

# 10 STRESS RELIEVERS FOR NURSES

When stressed, our brain stimulates our sympathetic nervous system which increases our heart rate, blood pressure AND the release of adrenaline and glucocorticoids. These chemicals in our bodies serve a purpose – to keep us alive when faced with danger. However, while releasing these chemicals helps you save patients' lives in a code situation, they are also released when you get your fourth admission of the day or find out you are working your entire shift with the queen bully!

Stress chemicals, primarily cortisol, can also damage your body if elevated for too long, leading to chronic toxic stress.

There are many, many proven strategies to reduce the stress response and release of cortisol. The following represents my personal favorites.

## 1. Power naps

Humans are actually physiologically programmed to take a nap halfway through their day. Most countries incorporate napping into their workday but in the United States, napping is frowned upon (ESPECIALLY in the workplace). However, napping for just 20 minutes recharges your battery giving you more energy, decreases your cortisol levels, and reduces stress.

## 2. Meditation

Humans have been practicing meditation for centuries as a way to quiet the mind. We KNOW meditation helps to reduce stress yet some people say they are way TOO stressed to sit quietly and meditate! Quieting your mind for just 10 minutes can provide hours of stress reduction.

## 3. Exercise

This is a no-brainer. We KNOW that exercise increases the release of endorphins – feel good chemicals in our brains like Dopamine, Serotonin, and Oxytocin. These chemicals are like stress Ninjas who slay stress hormones like Cortisol! Just 20-30 minutes of exercise daily is all you need to release the Ninjas!

## 4. Deep breathing exercises

Did you know that it's physiologically impossible for you to feel anxious while you are deep breathing? This is why many performers do a series of deep breathing exercises before they go on stage. Deep breathing works well before taking an exam too! Just three deep breaths is all you need.

## 5. Listening to music

Music tames the beast. That's because our brains are wired to respond to music. Music makes your life better.

## 6. Laughter

When you laugh, like exercise, you release endorphins that act as powerful stress busters!! And here's the good news – your brain doesn't know if you're laughing for real or laughing for fake. When you laugh, even if you just force yourself to laugh, you release magical stress fighting chemicals!



## 7. Eating healthy

We spend 50% of our energy digesting our food. But use MORE energy digesting processed, high fat, and artificially laden unhealthy foods. Eat real food – mostly plants – not a lot (Michael Pollan).

## 8. Asking for help

Why is it that we have to be martyrs and do everything ourselves or that by asking for help, we are admitting failure or that we are weak? Smart people ask for help to solve problems, get advice on how to handle complex situations, and they delegate appropriately to others.

## 9. Positive attitude

Attitude is a choice and so is your reaction to everything that happens to you – good, bad, or ugly. When you make the decision to maintain a positive attitude no matter what happens, your brain looks for a way to make that happen. Traffic jams become an opportunity to listen to an audio CD. Getting pulled to another unit gives you the chance to work with other amazing nurses.

## 10. Start a gratitude journal

Many successful humans swear that their lives changed when they started a gratitude journal. Every day, write down three things you are grateful for. Over time, you will FEEL more grateful, more positive, and less stressed. Start a journal today!

The key here is to recognize that chronic toxic stress may be negatively impacting your ability to have a successful, satisfying nursing career! Don't just sit back and complain about it. TAKE ACTION!

Take care and stay connected!

*Renee Thompson*