

How to de-stress: 7 ways to complete the stress cycle

1. Move

Running, dancing, swimming, whatever: the Nagoskis note that exercise is 'your first line of attack in the battle against burnout.' Aim for 20 to 60 minutes a day.

2. Breathe

'Deep, slow breaths down-regulate the stress response—especially when the exhalation is long and slow and goes all the way to the end of the breath, so that your belly contracts,' write the Nagoskis.

'A simple, practical exercise is to breathe in to a slow count of five, hold that breath for five, then exhale for a slow count of ten, and pause for another count of five. Do that three times—just one minute and fifteen seconds of breathing— and see how you feel.'

3. Talk to people

'Casual but friendly social interaction is the first external sign that the world is a safe place,' say the Nagoskis.

'Just go buy a cup of coffee and say 'nice day' to the barista. Compliment [your colleagues] earrings [via Zoom.] Reassure your brain that the world is a safe, sane place, and not all people suck.'

4. Laugh

'Laughing together—and even just reminiscing about the times we've laughed together—increases relationship satisfaction. We don't mean social or 'posed' laughter, we mean belly laughs—deep, impolite, helpless laughter.

'When we laugh, says neuroscientist Sophie Scott, we use an 'ancient evolutionary system that mammals have evolved to make and maintain social bonds and regulate emotions.'

5. Speak to loved ones

'When friendly chitchat with colleagues doesn't cut it, when you're too stressed out for laughter, deeper connection with a loving presence is called for. Most often, this comes from some loving and beloved person who likes, respects, and trusts you, whom you like, respect, and trust,' say the Nagoskis.

'It doesn't have to be physical affection, though physical affection is great; a warm hug, in a safe and trusting context, can do as much to help your body feel like it has escaped a threat as jogging a couple of miles, and it's a heck of a lot less sweaty.

'One example of affection is the 'six-second kiss' advice from relationship researcher John Gottman. Every day, he suggests, kiss your partner for six seconds.

That's one six-second kiss, mind you, not six one-second kisses... six seconds is too long to kiss someone you resent or dislike, and it's far too long to kiss someone with whom you feel unsafe.'

6. Cry

'Anyone who says 'crying doesn't solve anything' doesn't know the difference between dealing with the stress and dealing with the situation that causes the stress,' the sisters write.

'Have you had the experience of just barely making it inside before you slam the door behind you and burst into tears for ten minutes?

Then you wipe your nose, sigh a big sigh, and feel relieved from the weight of whatever made you cry? You may not have changed the situation that caused the stress, but you completed the cycle.'

7. Do something creative

'Engaging in creative activities today leads to more energy, excitement, and enthusiasm tomorrow.

'Why? How? Like sports, the arts—including painting, sculpture, music, theatre, and storytelling in all forms—create a context that tolerates, even encourages, big emotions.'

Time to get those watercolours out?

7 WAYS TO COMPLETE THE STRESS CYCLE



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

YOUR CREW



BREATHING

LAUGHTER



AFFECTION

CRYING



CREATIVE EXPRESSION