



The Wellness Family

Dr. Heather Keeps You Informed

Reclaiming Your 20

Whether it's a packed day at work, a long list of family commitments, kids to run around all day for sports, cheer and music lessons, or a stack of bills to take care of, the average person lives a stressful life. While stress is probably unavoidable, taking a few minutes a day for yourself to un-plug and rejuvenate could make a huge difference.

The Dangers of Stress

While some stress is key for survival and studies have shown that not all stress is bad, many studies have shown that stress is probably more dangerous than you realize.

Emotional stress that stays around for weeks or months has shown to weaken the immune system and cause high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, fatigue and even heart disease. The American Institute of Stress says that there is a proven relationship between stress and heart disease.

Any stress that invokes the "fight or flight" response is dangerous and recent studies conducted by the American Psychological Association revealed that 73% of those surveyed regularly experienced psychological symptoms caused by stress. In addition, 77% of Americans also experienced physical symptoms such as fatigue, upset stomach, muscle tension, and headaches.

The Benefits of De-Stressing

A recent study from Massachusetts General Hospital found that as little as eight weeks of meditation not only helped people feel calmer but produced changes in various areas of the brain. Additionally, the Chopra Center says that meditation has shown to provide relief from stress and anxiety (meditation mitigates the effects of the "fight-or-flight" response, decreasing the production of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline), decreased blood pressure and hypertension, lowered cholesterol levels, increased production of the anti-aging hormone DHEA and helped with restful, restorative sleep.

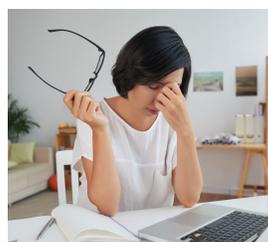
While meditation clearly provides many health benefits, it is not the only way to de-stress.

20 Minutes a Day the Usual Way

Despite busy schedules and hectic lives, it's important to take just 20 minutes a day to focus on you. There isn't much you can do to avoid the stresses of your life, but making 20 minutes a priority can make a big difference. Taking the time to just focus on you and something you enjoy, can recharge and help the rest of your day be more effective.

Of course, there are the tried and true options – these are the ways to de-stress that everyone knows about but probably don't regularly employ.

Meditation or Prayer – Whether in a yoga pose or not, taking a moment to just quiet your mind and rest can be rejuvenating. The most important part of meditating is quieting the noises in your environment; just shut down the inner thoughts that are trying to remind you of the million things you should be doing and just focus on your breathing or your prayers. Rest, quiet your mind, breathe and allow yourself 20 minutes to meditate or pray.



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Yoga – Speaking of yoga poses, this is a great way to spend 20 minutes a day. Whether you're a pro or have never done yoga in your life, spending some time focusing on specific poses will give you a break from the pressures of your schedule and the stress it causes.

Exercise – Generally speaking, any kind of exercise for 20 minute a day is going to be good for you. Whether it's going for a walk, doing yoga, stretching or Pilates, it's going to be beneficial. A strenuous routine at the gym or 5-mile jog may even be beneficial to de-stress – if that's what you enjoy doing. Remember that your goal here is to de-stress, if the exercise you choose to do is enjoyable then fine but if you're using this break to push yourself to exhaustion doing something you hate, that might defeat the purpose.

Reading – If this is your pleasure then do it. Grab a good book, go hide in a comfy corner of the house and read a few chapters, allowing the book to transport you away from your busy schedule and stress-filled day. It's probably a good idea not to use your phone or other electronic reading device; the point is to unplug and refresh and this is probably easier done with a good, old-fashioned page turner.

Writing/Journaling – This is another option that is going to be perfect if you're one of those people that enjoy doing it. If writing isn't your thing then this will probably be more stressful than helpful. If you're going to be spending the 20 minutes making a list of all the things you should be getting done, then this isn't the plan for you. However, if you want to make a list, consider writing

down all the things for which you're grateful. An attitude of gratitude has been proven to reduce stress.

20 Minutes a Day the Un-Usual Way

With the goal being to do something for yourself and the result being a rested and rejuvenated spirit, there really isn't a limit to what you can choose to do. If on the other side of your 20 minutes, you're feeling calmer, quieter and ready to tackle the next thing on your list then it doesn't really matter how you spend that 20 minutes. The following are some unusual options.

Arts and Crafts – If you've got little ones at home that aren't going to allow you 20 minutes to breathe, much less breathe alone, then this could be the option for you. Arts and Crafts can mean anything from cutting paper and pulling out the glue sticks to a few coloring books and crayons. The goal is to de-stress, so Play-Doh and paints might not be the way to go depending upon the ages of your children. Making a mess to clean up later is something to avoid.

Walk in the Park – Another great idea if there are little ones at home that won't give you a moment alone, a recent study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Health Research* said that a 20-minute visit to the park will improve well-being even if you're doing nothing but taking a quiet stroll.

Aquariums and Lava Lamps – Focusing on random patterns can be distracting and calming. Similar to someone with sensory issues that plays with a fidget spinner, sitting quietly and watching something in motion for an extended period of time can be therapeutic. The only requirement is that you focus on what you're watching and try to keep any stressful thoughts at bay.

Blast Your Favorite Music – If you find yourself in a day where there isn't time to get away then at least blast your favorite music while you're checking something off your

to-do list. Perhaps you're cooking dinner for your family, or driving your kids to little league, or running to the dry cleaners, allow yourself a mood elevating dose of your favorite music. Research has shown that music improves cognitive performance and reduces stress.

Pamper Yourself – A facial, a massage, a relaxing bath, or even a nap, find something that you can do for yourself. Anything that you find refreshing and beneficial that can be done in 20 minutes.

Plan a Vacation – Really. A study published in the *Journal of Applied Research in Quality of Life* showed that the largest boost in happiness came when planning a vacation. It's not necessary to actually go on the vacation; the act of planning one boosted happiness for eight weeks, whereas shortly after the vacation was over happiness returned to baseline.

The Chiropractic Factor

You may be asking yourself, "Why does my Chiropractor even care about my stress levels?" The answer to that question is a simple one: stress affects your spine. Stress causes the muscles in your back, shoulders and neck to contract, and the longer they are contracted the more damage they are doing to your spine. As the spine shifts, the interference to your spinal cord causes additional health problems.

Perhaps you're thinking that 20 minutes a day all to yourself seems selfish or lazy. It's not selfish and it's not lazy, it's good for you and it will help you be a better you. Research has shown that those who take short breaks from responsibilities to focus on themselves are actually more productive; you'll be a better parent, better partner, better employee... and less stressed.



*Dear Patient,
Dr. Heather is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.*

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