

EAT WELL

According to Dr. Mark Hyman, eating whole, real foods restores balance and reduces the effects of stress on your body. Replacing harmful substances such as caffeine, alcohol, and refined sugars, with clean proteins, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats helps regulate your hormone levels, including stress hormones. Food As Medicine Education Director Kathie Swift, MS, RDN, LDN, FAND, EBQ cites the connection between the gut and brain in relieving stress. The gut and brain are constantly sending signals to each other, so by keeping your microbiota (the bacteria in your gut) healthy, your brain feels less stressed.



SHAKING & DANCING

The quickest way to relieve stress is to release endorphins through exercise. An easy way to do this is through shaking and dancing, a form of expressive meditation that loosens your joints as well as clears the mind. It's one of our favorite techniques to teach in conflict and disaster areas, such as Haiti. Start by standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, shoulders relaxed, and shake your whole body for a few minutes (we recommend 7-8 minutes). Then, stop for a minute or two and pay attention to your breathing and physical sensations. Finally, turn on fast music – anything that gets you energized, and allow the music to move you. Dance for about 5 minutes, or until you feel satisfied.



GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Sleep and stress tend to cause a vicious cycle – if you're stressed, then you can't sleep, which makes you ill-prepared to handle the stressors of the next day, leading to more stress. To relieve stress before bed, try some relaxation techniques (see below) and disconnect from technology as much as possible an hour before bedtime. To ensure the proper amount of rest (7-8 hours is recommended), set an alarm reminding you to go to bed.



GUIDED IMAGERY & BREATHE

The body responds in essentially the same way to made-up imagery as it does to real experiences. Positive, relaxing images can be an effective tool for relieving stress. Try it for yourself with this Guided Imagery podcast from our Founder and Director Dr. James Gordon, or check out Dr. Gordon's book *Unstuck: Your Guide to the Seven-Stage Journey Out of Depression* for dozens more techniques, including scripts for guided imagery exercises. We do it all day, every day, and yet we often forget the healing powers of deep breathing. By slowing down your heart rate and lowering blood pressure, breathing deeply relieves stress. Our Soft Belly meditation is our go-to for relieving stress, but any form of slow, deep breathing can help you relax and stay calm.

