

STRESS AIDS

TRY HAND REFLEXOLOGY

Key reflexology points lie not just in the feet, but also in the hands as well. There are several key points you can massage to ease stress and tension elsewhere in the body.

WHAT TO DO: Reflexology Gordon Flynn recommends pinching the area between the thumb and forefinger, about two centimetres into the palm, to combat stress. 'This point correlates with the adrenal glands, responsible for releasing the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisone into the body,' he says, 'Pinch the point firmly for three seconds and repeat three times, or massage the area with circular movements, to reduce stress.'

CONNECT WITH NATURE

There is growing evidence that connecting with nature helps with calming stress and restoring balance to the body, mind and psyche. Try this method to tune into nature whenever you are.

WHAT TO DO: Spend a few minutes gazing at a plant or flower, indoors or outdoors (if you have a desk job, keep a plant next to your computer). Take in all its details, from the stem to the leaves and the flower. Sense the feeling of the plant and its beauty. Keep observing, noticing details you might have missed before, and developing a feeling of appreciation for nature and life.

BREATHE DEEPLY

Breathing coach Kim Upton recommends the 'Let Go' Breath as 'an instant tranquilliser, reducing stress, and releasing tension in your chest, diaphragm and neck'.

WHAT TO DO: Internally say to yourself, 'Stop!'. Breathing through your nose, inhale gently, then exhale very slowly. As you exhale, feel tension melt from your muscles, especially your shoulders. Let your forehead, jaw neck and chest soften. Direct your attention outside yourself, watching and listening calmly to the sounds around you. Become aware of your peripheral vision – this helps you access a more open, embracing state of mind. Repeat once or twice whenever you feel tense.

USE SOMATIC EXPERIENCING

This technique is used for chronic and acute stress. 'It's a way of teaching your nervous system how to restore itself,' explains practitioner Giselle Genillard.

WHAT TO DO: Stop. Feel your feet on the ground. Notice where you feel stress. Is your heart beating, are you anxious, or do you feel muscle tension or pain? Visualise a time and place when you felt relaxed or safe. Bring that feeling into your body and see if you can make it grow. Go between the feeling of stress and relaxation as many times as you need. The nervous system often fixates on uncomfortable sensations. To retain the system, always find a positive sensation to come back to.

PRACTISE YOGA

Research has found that the relaxed focus of yoga switches off anxiety. While any yoga class will act as a stress-buster, yoga teacher Howard Napper says this spinal roll will help mellow you, wherever you are.

WHAT TO DO: 'Hang forward, holding the elbow of the opposite arm with each hand, and literally hang out for a minute or two,' says Napper. 'You'll notice your breathing becomes deeper, while tension is released across your neck and shoulders. Slowly roll your spine up to vertical, then roll it down again, hanging for another minute or two. This rolling action really relaxes and invigorates the spine, and you will feel the benefit. Repeat as necessary.'

HYPNOTISE YOURSELF

Hypnotherapy is one of the most established instant stress-busters. Numerous studies have shown how it effectively slows the heartbeat, reduces blood pressure, and evokes feelings of relaxation and wellbeing.

WHAT TO DO: Pick a relaxing visualisation, using your imagination. The image should be one that passes through your body, taking any tension away with it. You might choose golden light or water flowing gently through your body, or a comforting memory of scene, in this case, feel the smells, sounds and sensations in the image as vividly as possible, as if you were really there. Let any feelings of relaxation and peace triggered by the image spread and expand outwards.

UNFOCUS YOUR EYES

The way our eyes focus has an almost instant impact on our state of mind. 'The more focused our vision, the more focused we are, but this can make us tense,' explains meditation teacher Dorje Chandro. Staring for hours at computer screens stresses the eyes and, as a consequence, creates anxiety. However, the more relaxed our vision, the more refreshed we feel.

WHAT TO DO: Look around the room, noticing what's around you. But, as you do so, let a feeling of softness come into your eyes. Try to take as much in as you can from the periphery of your vision, while also noticing what's in front of you. This should have the effect of instantly relaxing your mind and thoughts.

EASING TENSION

'Low-level stress leaves your body in a constant state of fight or flight, where adrenaline is pumping and you push your body too hard,' says GP Dr Jane Flemming. 'Biologically, digestion, memory, mood and immunity all suffer.'

Navigating the constant pressures of modern life is all about pacing. 'You can cope and even flourish on low-level stress as long as you give yourself regular stress breaks, which all the body to replenish and heal,' says holistic health consultant Amanda Jennings. 'The trick is not to let it go so far that you develop low mood, anxiety, sleeping difficulties and health problems.'

Jennings recommends using two or three stress-busting techniques regularly, as often as you need, to prevent stress as well as reduce it. 'Train your nervous system to remain relaxed even when you're up against it. Then, when you really do get a shock, your nervous system should be better equipped to handle it.'

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Stress Aids

HELP WITH STRESS



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