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**FIVE EASY WAYS TO
MANAGE STRESS**

**STAYING BALANCED
THIS TIME OF YEAR**

**HEALTHY AGING
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A GUIDE TO HEALTHY LIVING FOR MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SENIORS



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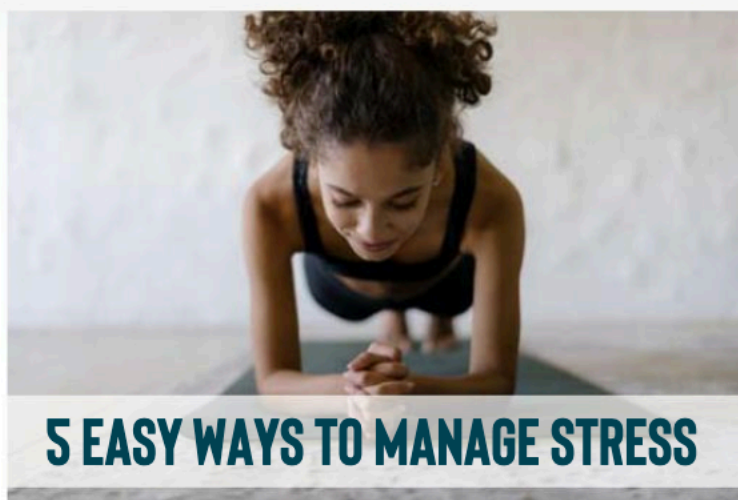
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5 EASY WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS

By: Dr. Briana Sinatra, N.D., Healthy Directions

If you are feeling stressed, you are not alone. Life pulls us in a lot of different directions, and the last couple of years have taken a particularly tough toll. Sometimes even just trying to accomplish everything that needs to get done in a day can feel overwhelming. Plus, there are silent stressors you may not even be aware of, like watching too much “bad” news on TV, sitting in traffic, or the pressure to keep up with the perfection you see on social media.

But while stressors are all around us, feeling stressed is not a given. You do not need to go through life feeling irritable, anxious and overwhelmed. I’ll share my top five tips for fighting off stress in a minute. First, here is a look at how stress affects your body:

Chronic Stress Puts Your System on High Alert

Inside your body, stress is regulated by the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. It is the communication network between your hypothalamus, pituitary gland and adrenal glands.

If you encounter a stressful situation—such as being stuck in traffic on your way to an important appointment—the HPA axis goes into action. It stimulates the release of cortisol, your body’s “stress hormone.” Cortisol raises your blood pressure, quickens your breathing, dilates your pupils, and stimulates the release of blood sugar so you get a sudden surge of energy.

This response, called “fight or flight” mode, is extremely important if you encounter acute danger, like a life-or-death situation. But most people do not experience life-or-death situations daily. Instead, we are inundated with so much chronic stress that we do not even realize how stressed we are. Left unchecked, stress takes a real toll on your HPA axis, cortisol level, mood, sleep, and more.

Fortunately, there are five ways to keep stress in check and feel more in control:

1. **Nourish Your Body with a Healthy Diet:** Eat low glycemic foods and balance carbohydrates with proteins and healthy fats. Also, limit caffeine, alcohol

and foods high in sugar—all of which can affect your mood and stress level. When feeling stressed it is easy to reach for the donut or handful of candy, but that quick fix will only help you to feel better temporarily. When your blood sugar begins to drop, your brain will tell you to eat more sugar to sustain the elevated mood you may have just experienced. It is a tough cycle to break and one that many of us have experienced.

2. **Prioritize Sleep:** Stress is much easier to deal with after a good night’s sleep. Plus, sleep helps to reset emotional reactivity, especially during the second half of the night which is when you get your REM sleep. Strive to get 7-9 hours of sleep each night and go to sleep early enough that you do not have to cut your sleep short in the morning. To help yourself relax, avoid caffeine after noon, limit alcohol and sugar, keep your bedroom dark and cool, and use a lavender diffuser to help you drift off to sleep.

3. **Get Outdoors:** There is incredible healing power in being out in nature. Just gazing up at the sky can help to put your stress into perspective. While you are outside, notice how good the sun feels on your face, or the sounds of the birds chirping in the nearby trees. All of these sights and sounds reawaken our minds and have a pleasant, calming effect. You can even take off your shoes and put your bare feet on the damp grass, soil or sand. Connecting with the earth’s energy in this way has been shown to activate your parasympathetic nervous system for a more relaxed state and reduced levels of cortisol.

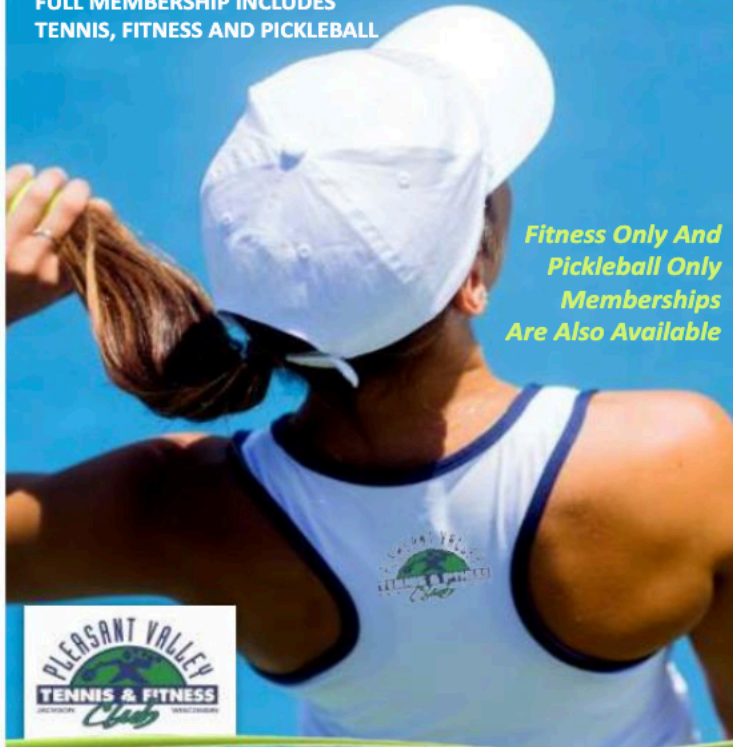
4. **Go on a Media Diet:** Years ago, if you wanted to know what was new in the world, you had to open a newspaper or watch the evening news. Now, our phones, social media, and 24-hour cable news stations bombard us with issues to worry about and react to. Plus, social media can have a stressing effect. So, limit the amount of time you spend consuming news and scrolling through social media channels. You want to be informed and feel connected, yet not overloaded. As a

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eases.

- Eat a diet high in healthy nutrients (vitamins, minerals and antioxidants) and low in fat and sugar. Ask your eye care specialist if and what supplements may be beneficial.

Past president of the Milwaukee Optometric Society, David Scheidt, OD, adds, "These steps and regular exercise are all beneficial to your ability to see life to the fullest—now and in the future."

For FREE handouts on the eye conditions mentioned in this article (amblyopia, strabismus, cataracts, dry eyes, AMD, glaucoma, diabetic eye disease, vitamins for your eyes, or eye safety) call Eye Care Specialists Community Education hotline at 414-321-7035. Since 1985, this leading ophthalmology practice has provided medical, surgical and laser care for virtually every eye condition to more than 185,000 Wisconsin residents at offices on 7th & Wisconsin Ave., 102nd & National Ave., and Mayfair Rd. across from the mall. More information is also available at www.eyecare-specialists.net

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side note, social media was intended to connect us to one another, but sometimes it can have the paradoxical effect of causing disconnection and stressful isolation.

5. Make an Appointment with Yourself: We tend to prioritize what we need to do for others and put ourselves at the end of the line. But you cannot take care of others unless you take care of yourself. Whether it is making time for a long relaxing bath, reading a good book, or catching up with a friend, make sure you schedule time each day that is just for you. A morning meditation can also be a powerful way to start the day. Pick a quiet spot in your house and sit comfortably upright with a straight spine. Focus on your breath coming in and out through your nose. As stressful thoughts come to you, let them wash away like the waves in an ocean.

It is also important to make this "you" time sacred, just as you would a doctor's appointment or work meeting and try not to cancel it.

Above all, it is also important to practice gratitude. Simply stopping to be thankful for nature and the love of people around you can change your perspective very quickly. When you feel stress creeping in, take a breath and reflect on what and whom you are thankful for. Then send that person a card, gift or note; or journal and meditate about all the things you are thankful for. You will feel yourself start to reset from the stress with a calm mind and a positive outlook.

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"pinch your shoulders together like you're squeezing a pencil between them," to correct your posture. Locust pose does something similar but also brings awareness to what your shoulders are doing and activates your upper back muscles, Vincent says.

Begin lying face down with legs together and arms by your sides, palms down.

Inhale as you lift your upper torso away from the floor.

Pull your shoulders back by activating the muscles of your upper back.

Hold for a few breaths, then lower back down.

T-Spine Opener

If your upper back is out of alignment, you'll likely experience problems in your neck and lower back as well, says Los Angeles-based chiropractor Robert Bates. And that can lead to imbalances and movement-pattern problems. The T-spine opener helps loosen and realign your spine.

Lie on your side with your knees bent to 90 degrees and your arms outstretched, hands together. Place a towel or blanket under your head for support if you like and a small pillow or yoga block between your knees.

Keep your knees in place as you inhale and reach the top arm up and over to the other side so your arms are in a T shape.

Exhale and return to the start position.

Perform five to 10 reps on each side.

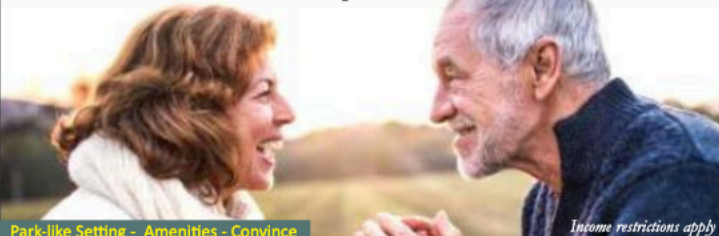
Proper curvature in your spine provides structure and function to the body and acts as a shock absorber for motion. "If a segment of the spine is stuck, it's not allowing proprioception to be generated, nutrients can't flow to brain and throughout the body and stress hormones are produced," says Bates. Counteract all of that with this dynamic stretch.

Begin on your hands and knees in a neutral spine position.

Exhale as you fully round your back, pull the belly button in toward your spine and tuck your chin toward your chest.

Be aware of what segments feel stuck. Breathe into these spaces and remember to move slowly.

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