

FIVE STRESS MANAGEMENT TIPS YOUR HEART WILL LOVE



WE ALL HAVE STRESS IN OUR LIVES. The question is, what do we do about it? Every step you can take to unwind helps your heart in two ways, says Johns Hopkins cardiologist **Seth Martin, M.D.**

First, chronic stress wreaks havoc on your body. When you're stressed out, your nervous system releases hormones and chemicals that prompt your heart rate and blood pressure to increase. Over time, unchecked stress can strain and damage the blood vessels and heart.

Second, common reactions to stressful situations—like overeating, drinking too much and smoking—raise the risk of heart disease.

To help, try Martin's top five fixes to knock out stress throughout the day. →

1 “TAKE 10” TO MOVE AROUND

“One of the greatest stress relievers of all is physical activity,” says Martin. A trip to the gym is great, but so is a 10-minute walk—an outlet for revved-up feelings that also improves every marker for heart health. Consider mini fitness breaks like walking a dog, dancing to an upbeat song and taking a stroll around your workplace.

2 SWAP UNHEALTHY REACTIONS FOR HEALTHY ONES

After a hard day at work, do you crave TV and a bag of chips? When something makes you mad, do you reach for a cigarette? “Once you can draw the connection between your stress and what it cues you to do, you can ‘close the loop’ by picking a healthier response,” Martin explains. Maybe instead of grabbing salty snacks, you make tea. With repetition, the swapped reaction will turn into your new habit.

3 FIND A RELAXATION TOOL YOU LIKE

Relaxation techniques slow your heart rate and lower blood

pressure. They’re not only good for your heart, but can improve your mood, confidence and ability to cope. From yoga or tai chi moves to meditation and simple deep breathing, these de-stressors can be done anywhere, in short bursts.

4 CALL A FRIEND

Social media is no sub for face-to-face friendships. Talking to real people calms us down and makes us laugh. Friends can often help us gain fresh perspectives on problems too. People with strong social ties also seem to enjoy better protection against high blood pressure.

5 POWER DOWN BEFORE BED

Under stress, we often have trouble sleeping. That, in turn, gives us less energy and more trouble concentrating during the day, which lowers our ability to cope with stress—trapping us in an unhealthy loop. A calming, tech-free bedtime ritual is the first step in creating a healthier sleep environment. For better relaxation and better sleep, limit bed to being a place for rest and sex, period.



USEFUL LINKS

Learn more about the powerful ways stress impacts your overall health, and discover advice approved by Johns Hopkins experts at our website:

- For [healthier ways to manage anger](#)
- For [heart-friendly ways to cope with daily stress](#)
- For [research on the physical link between emotions and heart health](#)

Too much stress, over time, puts you at higher risk of heart disease.

