



# Relax Daily

**CHALLENGE**  
Do something  
fun and relaxing  
each day.

## Requirements to Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Keep a mental or written record of how many minutes you engage in a relaxing activity each day. Record the activity on your monthly Health Challenge Calendar.
2. Read "Who needs to relax?" and "How to relax" below.
3. To complete the Challenge, do some relaxing activity at least 22 days this month.
4. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

Physical activity is a great way to diffuse stress energy.

## Who needs to relax?

Everyone feels the affects of stress in their life. As long as you are coping you are doing OK. When stress becomes excessive, however, your coping ability may become overwhelmed and you experience distress, a destructive process that damages both physical and mental health.

Unmanaged stress has been linked with increased risk of diabetes, fatigue, asthma attacks, hypertension, heart attack, stroke, high cholesterol, inflammation, infection, muscle tension, intestinal issues, heartburn or acid reflux, panic attacks, menstrual irregularity, erectile dysfunction, and abdominal obesity.

While lifestyle, genetics, and age play a role in how much abdominal fat a person has, stress also appears to be a contributing factor. Abdominal fat is related to poorer health, including greater risk of heart disease and diabetes. Even thin women are vulnerable to fat build-up in the abdomen when exposed to more stress than they can handle, according to a Yale University study. And the more life stress a woman is exposed to, the greater her chance of having abdominal fat.

Relaxing diminishes the impact unavoidable stressors have on you. This coping skill does more than make you feel less stressed. It breaks the stress cycle. It's effective in the treatment of high blood pressure, cardiac arrhythmias, chronic pain, anxiety, depression, headaches, low self-esteem, and more.

## How to relax

A study of more than 12,000 men at high risk for coronary heart disease found that taking regular annual vacations lowers the risk of death. Vacations may protect health by reducing stress – a known risk factor for many diseases – and according to the study authors, they may also be beneficial because they provide opportunities to engage in restorative behaviors such as exercise and interactions with family and friends.

More and more people are planning staycations – a vacation where you stay at home and explore your hometown. Ideas include backyard barbeques, visits of local museums, tossing a Frisbee in your local park, or swimming in your community pool. Whatever you do, don't turn your staycation into a garage-cleaning marathon. Use the time away from your job to play.

In addition to taking an annual vacation, it's important to find everyday ways to control tension or redirect the stress-energy you experience regularly. Various methods work for many people. Physical activity and lifting weights is a great way to diffuse stress energy and boost your mental and physical health. Aim for 30-60 minutes a day.

A favorite activity, hobby, or pastime you thoroughly enjoy can soothe tense muscles and give your mind a much-needed break. Some people take frequent short breaks throughout the day. Others devote 30-60 minutes daily in stress-reducing activities. Many people do both. There are innumerable fun activities that are relaxing and enjoyable:

- Stretch
- Enjoy a warm bath
- Listen to relaxing music
- Hike or walk in the park
- Phone a family member or friend
- Practice deep breathing





- Read a good book
- Play with the dog or cat
- Get a massage. If that's not possible, massage your own tense muscles
- Garden
- Learn yoga or tai chi
- Write in your diary
- Watch a funny movie
- Toss a ball with your kids
- Paint or draw or take photographs
- Read a joke
- Meditate or pray
- Tense and relax various muscle groups in your body
- Lean back in your office chair and picture yourself on a sunny beach on Kauai or other serene location



Learn to recognize your stress signals, and then incorporate whatever relaxation technique works for you. When you relax regularly, you will improve your mental and physical health, as well as build up your own immune system against stress.

## Too stressed to relax?

You can't avoid all stress, but you can limit your stress load. Here are some suggestions.

- Get enough sleep.** Aim for 7-9 hours.
- Eat right.** That means fueling your body with fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains.
- Eliminate stressors.** For example, if your commute to work is overwhelming, ask your boss about telecommuting or working flex hours so you can miss the heaviest traffic.
- Live within a reasonable budget.** Over-spending, accruing debt, charging items to your credit card when you don't have money to pay the bills are major causes of distress. Living "beneath your means" rather than "above your means" can help eliminate a lot of unnecessary worry and stress.
- Say "No" when necessary.** Only take on new challenge as you have the time, interest, and energy to do it well. If it's your boss who's asking you to take on more, ask which tasks should be done first in case there isn't time to do them all.
- Delegate.** When you find you have more to do than is humanly possible, ask others for help. For example, a working mom may need help with house cleaning chores and making dinner – tasks that family members can likely do. Or, if no one in your family can do them, hire out (e.g., hire a house cleaner or order a takeout dinner after a busy day).
- Make major changes one at a time.** Don't try to make several major changes at once, such as moving, taking a new class, and stopping smoking.
- Be nice to yourself.** Many of the demands that put people under the most stress are self-imposed, such as staying up late and being sleep deprived, bring work home every night, skipping meals, never taking a vacation, working every weekend, and perhaps drinking heavily and having to deal with hangovers the next day. Lighten up a little and learn to enjoy life. Don't expect perfection.
- Give yourself permission to relax.** Sometimes you might not value yourself enough to give yourself permission to take a much-needed break. If that's the case, engage in activities that will build your self-esteem. Read an informative book, take a course that will upgrade your job skills, or practice a hobby until you become an expert.
- Reach out to others.** Research consistently finds that people with a strong social support system of family and friends cope better with stress and crisis in life. You need the help, encouragement, and moral support from close family members and friends. Perhaps you can use a few of your daily relaxation minutes to build close relationships. It's a good investment in your health and happiness.

If you find yourself stressed out, talk to an understanding friend, your pastor, or a counselor. Enroll in a stress management class at your local hospital or community center.

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### Sources:

*American Psychological Association help center. 2010.*  
*National Institute of Mental Health. National Institutes of Health. 2010.*  
*Axmaker LW. WellAssured Guide to Managing Stress. 2007.*  
*Psychosomatic Medicine. Sept/Oct 2000; Yale University. Sep 2000.*





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## Instructions

1. Post the Health Challenge Calendar and daily fiber log where you will see them daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of minutes you spend relaxing each day. Use this calendar to also record your exercise program (min/day), weekly weight, and any other items you may want to track.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you spent 15 minutes or more doing something fun and relaxing. You must meet this goal at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this healthy practice for a lifetime of good health.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____		
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I did something fun and relaxing for 15 minutes or more

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking

## Other wellness projects completed this month:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

