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abc3. Soothe Away Stress
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Source: Daryn Eller, Good Housekeeping, April, 1996.

As researchers learn more about the mind-body connection, they're realizing just how much anxiety threatens your health. "Stress hormones can ultimately lead to an increase in blood pressure, raised cholesterol levels and suppression of the immune system factors that can increase your risk of heart disease and other illnesses," says Dorene Loew, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Menlo Park, Calif.

To minimize stress attacks:

Have a good cry. When you feel the urge to break into tears, don't fight it. "Studies suggest that emotional crying may release stress-related chemicals as well as endorphins natural painkillers that can have a calming effect," explains William Frey, Ph.D., research director of the Health Partners Tear Research Centre. There's still a lot to be learned, but we do know that 85 percent of women feel better after they've cried," he said.

Take a walk. Pounding the pavement doesn't just burn off calories, it melts away stress.

"When demands are placed on you, your body responds by preparing itself for physical action," explains Matthew Burg, Ph.D., assistant clinical professor of medicine at Yale University School of Medicine and chief of health psychology section at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System.

"But it's rare that we actually complete that physical action, so tension builds up. " Walking briskly for about 30 minutes will increase your circulation, helping the body metabolize stress hormones more rapidly.

Reduce irritants. If you tend to get worked up when you're stuck in traffic or in line, your heart may be headed for trouble. "People who report getting angry often in everyday life situations, have higher death rates from coronary artery blockage, " says Redford B. Williams, MD, director of the Behavioral Medicine Research Center at Duke University. There's no short-term cure for zapping these feelings, but distraction can help soothe your soul.

Turn on a radio talk show if you're bumper-to-bumper, and carry around reading material for those times when you're waiting (and waiting and waiting) in line.

Breathe deeply. A fast way to subdue stress hormones, from Michelle Newman, Ph.D., affiliate assistant professor at the Stress and Anxiety Disorders Institute at Pennsylvania State University:

Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly. Breathe in deeply so that your belly balloons, but your chest stays still. Slowly exhale until your stomach empties. Repeat several times.

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