



We know stress is bad for our health.

Yet daily stress is unavoidable. Family drama, deadlines at work, financial pressures, and bumper-to-bumper traffic increase our heart rate, shoot adrenaline into our nervous system, and decrease our ability to fight infections. Whether you're a parent caring for a family, or an adult child caring for a parent, the strain can become unbearable if you don't address the tension.

Try these five sure-fire ways to de-stress.

Breathe! Mindful breathing can lower blood pressure, promote feelings of calm and relaxation, and help you de-stress. Inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four. Breathe in and out through the nose. Repeat ten times.

I find this especially useful while I'm driving, as I tend to either hold my breath or take shallow breaths. If you're facing an upcoming stress-inducing event, try this technique.

Journal. Writing in a notebook helps me untangle my thoughts. On days when I feel especially weary, I can pour out my feelings on a blank page for my eyes only. I've written things like, "I'm tired of being in charge. Why can't someone else share this heavy load?" When I reread these entries, sometimes I can laugh about the depth of my angst. Other days I write about the blessing of caring for my ninety-three-year-old mother, or a special devotional that touched me.

Reading these on difficult days lifts me up and helps me continue. Some people keep a 'joy journal' or a 'gratitude journal.'

Go for a walk outside. Consider this quote from the My Fitness Pal Blog: "Having a rough day? Walk it off. Numerous studies have linked walking for exercise with improved mood and reduced stress levels. And it's even better if you can take a stroll through nature — walking outdoors near greenery has been shown to help reduce feelings of frustration and may even help put your brain into a state of meditation."¹

Develop the discipline of unplugging. From FB, news, internet browsing, YouTube, and television. Set a time each day to pray, meditate, think, daydream, or pet your cat. Set your mobile devices far enough away that you won't hear them. Even when my phone is on silent mode, I hear it vibrate. I have to get over the feeling of FOMO, a modern term meaning Fear of Missing Out. What if something happens and I don't hear about it for thirty minutes? What if I get a text that needs an immediate answer? What if someone calls and I'm not there to answer? The world will not spin out of orbit simply because you are spending time in your happy place.

Laugh. A quote from Proverbs says, "*A merry heart does good like medicine.*"²

Yesterday I visited a friend who was despondent over her son's sudden death at the age of thirty-two. When I got to her home, she was scrolling through Facebook, looking at funny cat videos and crazy texts sent by parents to their adult children. Her face shone with glee as she shared some of them, often belting out a good laugh. Her heart was turned to joy despite her constant grief.

Charlie Chaplin once said, "*A day without laughter is a day wasted.*" When Mike and I married, I told him he needed to make me laugh every day. And he does. His goofy sense of humor is just what I need when work or caregiving for my mom makes me crazy.

We don't need to be happy or hear something funny to laugh. You can make yourself laugh, and it has the same effect as chuckling over a good joke.

According to the Mayo Clinic³ laughter can:

- **Stimulate many organs.** Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases the endorphins that are released by your brain.
- **Activate and relieve your stress response.** A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response, and it can increase your heart rate and blood pressure. The result? A good, relaxed feeling.
- **Soothe tension.** Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.
- **Make you smarter.** An educational consultant told a group of teachers that laughter makes you smarter for several hours and aids memory.

These five tips aren't new. You've heard one or more of them, handed out like candy. But here's the secret – they won't work if you don't try them. Take one of the above tips and practice it for a week. I guarantee it will help calm and relax you. Then let me know how it worked.

¹10 Amazing Benefits of Walking. By Jessica Smith, March 25, 2017

²Proverbs 17:22, NKJV

³Stress Relief From Laughter? It's No Joke. Mayo Clinic Staff, April 2016 blog

