The Art of Stress Relief

Tips and Tricks to Help Manage Your Stress Levels

National Association of Housing Cooperatives
Annual Conference 2019

www.csi.coop
Introduction

• There are many factors that contribute to stress in our daily lives. It is important to manage your stress before it wears you out and runs you down. As cooperators, it is important that we enjoy the work that we do on a daily basis. In this workshop, we will look at some ways to keep your stress levels down and your spirits up!
Dancing and Shaking

• The quickest way to relieve stress is to release endorphins through exercise.

• An easy way to do this is through shaking and dancing, a form of expressive meditation that loosens your joints and clears your mind.

• Don’t feel the need to follow any specific dance moves. Anything that gets you energized. Allow the music to move you!
Wrist Exercises

• One of the most common places that we hold stress and tension in our wrists.

• A simple wrist exercise to release tension is to hold your right hand out with your palm facing down. With your left hand, pull your fingertips on your right hand back slowly and easily. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then repeat with the left hand.

• When you’re finished, shake both hands to release any extra stress and cortisol! (Cortisol is the hormone that helps your body respond to stress)
Breathing Exercises

• Breathing exercises can help you relax because they make your body feel like it does when you are already relaxed.
• Deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body. When you breathe deeply, it sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax.
• Taking a deep breath triggers neurons in your brain to tell your body it is time to relax.
Breathing Exercises

• There are two types of breathing to help relieve stress and anxiety, depending on how you are feeling and which part of the nervous system is affected:
  – Dorsal (stomach region): short breaths
  – Ventral (chest region): elongated breaths

• A great way to practice elongated breaths is through a technique called “box breathing”. Close your eyes and think about drawing a box while you’re inhaling. Count to four while drawing the box and do the same when you exhale. This will keep your breaths controlled and consistent. Repeat 4 to 5 times.
“Hand-on-Heart”

• When you’re feeling stressed or anxious, one simple way to calm your nervous system is by practicing the “hand-on-heart” technique.

• Simply place your hand in the center of your chest and hold it there for 20 to 30 seconds.

• When we do this exercise, the warm, safe touch of our hand on our heart center begins to activate the release of oxytocin, the brain’s hormone of safety and trust, bonding and belonging, calm and connect. There are neural cells around the heart that communicate directly with the brain and more quickly begin the activation of the release.
Meditation

• There are four main reasons people meditate:
  – Emotional, mental, physical, or spiritual development
• Benefits include:
  – Stress reduction, increase creativity, pain management, emotional consciousness, relaxation, increase energy, mental clarity, and greater self-awareness

www.csi.coop
Meditation

• There are two basic types of mediation:
  – Concentration meditation – your attention is focused on a single object.
  – Mindfulness meditation – the meditator focuses on mental states, moods, and feelings that occur spontaneously.

• Concentration meditation is suggested for beginners. However, every person is different and what is easier for one person may not be easier for another.
Meditation

- Keys to a peaceful meditation:
  - Pick a focus for concentration
  - Find a quiet environment and comfortable position
  - Breathe slowly and naturally
  - Don’t worry about how you’re doing
  - Meditate for 10-20 minutes at a time

www.csi.coop
Blow Bubbles

- Blowing bubbles is a great stress-relieving activity because it is not only beneficial, but it is fun!
- The activity requires you to breathe deeply, which literally forces your body to relax.
- Blowing up balloons has a similar effect. Plus, balloons last longer than bubbles, so you can use them to decorate your home or office!
Random Act of Kindness

• Giving to others activates your brain’s relaxation responses, which is why being kind is great when you’re stressed.
• Try volunteering or performing a random act of kindness for either a stranger or someone you don’t know well.
• In 2014, a customer at a Starbucks in Florida asked the cashier if they could pay for the car behind them in the drive-thru. The next car did the same. The “pay-it-forward” chain lasted from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and 368 customers in a row participated.
Go Outside

• It isn’t good to stay inside looking at the same four walls all day.
• Get out of the co-op and let the sun shower you with vitamin D to reduce your blood pressure!
• Still feeling stressed? Go outside and look for shapes in the clouds to help distract your from your troubles.
Read

• Reading is a great way to reduce stress in your everyday life.
• You have the ability to take yourself to another world through the words on a page and take your mind off of your stressors.
• Visit your co-op library and check out a fantasy novel, a biography, a thriller, and more to help you disconnect from the world for a little while!

www.csi.coop
Journal

- Keeping a journal allows you to be honest with yourself, which helps with stress relief.
- It allows you to unplug and get all of your thoughts out of your head that you may have bottled up.
- Journaling also helps reduce stress by helping you to problem solve. You may have stressors that you didn’t even know you had until you began writing.
- It will also help track down the source of your stress.
- Lastly, journaling helps you to track your progress. If you continue to get your thoughts down on paper, you will be able to see your self-progression.
“Stress Less” Exercise

• When you are feeling overwhelmed or like your “to-do list” is never ending, take control of your stress by writing down every stressor that you have.

• There’s no better feeling than watching your stresses go away or crossing something off your list.

• If you ever feel like you’re carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, write down everything that is stressing you out on a piece of paper. Once your list is complete, RIP IT TO SHREDS! This will help you release tension and ease your mind. There are only so many hours in a day and you can only do so much!
Laughter

• As we all have heard, “laughter is the best medicine.”
• Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, which ultimately helps your resistance to disease.
• Laughter triggers the release of endorphins (the body’s natural “feel-good” chemical).
• Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.

www.csi.coop
Lavender

- Lavender – is excellent for naturally calming anxiety and reducing stress. Also, known to alleviate insomnia. A recent study showed that the medicinal properties of lavender enter the blood stream in as little as five minutes. You can do this by either using the essential oil, candle or spray. Lavender is also available fresh or dried.
Brain Games

• Brain games are a great way to exercise your mind and keep you mentally strong.
• Examples of brain games include crossword puzzles, Sudoku, word searches, logic puzzles, riddles, etc.
• How can you benefit from brain games?
  – Improve memory
  – Enhance reaction time
  – Enable faster thinking
  – Increase concentration levels
  – Learn to strategize and plan

www.csi.coop
Brain Games

• Another way to not only exercise your brain, but to keep your mind healthy and stress-free, is to set daily goals. For example, make a goal chart like the one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>SATURDAY</th>
<th>SUNDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think about the people</td>
<td>Do a craft, color, draw, or</td>
<td>Repeat a positive affirmation throughout</td>
<td>Carry yourself like a happy person.</td>
<td>Practice mindful meditation.</td>
<td>Focus on your breath.</td>
<td>Take some time for yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that are most important</td>
<td>journal.</td>
<td>the day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to you.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image5.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image6.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image7.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

www.csi.coop
How Art Can Help Relieve Stress

• “The British Association of Art Therapists defines art therapy as:

  ...a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of communication. It is practiced by qualified, registered Art Therapists who work with children, young people, adults and the elderly.[4] Clients who can use art therapy may have a wide range of difficulties, disabilities or diagnoses. These include, for example, emotional, behavioral or mental health problems, learning or physical disabilities, life-limiting conditions, brain-injury or neurological conditions and physical illness.”
Get Crafty or Color

• Expressing yourself creatively is a great way to distract yourself from stressors.
• The relaxation that coloring provides lowers the activity of the amygdala, the basic part of our brain that is involved in controlling emotion that is affected by stress.
• What does this mean? Coloring has a de-stressing effect because when we focus on a particular activity, we focus on it and not our worries.
• It also brings out our imagination! Use this form of relaxation to enter into a more creative, freer state of mind.
• You can color to de-stress in a quiet environment with calming music or with a group of friends.
• If coloring isn’t your thing, try creating a vision board. It may help you realize what is most important to you in life.

www.csi.coop
Music Doodle Exercise

• For this exercise, we are going to play a song and you are going to have 60 seconds to draw what you hear.
• Be creative! Start drawing the first thing that comes to mind when the song begins and see where your imagination can take you!