowfall?

Taste

What do you taste? Did you finish a meal, snack, or beverage? Can you taste anything from the air surrounding you?

Once you explore each sense you are experiencing, you may finish your practice with one final inhale and exhale. This practice can be repeated anytime for any length of time.

Sources: [Mindfulness exercises - Mayo Clinic](#)



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Setting Realistic Health Goals

The New Year is a popular time to re-evaluate our lives and set improvement goals. However, one roadblock many of us fall into is setting too large of goals without setting in place a realistic plan of how to see them through.

It is great to dream big, but make sure you put in place smaller steps to bring those goals to life. By breaking your goals down into smaller steps, it is easier to transition your changes into a sustainable lifestyle.

Remember, it takes 8 to 12 weeks to create new habits!

How to Create Sustainable New Year's Goals

- **Set a Goal.** Start off by reflecting on what you would like to change in your life. Consider what makes you feel your best and move in that direction.
- **Check to Make Sure your Goal is Realistic.** A very common New Year's goal is weight loss. Maybe you plan to lose 50 pounds by the end of the year. Start off by speaking with your doctor about if this would be a healthy goal for you. For most adults, healthy weight loss is anywhere from ½ to 2 pounds a week. So, yes, this can be a realistic goal if it has been approved by your doctor.
- **Break Down Your Goal into Smaller Goals.** Setting out to lose 50 pounds can feel overwhelming. Instead, try breaking it down by thinking of it as 4 - 5 pounds a month or about 1 pound a week.
- **Identify Your Potential Roadblocks.** Think of small areas in your lifestyle that could sabotage your goal and create a list of these areas. If your goal is to lose weight, take notice if you go out to eat every day or drink multiple servings of soda often. Maybe you sit all day and don't have time to exercise at home. Try to identify one or two roadblocks to start with.
- **Create Measurable Steps to Achieve Your Goal.** Once you have broken your goals down into smaller steps, decide on measurable actions you can take to achieve your goal. For example, create a plan to walk for 45 minutes 3 times a week for the next 8 weeks, and then reassess how you feel. Or start by reducing your soda from three cans a day to two, then to one or none over time.

The key is making small lifestyle changes that you can live with over time – and small changes add to significant results!

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach. Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, well-being & legal issues.



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Chicken & Spinach Skillet Pasta *with Lemon and Parmesan*

Ingredients

- 8 ounces gluten-free penne pasta or whole-wheat penne pasta
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1-pound boneless, skinless chicken breast or thighs, trimmed if necessary and cut into bite-size pieces
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup dry white wine
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon
- 10 cups chopped fresh spinach
- 4 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese, divided

Directions

1. Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and set aside.
2. Meanwhile, heat oil in a large high-sided skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken, salt, and pepper; cook, occasionally stirring, until just cooked through, 5 to 7 minutes.
3. Add garlic and cook, stirring until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add in wine, lemon juice, and zest; bring to simmer
4. Remove from heat. Stir in spinach and the cooked pasta. Cover and let stand until the spinach is wilted. Divided among 4 plates and top each serving with 1 tablespoon of Parmesan.

Nutrition

High-Protein, Egg Free, Low Sodium, Gluten-Free Optional

4 Servings | Serving Size: 2 Cups

Per Serving:

Calories: **335** | Protein: **28.7g** | Carbohydrates: **24.9g** | Dietary Fiber: **2g** | Fat: **12.3g** | Saturated Fat: **2g** | Sugar: **1.1g** | Sodium: **499.2mg**

Source: [Chicken & Spinach Skillet Pasta with Lemon & Parmesan Recipe | EatingWell](#)

Did You Have a Panic Attack?

About 25% of people will experience a panic attack during their lifetime. A panic attack can strike any time or place. You could suddenly awaken at night to sheer terror. It's not a heart attack, but you might think you are having one, with total fear of losing control. A rapid irregular heartbeat, extreme anxiety, trembling, dizziness, and inability to catch your breath are classic symptoms. Symptoms often resolve in about ten minutes; the event by itself is not symptomatic of an anxiety disorder or mental health condition. Still, if you have a panic attack, talk to your medical provider to rule out health issues and gain reassurance. *Learn more:* [Mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org) [search "panic attack"]

Are You Avoiding Critical Preventive Healthcare?

Many preventive health screenings for men and women are unpleasant, but don't let this be the reason you put them off, especially ones that could save your life.

Which of these 14 common health screenings do you need right now based on your gender, lifestyle, and/or family history? Talk to your doctor if in doubt. 1)

Hepatitis C screening: an infection that kills more people than any other. 2) Osteoporosis screening: to prevent bone fractures, mostly in older people. 3) Blood pressure screening: to prevent cardiovascular disease-related deaths. 4) Lipid panel: high cholesterol contributes to stroke and heart attacks. 5) Diabetes screening: about 1 in 10 U.S. residents has it—a third don't know it. 6) Sexually transmitted infection screening: chlamydia is the most common STI nationally. 7) Human papillomavirus (HPV) screening: 43 million infections in 2018; causes 70% of cervical cancers. 8) Clinical skin examination: prevents skin cancer, the most common cancer. 9) Pap smear: helps prevent cervical cancer. 10) Breast cancer screening: mammograms reduce breast cancer deaths by nearly 40%. 11) Colon cancer screening: the second-most common cancer (men/women combined). 12) Low-dose CT scan (lung cancer): early detection reduces the high risk of death; 13) Alcohol use disorder (AUD) screening: a recognized brain disease; early detection and treatment can arrest the illness; 14) Depression screening: early identification leads to more effective treatment and reduced suicide risk.

Poor Sleep and the Type 2 Diabetes Connection

Sleep quality affects insulin resistance and has an impact on glucose tolerance. Did you know this? It can therefore be a risk factor for diabetes. Poor sleep quality happens if you awaken too frequently, causing loss of deeper sleep periods. The other clue to poor sleep is a lack of that "refreshed feeling" after sleeping all night, even though you may have "slept" for eight or nine hours. Are you sabotaging sleep? Culprits: 1) Late-night snacking; 2) Anxiety; 3) Too hot or cold room temperature; 4) Bedtime smartphone use; 5) Alcohol nightcaps; 6) Caffeine; 7) Irregular sleep schedule; 8) Exercising before bedtime; 9) Artificial light/non-darkened room; 10) Sleep apnea. *Source:* www.niddk.nih.gov/ [search "poor sleep"]

Relationships at Work: Don't Psychologize Friends and Coworkers

Do you "psychologize" your friends? Psychologizing is analyzing others in psychological terms—theorizing or speculating about their decisions or behaviors. To help cement a more trusting and helpful relationship with a coworker, discard this habit. Instead, practice empathy. For example, "Mary, that was a tough decision. How do you feel about it?" This approach will elicit stronger insight versus hearing what psychological dynamics you believe are affecting them. Plus, you'll avoid the retort, "Stop analyzing me!" Acknowledging someone's difficult experience, pain, or discomfort naturally precludes a judgmental response. It takes practice if you don't communicate naturally this way. However, the affirming reaction will reinforce this communication skill, and you'll appear less judgmental.



Seasonal Affective Disorder

Feeling gloomy in winter is a common complaint, but some people are affected far more than others. Although not a distinct illness, seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression with feelings of sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, and sluggishness that you can't shake. When any type of depression interferes with social and occupational functioning, take a few minutes to get an assessment. Start with your employee assistance program to get the right source of help. *Learn more:*

www.nimh.nih.gov [search "seasonal affective disorder"]

Workplace Safety: Don't Take Cold Weather Casually

Cold weather injuries affect thousands of people each winter. Frostbite and hypothermia are the most common. Working outside at 20°F with wind blowing at 20 mph will cause frostbite on your nose, ears, chin, fingers, or cheeks in two to three minutes. (It's a myth that it takes much longer.) Frostbite can also be caused by touching very cold metal or liquids.

Hypothermia is the other cold injury and strikes when your body temperature starts dropping and continues to do so faster than your metabolism can regenerate body heat. Fact/warning: Many college students have died of hypothermia in cold weather after abusing alcohol. Unable to detect symptoms while under the influence or unconscious, they succumbed to the cold outdoors. *Learn more:* www.athletico.com [search "cold weather injuries"]

New Year's Resolution Tip: Better Planning

Are you a serial defaulter on your New Year's resolutions? An estimated 80% of people give up by February. Don't be a statistic. Try better planning. One well-touted approach is to set S.M.A.R.T. goals. S.M.A.R.T. stands for making your goal *specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound*. If your resolution is to reduce your pre-diabetic fasting glucose A1C score of 6.1, make it specific. For example, shoot for 5.7. Talk with your doctor. Is it achievable? Check. Is it realistic? Check. Measurable? Check. Now, choose the time period for achievement. Three months? Check. Now build your strategy and tactics. They might include exercise, diet, and better sleep. Measure your progress. A third of North Americans are *prediabetic*, so this might be a good goal for you if you don't already have one. Get checked! *Source: Centers for Disease Control*

Manage Stress Right Now: Start Sooner, Procrastinate Less

Procrastination is about putting off the pain of starting a project. A visual image of the work often adds to this avoidance. To intervene, focus away from the vision of the work, and onto the vision of completion or success. Then, visualize smaller steps to make it easier to start. For even more motivation, divide small steps into even smaller steps. The Nike slogan "Just Do It!" is well hyped, but it may not stir you to act. Modifying this slogan to "Just Start Small" or "Just Do a Few Minutes" may easily kick-start you to act sooner, and if you do, continuing on to finish the job is more likely. Try it, and discover if it is a game changer for you.

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Ways to Feel Calmer Right Now

Take some deep breaths

When anxious, our breath becomes rapid and shallow. Deep belly breathing helps decrease anxiety by stimulating the body's relaxation response, lowering our heart rate and blood pressure. It's a powerful technique that works because you can't breathe deeply and be anxious at the same time. There are many variations to try, including this simple exercise: Inhale deeply for a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 4. Repeat several times.

Go for a walk

Exercise is one of the best anxiety remedies, immediately and long term. Going for a walk creates a diversion from your worries and releases muscle tension. Grab your headphones or earbuds on your way out; studies show that listening to music brings its own calming effects.

Long term, regular exercise triggers the release of feel-good neurochemicals in the brain, building up resilience against stormy emotions. It boosts your confidence and your mood, and you don't need to run a marathon to feel the benefits. Washing your car, hiking, gardening, a pick-up game — anything that gets you moving counts. Thirty minutes, 3 to 5 days a week can help to significantly improve anxiety symptoms, but even 10 minutes can make a difference.



Try a mini-meditation

No matter what's causing your anxiety, take a pause and try this 3-minute meditation to anchor your mind and body in the present.

Sitting down, take a few deep breaths, in through the nose, and out through the mouth, feeling the breath move through the body, the rising sensation as you breathe in, the falling sensation as you breathe out. Do this a few times, then allow the breath to return to its natural rhythm.

Begin to focus your attention on the physical sensations, either of the weight of the body on the seat beneath you, or the feet on the floor. That's your anchor, something that doesn't change, no matter how many thoughts come and go. The moment you realize you're caught up in thought, come back to that sensation, that feeling of being grounded. It's as though you're stepping out of all the business of the mind, and just being present in the body.



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Sip some herbal, chamomile, or green tea



If you're feeling jittery, pour a cup of chamomile or green tea. Known as a sleep aid, chamomile contains a compound called *Matricaria recutita*, which binds to the same brain receptors as drugs like Valium.

Chamomile's sedative effects may also come from the flavonoid apigenin. In one study at

the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center in Philadelphia, patients with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) who took chamomile supplements (1.2 % apigenin) for 8 weeks showed a significant decrease in anxiety symptoms compared with patients taking placebo. (Despite improved quality control, herbal supplements aren't regulated by the FDA the way medications are, so before taking any supplement, check with your doctor.)

Green tea, long used in Chinese medicine to treat depression, contains the amino acid L-theanine, which relieves stress, and reduces blood pressure and muscle tension. Nuts, whole grains, and broccoli are also rich in L-theanine.

Distract yourself

If you're feeling anxious, try a distraction technique — anything that redirects your attention away from distressing thoughts or emotions. Run your fingers around the edge of your phone, put your hands under running cold water, color, or draw on a piece of paper.



Distractions work because your brain can't be in two places at once, and shifting your attention to any activity will interrupt a string of racing thoughts.

source: www.headspace.com/articles/how-to-reduce-anxiety



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