

## 26 stress-reducing strategies you can practice today



Many people who live with multiple sclerosis believe that [stress](#) aggravates their [MS symptoms](#). While research hasn't proven this directly, it is true that during times of stress, more energy is required to think, solve problems and handle daily life. Any difficulty, including MS symptoms, may be more challenging. Stress may also add to a feeling of overwhelming [fatigue](#), already one of the most burdensome symptoms of MS.

For these reasons, techniques and habits to reduce stress might be particularly beneficial for you. While you probably practice many of the strategies below already, some may be new to you. Choose a few to experiment with. They could make a difference in how you feel.

### **Organizational strategies for reducing stress**

Whole sections of bookstores — not to mention entire stores — are dedicated to organization, for good reason. A few simple adjustments in your household arrangements or in your daily habits can go a long way in heading off last-minute frustrations. If you're feeling stressed out on a daily basis, consider taking the following steps:

- Make an extra set of keys.
- Keep your telephone/address directory up to date.
- Schedule your car maintenance appointments ahead of time and put them on your calendar.
- Follow a schedule for home maintenance (cleaning out rain gutters, replacing air

conditioner filters and switching out smoke alarm batteries).

- Keep an extra supply of items you use all the time, such as toilet paper, batteries, stamps and change for the bus.
- Carry a notebook, smartphone or tablet to write yourself — and others — notes for errands to run, chores to do or emails to write.
- Make a 3/4 rule: Fill the gas tank when it is 3/4 empty; order more medication when it is 3/4 gone; replace juice when the quart is 3/4 empty.
- Have a go-to easy recipe and keep the ingredients on hand for times when you don't feel like cooking or shopping. Pro tip: Check out one of our favorite easy recipes such as [succotash](#) or [gazpacho](#).

## Scheduling tips

New ways of managing time can make a big difference.

- Make backup plans for complicated or unpredictable situations. Pick a place to meet if your party gets separated, for instance.
- Do the unpleasant things on your list early in the day so that you don't have to worry about them.
- Schedule rest periods. (You may want to set an alarm to tell you that it's time to rest.) Knowing that you are going to rest on a regular basis may stop you from feeling guilty when you do it.
- Try to do something you enjoy each day.

PLEASURABLE ACTIVITIES		
 <p>Talk to a friend, talk on the phone, meditate or pray</p> <p>Sing, take a nap, daydream</p> <p>Play cards, listen to music, work a jigsaw puzzle, watch a movie or favorite TV show, read a magazine</p>  <p>Sit in a garden, spend time with a pet</p>	 <p>Enjoy a cup of coffee, soak in a bath</p> <p>Try a new recipe, play an instrument</p>  <p>Visit a library, go to a museum, visit a flower market</p> <p>See a movie or a play, take yourself out to lunch</p> <p>Sit in a park, people watch</p> 	 <p>Take a walk, go birdwatching, go to a yoga class, shoot some pool</p> <p>Go to the gym, play a sport, take a hike</p>  <p>Listen to a podcast, do a crossword puzzle, watch a ballgame</p>  <p>Go fishing, go camping, take a trip</p>

## Shifts in mindset to reduce stress

Stress often evolves from the way we interpret situations and the way we relate to the world around us. If you always expect the worst to happen, have difficulty making everyday decisions and experience ongoing worry and distraction, you might consider how you can change your mindset.

The examples below show thought patterns that increase stress and ways to reframe them:

- You think “total failure” whenever you fall short of absolute perfection. (Alternative: “I did a pretty good job. I’ll do it better next time.”)
- You feel responsible for everything, thinking things like, “I wonder what I did to make him feel like that?” (Alternative: “I am not the center of everyone’s world.”)
- You often use the word “should” in your thoughts: “I should be treated fairly.” (Alternative: “I’d like to be treated fairly, but ...”)
- You think: “I probably won’t be able to do that ... no use trying.” (Alternative: “I’ll give it a try and see how far I can go.”)
- You think in all-or-nothing ways: “I messed that up. I’ll mess up everything.” (Alternative: “I am not very good at that, but I’m good at many other things.”)

### **Get help**

If you’re like many people, you might prefer to do things yourself rather than ask for help. The truth is, everyone benefits from help from time to time, and most people are happy to be of service. Consider how you frame your request. See what resources you already have in your life, including the Society.

- Make your requests for help as specific as possible: “Would you please help me by ...”
- Use [support](#) and education services. Let the experiences of others help you solve problems — and share your experiences to help others.
- Investigate and use gadgets, aids and devices that save time or effort.
- Consider hiring outside help when you can, including possibly a [caregiver](#).

### **Mindfulness strategies to reduce everyday stress**

Mindfulness isn’t only for people with lots of free time. It can be something that you incorporate into your daily routine. With these tips, you can practice mindfulness in small ways throughout the day:

- Do one thing at a time. Don’t think about the next task before you have finished the one you are working on. Let yourself feel a sense of accomplishment before moving on.
- Try a new route for your commute from time to time.
- Sit quietly for a minute or two before starting your meal. Say grace if you wish, or just notice — really notice — where you are, what you are eating and who you are with.
- If you find that you are breathing in a short, shallow pattern, it’s time to take a break. That style of breathing often comes with stress. To break the pattern, sit down for a minute. Take deep, slow breaths and relax all your muscles.
- Notice the water when you’re washing your hands. Let it wash your cares down the drain.

For more on stress and the strategies that help tame it, read “[Out-stressing Stress](#).”

*Editor’s note: This article has been adapted from a brochure written by Frederick Foley,*

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