

# Stress Relieving Exercises

Surprise yourself! Although you may not think of exercise as stress relieving (if you've ever walked a treadmill for a stress test), a healthy body is a formidable weapon to combat stress. Of course, a full-blown exercise regime can't be completed at your desk, but there are several easy exercises that you can do to relieve tension and reduce stress. Even if your job is physically taxing, the exercises below are designed to help you unwind, relax, and reduce stress.

1. **Blow it off.** Since breathing comes naturally, deep breathing is often overlooked as an exercise, but it's an excellent stress reducer. Breathe in while tucking in your tummy and feel the air as it expands your lungs and your chest. Breathe in to the count of four and hold it for two counts. Then exhale to the count of four. Take two to four deep breathes several times a day and soon daily stressors may well be "gone with the wind!"
2. **Get up and stretch.** Visualize the stress flooding from your back, legs, your shoulders, and pour out of your fingertips and toes. Add to your stretches by taking the time to learn a few yoga positions, which you can find in books and videos as well as yoga classes.
3. **Take a short walk after lunch or in lieu of a coffee break.** A brisk ten or fifteen minute walk each day is not only physically beneficial but transfers your focus from your problems to the scenery along your route, whether it's the good-looking person in the hallway or the trees in the neighborhood park.
4. **Squeeze a lemon.** P.T. Barnum said, "When life hands you a lemon, make lemonade!" Squeezing a lemon or tennis ball is a good way to keep your fingernails from biting into your palms! If you crush the fruit or the tennis ball, either get a rubber ball or go on to a more vigorous exercise to reduce your stress!
5. **Progressive relaxation** is especially beneficial when stress keeps you from getting a good night's sleep. Start at your toes and "tell" them to relax. When you feel them relaxing move to your feet, ankles, calf muscles, knees, thighs and so on up your torso to your shoulders and finally to the top of your head or alternatively down through your arms to your fingertips (if you make it that far before you're asleep!)
6. **Dance.** Join an aerobics class, a tai chi class or just turn on the tunes and dance. Dancing has a double advantage in that along with exercise, music is a great stress reducer.