

EAP Newsletter – May 2026

Relaxation Methods That Really Work

Everyone has stress and feels its effects. Short-term effects of stress include headaches, shallow breathing, trouble sleeping, anxiety, and upset stomach. Long-term (chronic) stress can increase your risk for heart disease, back pain, depression, constant muscle aches and pains, and a weak immune system.

Chronic stress can affect your emotions and behavior. It makes you grouchy, impatient, less enthusiastic about your job, and depressed.

To keep stress at a minimum and reduce its effects on your life, research shows it is helpful to find and practice healthy ways to manage it. Try these methods to see what works best for you.

Take a breath

Start by sitting up straight. Breathe in so your rib cage expands and then breathe out slowly. Breathing in this way relaxes muscles. This helps to reduce tension. It also reduces the likelihood of muscle and back pain.

You can focus on a word, a mantra, or even your breath by focusing on your nostrils. Feel the breath coming in and going out. What you're trying to do is put the focus on something other than your problems. Do this for 10 to 20 minutes, twice a day.



Relax slowly

Sit or lie down, if you can, and close your eyes. Starting at your head, tense your face by clenching your teeth and furrowing your brow. Hold the tension for 5 seconds, then release it.

Next, tense your shoulders by bringing them up to your ears. Hold for 5 seconds, then release. Tense your arm muscles and hold for 5 seconds, then release. Continue to tighten and release each group of muscles in your body until you reach your toes. Focus on the warmth and heaviness of your body as you relax. Breathe gently for a few moments and then open your eyes.

Visualize

Sit or lie down and close your eyes. For 5 to 10 minutes, imagine you're in a place you love. This may be the beach, the mountains, or the house you grew up in. Breathe slowly and deeply as you imagine what you see, feel, hear, taste, and smell in your special place.

Be patient

Be patient with yourself and with this process. It's important to find a method that works for you on an ongoing basis, not just when your life is out of control. Doing this regularly can give you a place of calm to return to when the going gets rough.

Ways to Protect Your Emotional Wellbeing

Maintaining your emotional wellbeing can feel like a balancing act at times. It's important to remember that when it comes to your wellbeing, everything is interrelated. Many of the topics below have a snowball effect—so by homing in on one area of your life, it can bring positive momentum to others as well. Here are some tips for protecting your emotional wellbeing.

Remember Your Purpose

Define what your purpose is and remind yourself each day. In Dan Buettner's book *The Blue Zones*, he distills life lessons from communities across the world with a high number of centenarians—people who live to 100 or more years old. One of the key takeaways: All these individuals had a reason to get out of bed in the morning.

Re-Examine Your Direction in Life

One area where people get a sense of purpose is from their job. If you've been feeling unhappy with the work you're doing or the direction your life is headed, you could brainstorm other options. What changes could you make to improve your personal satisfaction and emotional wellbeing?

Maintain Boundaries in Relationships

It's important to maintain boundaries with others. This includes family members, friends, coworkers, and anyone else you interact with. Boundaries can help strengthen relationships, as well as protect your sense of self and emotional state. You don't have to answer every text or phone call right away if you are busy or simply need a rest. Also, you can be supportive of others without taking on their problems.

Make Self-Care a Priority

Regular self-care is good for the soul and your overall wellbeing. Consider what is important to you and make time for that. You might feel like there aren't enough hours in the day, but most of us can carve out 10 or 20 minutes. Also, don't forget the importance of a good night's sleep on a regular basis.

Limit Your Media Use

An underrated factor that contributes to our emotional wellbeing is media consumption. Try spending less time scrolling on social media or the internet in general and instead, focus on actions you can take to better your own life. We all have limited time and mental bandwidth. Let's try our best to spend it with people we love and on things where we can affect the outcome.