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WAYS TO
LET GO OF
STRESS

How to CULTIVATE CALMNESS

If you've had enough of the stress caused by the ever-faster merry-go-round of modern life, it could be time to consider our expert ideas on managing frazzled nerves, compiled by **Rachel Roberts**

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDRII LUTS'KYI / ASCENT X MEDIA



7 FRESH AIR

Being cooped up all day inside can really take its toll on you, physically and mentally. So try to get outside for some fresh air at least once during your working day. Whether it's eating lunch outside or going for a walk, this will get you moving and give your eyes a break from constantly looking at a screen. If you can do this with friends or colleagues, that's even better because you can encourage each other to get outside, plus doing an activity together builds better, more resilient relationships. Kira Mahal, personal trainer and founder of Reset LDN (resetldn.com)



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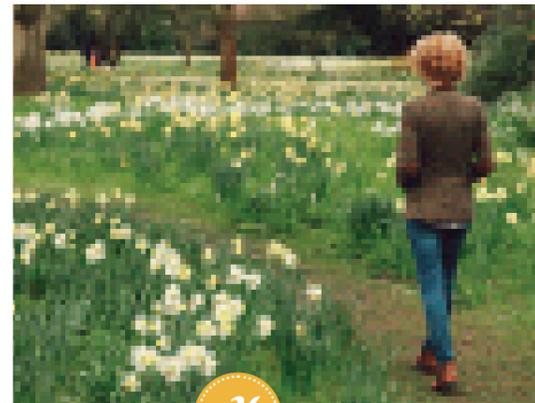
Tap into reflexology

With stress being so prevalent in our active urban lives, reflexology is a wonderful way to unwind, calm a busy mind and tap into the body's innate healing wisdom. When you have reflexology, you stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system and enter a state called 'rest and digest'. In this state, your heart rate slows, digestive activity is increased, the body stops pumping out stress hormones and the body has a chance to heal. You have an hour of calm and enter a meditative-like state. I believe that reflexology is the perfect antidote to our overly busy modern lives. **Serena Louth, Women's wellness expert and reflexologist. serenalouth.com**

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3 Pick up your knitting

The rhythmic movements of knitting induce a meditative-like state plus a sense of deep relaxation. Research shows that the more frequently people knit (more than three times a week), the happier and calmer they report feeling. Regular knitters will experience a familiar, comforting sense of instant calm when they pick up their needles. Combine this with knitting's portability and it gives you a powerful tool to manage stress and anxiety wherever you are, whenever you need it. Choosing a yarn for its tactile qualities and in a colour you love will enhance the feelgood experience. **Betsan Corkhill, author of Knit for Health & Wellness: How to knit a flexible mind & more. Betsan.org (Betsan shares her life lessons on p114)**



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Let it go!

In my experience, a great way to get stress relief is to learn to recognise when you're trapped in rumination mode. Ruminating while in a low mood impairs problem solving. People often believe that overthinking will lead to light-bulb moments and problem-solving insights. It generally doesn't. If you're finding it hard to stop overthinking, try some distraction techniques such as going for a walk, taking several deep breaths or picking up the phone to talk to a friend for a few moments. It will help reduce your physiological stress and shift your attention. **Alice Boyes, author of The Anxiety Toolkit**

5 SHRED YOUR YOGA

When it comes to releasing negative stress, as a lifelong yoga teacher, I can tell you that slowing down doesn't always work. At least, not at first. Sometimes, the answer is to get even fiercer than your stress in order to tame it.

High Intensity Interval Training, or HIIT, with its purposefully challenging hills and valleys of activity, might seem like the antithesis of relaxing and the polar opposite of yoga. But surprisingly, they are perfect counterparts.

HIIT does everything yoga doesn't: it gets your heart rate way up and works fast-twitch muscle fibres to define you. You begin releasing old toxins and body fat through deep exhales, so you literally feel lighter and cleaner. This intense form of exercise also optimises your deep DNA repair and cardio health far more than a slower flow yoga class can. Better oxygen intake means more healing and an efficient metabolism on all levels.

All of this helps you relax and recharge, especially when you blissfully hit Savasana! **Sadie Nardini is founder of The Yoga Shred®, a joint-safer, mindfully fierce HIIT + yoga fusion style. fitfierceclub.vhx.tv/videos/ak-day-17-core-strength-transformer-flow**





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Be mindful of your drinking

Alcohol's effects on our brains are complex and contradictory. While alcohol is a sedative and can relax us in small quantities, it also prompts the release of adrenaline and noradrenaline, which we associate with feelings of anxiety and stress. So drinking to unwind can make our stress worse. Having a chilled glass of wine (or whatever your chosen drink is) to de-stress is a habit we've learned, but we can rethink our relaxation routines. For many of us, drinking gives us time away from the day's pressures. The rituals we use to unwind are even more effective alcohol-free. Getting home can be a chance to enjoy some quiet time in a safe space, so we can allow ourselves to breathe. Meeting friends can be an opportunity to share the stresses of the day, as we laugh together and find a new perspective on our challenges. These moments of calm and connection are the best stress-relievers and they are ours to enjoy... without a drop of alcohol. **Dru Jaeger is co-founder of the mindful drinking movement, Club Soda (joinclubsoda.com) and co-author of *How to Be a Mindful Drinker: Cut down, stop for a bit, or quit.***

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BEAT A RETREAT (REGULARLY)

Sometimes, it can feel like you are looking after everyone else in your life, leaving precious little time to focus on you. This can lead to feelings of overwhelm and stress. A meditation retreat day is the perfect way to take some time out for you: a place to switch off and unwind. It is the ultimate in self-care as it is an opportunity to reset, recharge and reconnect with yourself. During my one-day retreats, you step into a relaxing environment which is conducive to feeling you have stepped out of your everyday life. Through mindfulness and meditation techniques, you have the opportunity to release the tension and stress from your body, mind and emotions, review your mindset, plus encourage yourself to be much more in the moment. An increasing number of people are seeing a retreat day not as a special treat, but as a regular necessity to counter-balance the stress of life. **Sarah Presley runs one-day mindfulness meditation retreat days. Sarah Presley, Mindfulness Meditation and Reiki expert (sarahpresley.co.uk)**



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Give yourself a talking to

This is called 'self-distancing' in psychological circles and has been proved to help lower stress levels. Say you've got an anxiety making event on the horizon, like an interview for a job you really want to land. Instead of saying 'I feel nervous', use the third person. So, 'Daisy feels nervous'. While it might sound a little strange, it works by giving you a pause and space to simply observe the emotions. Research has shown that practising self-talk really can help soften stress. Our tip? Don't do it out loud in the lift on the way to the actual interview...



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PUMP IT OUT

When we are stressed or are under extreme overwhelm, our body goes into a fight or flight state. It feels like we are in survival mode, which can be life-saving if we are in a life-threatening situation, but which can be burdensome in non-life-threatening social situations. Stress manifests in different ways in different people. Some somatize it in the body and feel pain and tension, others become emotionally challenged or unable to sleep because their mind is racing and overactive. So when you're needing to let go of stress, try a technique that engages both body and mind in order to be effective. I love a Sophrology exercise called The Pump, where you stand tall with arms at your sides. Notice where your stress is located in the body. Now clench your fists and exhale through your mouth, then inhale through your nose and hold the breath. As you hold the breath, pump your shoulders up and down until you need to exhale again. As you exhale vigorously, release your arms and hands and feel the immediate lightness and stress relief. Repeat for a few minutes until you feel rebalanced. **Dominique Antiglio, Sophrologist (be-sophro.com)**





FLOAT AWAY ON A CLOUD OF PERFUME

The Renaissance treatment by LUSH is a perfume experience for the mind and soul, inspired by how fragrance was used during the Renaissance period for medication and meditation to help bring balance. Feeling stressed and anxious on a daily basis can be incredibly draining, so I was particularly excited to try out this brand new treatment. It began with the therapist choosing a specific fragrance to reflect how the last week had made me feel. My fragrance was called Nero, a regal scent with fresh green notes and ingredients included neroli, bergamot and petitgrain oil. The gentle head, neck and shoulder massage and the hot-towel body treatment was deeply relaxing and the whole treatment was accompanied by Renaissance-inspired music and rounded off with a bespoke perfumed drink. I left feeling cleansed and peaceful, with significantly reduced stress and anxiety levels. **£75 for 40 minutes, uk.lush.com. Amy Potter, Social Media Editor, Planet Mindful**



Create a mini Zen garden

When work deadlines are piling up, don't always reach for the biscuit tin as your default habit. Desktop Zen gardens are cute scaled-down versions of typical Japanese gardens. All you need is a bowl or container to fill with your own selection of tiny plants, pebbles and sand. The making of the garden is a mindful act in itself, so will instantly reduce stress levels. You can up the meditative aspect of your garden by using a miniature rake to swirl patterns in the sand. Stuck for ideas? You'll find an abundance of charming and simple projects at **thegardenglove.com**



Find your anchors of calm

Using self-hypnosis and NLP in my daily life helps me to stay calm and relaxed. It's no good being a hypnotherapist and NLP master practitioner if I can't walk the talk. When I go for my daily stroll (or outdoor swim in summer), I put myself in a light trance, giving myself positive affirmations and using soothing self-talk. Preparing while on the move helps avoid stressing. I use anchors of calm before giving a presentation. This involves visualising the situation in advance;

I see and hear myself giving the perfect talk/workshop and choose how I want to feel in that moment. That way, I feel mentally prepared. I work towards my goals in life by truly imagining how the future will look, sound, smell and even taste – and how I will feel when I've achieved those goals. Imagination is far stronger than willpower. Perhaps you could try it and see? **Hilary Norris-Evans, hypnotherapist and NLP master practitioner. Getmindfit.co.uk**