

THE MOM OASIS PRESENTS: 20 EASY WAYS TO CREATE LESS STRESS &
MORE JOY TODAY!



The Mom Oasis

Peaceful Strategies for Finding More Time

👁️ Keeping Your Sanity 👁️
and Thriving in Work and at Home!



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Every action on this list has been shown through scientific research to be beneficial to health in mind, body and spirit!
They all have the ability to increase calm and happiness.
Go ahead and try one or more today!!

BREATHE

MOVE

OBSERVE

REFLECT

REFRAME

LAUGH

CONNECT

GIVE

PLAY

EXPRESS

NOURISH

SMILE

WRITE

SOOTHE

FORGIVE

PLAN

LIMIT

DELEGATE

MEDITATE

PRAY

CELEBRATE!

Please keep reading for instructions :)

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1. BREATHE

This may sound too simplistic...we all have to breathe and do it without thought, but breathing deeply can be one of the most powerful ways to create calm! When we intentionally focus on our breathing, we can slow ourselves down. This is essential to turn around the fight-or-flight response that kicks in when we are stressed.

Try deep "diaphragmatic" breathing. If you notice a baby or animal breathing, the stomach area will rise and fall. Many of us get in the habit of taking shallow breaths -just letting our chest rise and fall. If you put your hand on your stomach, try to imagine filling a balloon under your belly button and letting your hand rise. This will take some practice, but some say that correct breathing can be the "magic pill" for good health. When we breathe deeply, we get more oxygen to our body and brain and can experience many health and calming benefits!

2. MOVE

We all know that exercise is recommended – we may even know from personal experience how it has helped our mood, energy, focus, etc. However, we may not always make it a priority. Perhaps it would help to change our perspective. Sure, the most benefits come from consistent exercise that challenges your body, but there are benefits from any type of movement...it doesn't have to be "all-or-nothing".

What would be a fun way to move today? Would you dance to music in your room? Stretch when you wake up? Go for a walk out in nature? Take a few minutes to do some push-ups and sit-ups before bed? What would feel the best for your body today? Any kind of movement can help with stress, and you'll enjoy it if you choose something you like.

3. OBSERVE

Observing without judgement is a fundamental principle of mindfulness. Mindfulness is at the cutting edge of scientific research into stress management and increasing personal happiness, Take time to notice your surroundings and be present in the moment. Notice your breath, your emotions and what you experience at the moment with your 5 senses. Keep in mind that your observations are most calming with they are non-judgemental.

Acceptance and observing go hand in hand! (You will hear about this theme often with The Mom Oasis!). Taking time to pause and “observe what is” can be a very grounding exercise when our thoughts are racing and creating stress. When we can let go of the regrets of the past and the worries of the future and just notice and accept the present moment, we can find calm.

4. REFLECT

Take a moment to consider the things you have to be grateful for in your life. Some of the most exciting studies into authentic happiness and overcoming depression cite the powers of an attitude of gratitude.

Reflecting on positive memories and things to be grateful for in the present. Where we choose to focus our thoughts can have a huge impact on our mood. If I wake up and wonder what will go wrong and look for something to complain about, I will notice everything that goes wrong. However, if I am looking for things to be grateful for, I always seem to find many things! Have you heard of a gratitude journal? At the end of the day, reflect and find 1-3 things you have to appreciate in your life. You may find your focus changes and you find more joy!

5. REFRAME

Many situations in your day have the potential for triggering stress. Step back and consider if there is another way to look at or think about the situation. Consider being stuck in traffic: will it raise your frustration and ruin your day, or could it be a chance to practice relaxation, mindfulness, or just listen to your favorite music.

When someone doesn't call you back, do you always take it personally? When you get nine compliments and one constructive criticism, do you dwell on the one that feels negative? What potentially stressful situations would you like to reframe?

6. LAUGH

Did you know that laughter has been proven to be a fabulous stress reliever? When you laugh, your intake of oxygen is enhanced, your muscles are stimulated, the body's stress response is reversed and endorphins are released. Norman Cousins who healed a life-threatening illness with laughter stated, "...laughter is an antidote to apprehension and panic." Health care professionals are finding that laughter may indeed be the best medicine. Hospitals are incorporating laughter therapy and in some countries, laughing clubs are gaining popularity! (check out laughter club or laughter yoga on youtube.com. It may just get you laughing!)

Can you remember the last time you had a good belly laugh? Didn't you feel energized and then more relaxed? What could make you laugh today? Tickle tag with your kids? Your favorite funny movie? Reading comic strip books like *Calvin and Hobbes* or *The Far Side*? An Indian doctor who promotes laughter yoga states that you can "fake it" at first and still have the health benefits. Whatever brings out laughter in you....do it!

7. CONNECT

Who are your supports and those close to you? Having a caring social support network can make a huge difference in your ability to cope with stressors and to find meaning in your life. Whether you find support in a formal group (new mothers, AA, grief support, youth group at church) or with friends or family, we have less stress when we know we're not alone. We can share burdens and also have the joy and satisfaction of supporting others.

We all need to connect with others to feel fully alive. I'm guessing that your happiest moments probably involved connection in some way - either with people or in a spiritual sense with God, or your idea of a higher power. How can you connect today?

8. GIVE

When we express generosity, we often get back more than we give. One study found that individuals who volunteered reported an improvement in all six aspects of well-being; happiness, life satisfaction, self esteem, sense of control over life, depression, and physical health. How would you like to give of your time, resources or talents today? Consider finding a favorite cause if you don't already have one. Knowing that we can change a life or plant a small seed can be incredibly rewarding!

9. PLAY

What is a fun activity for you? Could you do something fun today with your friends or family that would get you laughing and caught up in the joy of the moment? Perhaps joining in with the kids on the playground, getting out a board game, or playing a favorite sport.

With active play, you'll have the benefits of exercise. With other play, you'll have the benefits of smiling and laughing! Even a board game, card game, word game or something similar will challenge your brain and be a positive skill to cope with stress. When we challenge ourselves and are persistent, we develop self-esteem. Even in play mode, challenges can result in benefits for our brain, our mood, and our sense of self which improves our happiness!

10. EXPRESS

Expressing our feelings and thoughts in an appropriate way can be critical for stress management. Whether you resolve a conflict with assertive communication (direct and respectful of the other person and yourself) or express emotions through the arts, you can prevent uncomfortable feelings from building up.

What are some of your preferred forms of expression? Do you dance, paint, or write poetry? Even if you don't think of yourself as

a creative person, you may benefit from childhood favorites such as coloring with crayons or creating with play-doh. Have you ever felt the therapeutic effect of immersing yourselves in a project? How can you express yourself today?

11. NOURISH

Nourishment can come in many forms. Is there a way you can choose healthy nourishment for your body today? Do you take time for basic self-care such as healthy foods and adequate sleep?

What nourishes you emotionally and spiritually? Does being out in nature “fill you up?” How about reading a great book, listening to an inspiring podcast, or attending a worship service? Depleting our resources, whether they be physical, emotional, or spiritual is a sure path to stress. How can you stay nourished today?

12. SMILE

Did you know that a simple smile could change your day? Science tells us that smiling releases endorphins and serotonin, helping us to feel good naturally. One study showed that a smile has more benefits than chocolate! Researchers at The British Dental Health Foundation found that the brain and heart activity of people who had just been shown pictures of smiling people was equal to having the stimulation of 2,000 chocolate bars...so smiling can help those around you!

Smiling uses fewer muscles than frowning and it can change our mood almost instantly. How about trying a half-smile right now. Soften and relax your face and allow the corners of your lips to turn upward slightly. This exercise is used by many mindfulness experts and it can bring on a feeling of calm and contentment.

Sometimes we need to change our body first, then the positive mood follows. It feels impossible to be irritated when you have a smile on your face. Try it! The next time you feel annoyed or stressed, notice what changes when you try a half-smile. If you practice a half smile (or relaxation techniques like breathing) on a regular basis, it will be easier to have that skill available when you most need it. Practice during pauses in your day like at a red light, or offer a genuine smile more often to friends, family or strangers.

13. WRITE

Have you ever kept a journal? Ever expressed yourself through poetry, a blog or a letter? Writing can be a great outlet for our emotions and can help us process and get clarity on an issue that might be adding stress or bringing our mood down. Even a simple list can help reduce stress. For example, a gratitude list changes your perspective and a to-do list keeps you focused and then content as you check off accomplishments.

If you struggle with worry or racing thoughts, one idea is to keep a notebook nearby - especially if you find it hard to sleep. Give yourself permission to worry for a specific, short amount of time.

Write your worries and then work to let go. Your writing may include a plan to address the worry or an alternate, more realistic thought if your worry is based on irrational fear. I encourage you to include positive ideas and outcomes as well. Optimism and pessimism are somewhat genetic, but we can cultivate optimism through writing. Positive thoughts re-wire the brain and actually release neuropeptides that help fight stress and improve our immune system. How could writing help you create more calm or joy today?

14. SOOTHE

Consider how you can soothe and comfort yourself or boost your mood with any or all of the five senses. Hearing: Is there music you find calming or invigorating? Touch: we all have the need for touch and snuggling with a pet or loved one changes our brain chemistry to induce feeling of calm and well-being. Could you give or accept a hug? Smell: aromatherapy is very powerful. Smells like lavender are calming and you may have other favorite scents found in a candle or lotion. Sight: take in the views in nature, pictures of loved ones, or notice things around you in a new way. Taste: find something you enjoy and savor the taste. Eating mindfully (slowly with awareness) can be nourishing, satisfying and relaxing. Try using all five senses the next time you have a favorite snack.

Perhaps you can assemble a calming kit (I often call this a “crisis survival kit” for my clients.) A preventative approach with the idea of regular relaxation will be most beneficial to decreasing your stress! You would put items that are soothing for all five senses

in one place. Ideas for a calming kit will be available on my resources page.

15. FORGIVE

Holding onto anger and resentment toward someone else, or hanging onto personal guilt, creates stress. Would you be willing to let go? Could you forgive someone who wronged you? Whatever hurt or offended you cannot be undone. However, you can choose how it will impact you in the present and future. Do you need to forgive yourself or let go of unfounded guilt? Sometimes we hold on to guilt even though we were not truly responsible for an event or someone else's choices. If you were responsible for a wrongdoing, is there someone for whom you need to ask forgiveness in order to forgive yourself?

When we choose to forgive, it doesn't mean that we minimize or justify a wrongdoing. When we forgive we can move forward and prevent bitterness from taking over our lives. There are amazing stories of those who were able to forgive unimaginable crimes, and their forgiveness led to empathy and compassion on both sides. Even if you don't receive the apology, recognition, or closure that you would like from another person, knowing that you were able to forgive and let go can bring powerful healing and peace. Lewis B. Smedes writes about forgiveness in his well respected book, "When we forgive, we set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner we set free is us."

16. PLAN

Be honest with yourself: Could planning have improved your stressful day? Of course many stressors are unexpected, but when we are rushed, forget something, or try to pack too much into a day, we add unnecessary stress. Planning with a calendar or date book can help.

Do you have a way to keep track of appointments and deadlines? Do you check it regularly? If there is a time of day or regular event that keeps tripping you up, how could planning help? Many who find mornings challenging discover they go more smoothly with planning the night before. Another example would be to write stress reducing activities such as exercise or a date night with your spouse in your datebook. A busy life has a way of squeezing out what is important for what becomes urgent. If you feel you spend much of your time “putting out fires” and never have time for the activities that are important and beneficial, start to plan ahead. Flexibility is important, but consider how planning could help you reduce stress and enjoy your life.

17. LIMIT

Do you fill your schedule too full? Do you have a hard time saying no? What in your life drains you or creates tension? First recognize what activities, people or things suck up your energy, then consider how you can limit those stressors. Say no to an extra volunteer opportunity someone else may enjoy. Limit exposure to

the news if it creates stress. Even people we love or worthwhile activities need limits. You may need to set boundaries with people you care about or be realistic with your time and your priorities. Where could limiting help you create more peace and joy?

The idea of limits can also be extended to our material belongings. We create stress for ourselves by having more “stuff” than we need. Do you need to declutter? Walking into a cluttered room can be emotionally draining and “too many” items can result in frustration or time wasted when those things are unorganized or misplaced. Think about how the things in your life take up time and energy. Certainly caring for our stuff can take up valuable time. Simplify!

18. DELEGATE

Unnecessary stress is created when we take on tasks that someone else could do and may even enjoy. Which responsibilities bring out the most stress for you? If housekeeping seems exhausting, could your children have regular chores? If meal planning stresses you out, who else could get involved? Do you always feel overwhelmed or behind at work? Evaluate the tasks in your day and honestly consider what is better delegated to someone else. This may involve giving up some control of the outcome (a child’s bed may not be made as neatly, a teammate may make mistakes while he or she learns), or you could be pleasantly surprised by giving or hiring away the duties you don’t enjoy to free up time to do what you love.

If a stressor for you is lack of time and too much on your to-do list, how could you delegate today? Asking for and accepting help might empower someone else and relieve stress for you!

19. MEDITATE

When you meditate, you reverse the physiological stress response and activate the relaxation response. Your breathing slows, blood pressure stabilizes and you have the health benefits of not being in a “fight-or-flight state.” Meditation, like exercise, doesn’t have to require blocks of time to offer benefits! Just take a few moments to quietly focus on your breath or your surroundings.

20. PRAY

The medical field has shown interest in how prayer results in physical and emotional benefits. Studies have show that those who pray and those with spiritual beliefs have profound health advantages, including longevity and fewer symptoms of stress and depression. Harold Koenig, author of *The Healing Power of Faith*, has spent over twenty years researching the power of belief and prayer throughout many religions.

With faith, comes a sense of hope and security: a feeling that one is not alone in the universe and there is a greater plan and purpose. Twelve step recovery groups, such as AA are based on the concept of a higher power. Spiritual beliefs are widely accepted as a

powerful element in healing and managing stress. I believe in a loving God, who wants to have a personal, life-changing relationship with us. Spending time in prayer helps to strengthen our faith and that relationship. Is prayer a regular part of your life? Are you willing to explore your faith and spiritual beliefs?

21. CELEBRATE (here's a bonus! :)

Be sure to notice and celebrate your progress! Create fun ways to reward yourself when you reach a goal or find any occasion to celebrate! I invite you to celebrate YOU just for being who you are. You are unique! You have a lot to offer your family and the world! When you are less stressed, more calm, and able to find joy in little things, you will enjoy your life and will be more fully able to make the difference you want in the lives of others!

CLOSING

I encourage you to choose some things on this list to try today and to make many (or all!) of them a regular part of your life. You may find you never see a potentially stressful situation the same way again! Here's to a healthy, joy-filled life!

I wish you peace and much joy!!

Warmly,

Michelle