

5-Minute Stress Fixes



Whether you're anxious about the hectic holiday season, frustrated by an endless list of chores, or upset over an argument with a loved one, you don't have to let stress get the best of you. All you need is five minutes to escape life's frantic pace and regain your composure. Here, quick tips for conquering stress in your most distressing moments;

Running late?

You overslept, hit traffic, and are dashing into an important meeting 15 minutes late — again. Instead of spinning into an anxious frenzy, press your inner pause button and ask yourself, *what's another five minutes when I'm already late?* There's no point worrying about something you can't change. Then take slow, deep breaths and seek solace by letting your mind wander to a better place (like your last vacation) or making a mental list of things you're grateful for. This will help you get back in touch with what's most important and keep you from rebounding through the day on overdrive.

Overwhelmed by others' needs?

Somewhere between juggling demands from your high-maintenance boss, your meddling mother-in-law, your distraught girlfriend, and/or your bickering kids, slip away for a moment — either by ducking into an empty room or just closing your eyes — and draw an imaginary circle around yourself to create your own private island. Use your senses to distance yourself from reality: "See" a cloudless blue sky, "feel" the warmth of the sun, and "taste" that creamy piña colada. Within your circle of solitude, no one can enter or disrupt your inner peace and harmony. Keep this imaginary island as your own breathing room for safety whenever you feel engulfed by incessant pressures to be available to others.

Annoyed by difficult people?

We all encounter them: nosy neighbors, buttinsky relatives, rude grocery clerks. To insulate yourself from their irritating behaviors, first acknowledge how you're reacting (for example, your fists may clench while thoughts of how to escape race through your head). Recognizing your emotions enables you to develop strategies for soothing them, which in turn delivers a sense of calming control. Recite a calming self-affirmation, such as, "No matter how much she gets under my skin, I'll treat her with kindness." And have some good excuses prepared for escaping your next encounter, such as, "Sorry — gotta go. I'm expecting a phone call."

Second-guessing yourself?

Our minds are often plagued by self-defeating thoughts that start with phrases like "I can't," "I'll never," and "If only." The next time your inner critic pipes up, follow these steps to silence it: Close your eyes, breathe mindfully, and reflect on a time when you were surprised by your own strength (maybe it was when you gave birth or quit your job to find a better one). "Remembering past moments when you trusted yourself will guide you toward feeling comfortable with your decisions now.

Falling behind?

Joy to the world? Not when you're last-minute holiday shopping. Instead of swearing that you'll never procrastinate again, try making a two-column to-do list. On one side, list the high-priority tasks in order of importance; in the other column, jot down the things that can happen tomorrow or the next day. This will help you formulate a plan, and when you realize that there are things that can actually wait; your load will seem less demanding. As you complete each task on your list, cross it off with a colorful Sharpie. This visual affirmation of accomplishment is soothing, and learning how to tackle stress before it paralyzes you is your ticket to overcoming it.