



5 Easy and Free Tips for Holiday (and Anytime!) Stress Relief

You know what it's like to feel stressed, especially during the holidays: headaches; muscle tension; forgetful; irritable; want to run away; make bad decisions; inhale food; anxious. *There is another way!* How would you like to reclaim and maintain inner peace whether you're at an office party or with relatives around the holiday dinner table? Try out the five ideas below and see how they work for you.

•**Be mindful:** When you're mindful, you're being aware and truly in the moment-no future, no past-only the present moment exists. Critical to being mindful is to accept what is, without judgment, including any thoughts, and simply remain attentive to the current situation. That doesn't mean you don't want the situation to change, but being mindful allows you to begin to make constructive and health promoting plans towards creating that change. **Try this:** Next time you eat, try to do it slowly, savoring every bite. Notice the different colors and the different flavors and textures of each mouthful. By doing this, you may find yourself eating less.

•**Laughter:** A good belly laugh relaxes your muscles, gets more oxygen into your body, reduces blood pressure thus improving blood flow. It also lowers cortisol and epinephrine levels (2 *stress hormones*) which makes your immune system function better. Find ways to have several good belly laughs every day. **Try this:** If you've had a stressful day, visit a local card shop and read the funny cards-it's free, it's fun. Maybe even take one home.

•**Breathe deeply:** Practicing deep breathing can slow and even stop the stress response. When you do this, your epinephrine and cortisol levels decrease, your blood pressure and heart rate go down, your muscles relax, and your immune system functions better. Practice deep breathing on a regular basis until it becomes second nature. If you want to see deep breathing in action, take a look at a sleeping child-they breathe this way naturally. **Try this:** Inhale through your nose to a count of 4, 1-2-3-4 and exhale through your nose or mouth to a count of 4, 4-3-2-1. Practice this several times and notice how you feel. Be mindful and monitor.

•**Move your body:** Exercise has many physical and psychological benefits: it counteracts the harmful stress hormones so it raises your stress threshold; it keeps you mindful; it enhances your immune system; you can focus better after exercising; it helps regulate blood sugar and so can reduce obesity; plus, it can help ward off depression and anxiety. **Try this:** Call your friend with the great sense of humor and take a long walk together. Walking with them instead of alone can help keep you mindful and make you laugh a lot.

•**Get enough sleep:** If you're tense, it's difficult to let go and get restorative sleep. Getting adequate sleep helps you to have a positive mood and think clearly. Both of these allow you to make good decisions for your life. Sleep needs vary based on age and stage of life, but most adults benefit from 7~8 hours per night. **Try this:** Get some good exercise in several hours before bedtime. Then, instead of watching tv before bed, listen to some soft music, do some stretching, or spend some time focusing on your breathing. Sweet dreams.

