



Yesterday I was *clever* so I wanted to change the world.  
Today I am *wise*, so I am changing myself  
- Rumi



# Express Tips for Stress Free Living

by Helen France, NDP's resident yoga and meditation expert.....

**Why is stress so bad?** Unfortunately stress and a corporate lifestyle seem to go hand in hand. Between all the conflicting priorities, email overload, demanding bosses and headstrong co-workers, do you feel like there never seems to be enough time? Is stress making you feel frazzled?

**Take control.** Here are my 5 express rituals and practical ways to help you live your life without stress. They have the ability to make you more productive and experience more happiness and inner calm. I have called them "express" as they require just a 5-10 minute commitment from you every day – a small investment in your wellbeing could be all you need to take control again.

## 1. Breathe

This exercise will direct energy around the body and remove the tension along the way. Over time, breath work can re-pattern your nervous system at a deep level. It allows your cells, tissues and organs to be at peak performance rather than in a state of depletion. It's clever stuff!

Lie down or sit comfortable and start to count your breath:

- ✦ Inhale to a count of 4
- ✦ Exhale for a count of 4
- ✦ Repeat this breathing cycle for 2 minutes. Then if you feel comfortable, move to adding a retention:
- ✦ Inhale to a count of 4
- ✦ Retain your breath for a count of 4
- ✦ Exhale for a count of 4
- ✦ Remain without breath for a count of 4

Repeat this rhythmic breathing cycle for 3 minutes then come back to normal breathing for 1 minute before ending the practice. If you feel uncomfortable at any point come back to regular breathing.

You can do this exercise at home, at work in your lunch break or on your the way to work. I practice it on the bus all the time – perfect for your stress toolkit!

## 2. Meditate with mala beads

Meditation can quiet your mind from the incessant questioning and self-doubt we all experience. I know meditation is challenging because of the immense amount of external stimulus we face but with practice you have the opportunity to experience a new view of the world – of happiness, harmony and inner peace.

**Prepare:** Before you start you may want to light a candle or burn some oil or incense. Specific oils and incense help calm the mind when you sit. You could use a symbol, picture or a statue as your point of focus. Find a quiet and warm place and make sure you are not going to be disturbed. You can sit on the floor using a meditation cushion, sit in a chair or you can lie down - being comfortable is what matters. Close your eyes.

Mala bead necklaces have 108 beads with a mother bead. They are used as a tool to help you focus inwards during meditation. Simply count each bead (hold them in the right hand and count them between the thumb and the middle finger) until you reach the mother bead. Ignoring the mother bead, continue another round of counting. Continue for 5 minutes. The distraction of having something in your hand helps you remain focused for longer periods. The aim is not to stop your thoughts (as this simply isn't possible) but to let them be – just don't run off with them.

### 3. Stretch at your desk

Even if you practice yoga regularly, sitting at a desk all day is just not good for your body. The shoulder area is where stress is often carried, so this 2 minute shoulder roll can really help when the tension starts to mount in your day.

Sitting upright at your desk, inhale as you lift your right shoulder to your ear. Exhale as you slowly roll your shoulder around and back, dropping it away from your ear. Continue these shoulder rolls three more times, alternating right and left.

Now, inhale as you lift both shoulders up to the ears. Exhale as you release them. Repeat five times and then relax your shoulders.

Practice this exercise whenever you feel the stress might be starting to build.

### 4. Daily affirmation

Five minutes working with an affirmation can have a dramatic effect on your day.

I was apprehensive the first time I heard about it but it has really helped me connect back with the present moment and the real me. It wires you differently for your day ahead at work.

**Prepare:** Before you start you may want to light a candle or burn some oil or incense if this feels right to you. I find it makes the time feel more meaningful and symbolic. Find a quiet and warm place and make sure you are not going to be disturbed. You can sit on the floor using a meditation cushion, sit in a chair or you can lie down - being comfortable is what matters. You can bring your hands into prayer position at the heart if this feels ok for you, if not rest them on the knees palms facing up or down. Close your eyes.

Start by simply reciting an affirmation out loud or to yourself. Louise Hay and Marianne Williamson have some lovely ones that you can use. Here are some of my favourites from Louise Hay:

- ✦ I am open and receptive to all the good and abundance in the universe
- ✦ Today is a delightful day. Money comes to me in expected and unexpected ways
- ✦ I lovingly do everything I can to assist my body in maintaining perfect health

After your chosen affirmation, mentally recite the things you are grateful for today (e.g. having a warm bed, food on your table or whatever you are feeling today) and then list the people in your life you would like to send your love and compassion to you. It creates a wonderful feeling inside and over time changes the outlook for your day.



"Yoga doesn't take time,  
it gives time."

- Ganga White

### 5. Listen to some uplifting and spiritual music

Sound has the power to soothe your nerves, eradicate tension and to rejuvenate energy. Have a look on You Tube for my recommended list of singers below. They all offer a contemporary spin on spiritual music and are available for download in iTunes if you like what you hear.

The popular US born new age artist Krishna Das sings Indian devotional chanting in a western style. He has a powerful voice and is very uplifting.

For something a little different the spiritual MC yogi offers a cool mix of yoga mantra's and hip-hop. His quirky blend is fun and catchy.

Donna De Lory is best known as a backing singer to Madonna. She sings in Sanskrit (the ancient Indian language of the yogi's) and English. She and has some wonderful dance like remixes that sound modern and are easy to listen to.

German born Deva Premal has had numerous chart topping albums sung in English and Sanskrit. She has a divine voice and her music is relaxing and enchanting.

### What's next?

If one of more of these express tips resonates, why not commit to exploring it week and see what happens? You may notice a change straight away or it may take a few weeks of practice. Try and persevere as the results can be quite dramatic.

Remember, stress free living can come from a 5-10 minute investment out your day to help you start feeling more productive, calm and in control!

Namaste