100 ways to relieve Stress and Self-Care

1. Watch something funny. Laughter really is the best medicine. It relieves physical tension, reduces stress and increases immunity... so watch your favorite comedy and laugh your way to tranquility.

2. Body Clench. This relaxation exercise may make you look a bit constipated but give it a go! Starting with your toes, go up through your body, gradually clenching each of your muscles right through to the tiny ones in your face, keep your whole body clench, hold and then release to let go of all the tension. Feels good, right?

3. Try the Naam Yoga Hand Trick. Using your fingertips, apply pressure to the space between the knuckles of your index and middle fingers. This creates a sense of immediate relaxation by activating a nerve that loosens the area around your heart (don’t worry, it’s not as life-threatening as it sounds).

4. Stop multitasking. No wonder we’re all mega-stressed when we’re replying to text messages, whilst watching TV and speaking on the phone simultaneously! Not only is multitasking totally inefficient, but it’s also linked to the increased production of stress hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) that can send your body into panic mode! So, chill out and take things one step at a time.

5. Get a Coloring Book. They’ve exploded in popularity over recent months and for good reason – coloring in helps you chill out because it’s very difficult to focus on other things when you’re doing it. Here’s some of the best ones.

6. Have a banana. When we’re stressed out our blood pressure tends to rise but the potassium found in bananas can help to regulate this. Stress may also leave us feeling depleted, but bananas give you a replenishing energy boost that will get you swinging from the trees again!

7. Organize ‘worry time’. (Worryingly) worry can counterproductively occur at any point in the day and release stress hormones into the body that could cause anxiety and lower our immune systems. So, schedule a 15-minute worry window in your day, where you can write down your worries and work through them.

8. Do some baking. The smell of baking sometimes makes people feel calm and comforted. Many people find baking stress-relieving and adding decorative touches to your creation can give you a sense of pride, enhance how you’re feeling and therefore boost your self-esteem... so what better excuse to eat cake?

9. Cook up a facemask. Yep, that’s right, we are suggesting you mix up half an avocado, a teaspoon of honey, 2 tablespoons of hot water and smear it all over your face so that you vaguely resemble the Wicked Witch of the West. Relax for 10 minutes to look and feel rejuvenated.

10. Stay silly. Don’t leave playtime at the primary school gates. Studies have consistently highlighted the importance of play for helping manage stress throughout our lives. Goofing around is good for us, so bring out the Lego, pull ugly faces and dance in the rain shamelessly!

11. Keep calm and kiss. Kissing increases levels of the love hormone, oxytocin, which relaxes us whilst decreasing the stress hormone, cortisol. It’s been shown that kissing can lower anxiety in a similar way to meditation as well as generally improving your mood through an increase of serotonin and endorphins in the brain... so love really does conquer all!

12. Stay inside and listen to the rain. Want a good excuse to stay in your PJ’s? White noise may make you want to tear your hair out when it’s blaring out the TV, but this sound of nature shares similar wavelengths to the frequencies produced by white noise and has relaxing effects on the brain. So, curl up with a hot choc and let your brainwaves do the work.

13. Watch a nature documentary. Not only are David Attenborough’s dulcet tones particularly soothing, but nature documentaries can also sprinkle our minds with mood-lifting wanderlust and highlight the sheer scale of life which can, in turn, help us gain perspective of our own lives.

14. Meditate. Create a little Zen den in your room where you can meditate (e.g. light candles and incense, play calming music). Reaching a meditative state takes practice but there are some great tips for beginners online. Meditation can help ease anxiety and improve concentration, so peace out.
15. Breathe ‘Pranayama’ style. This yoga method requires you to breathe through one nostril at a time (inhale through the left by blocking the right, exhale through the right by blocking the left, repeat for 3 minutes) to relieve stress. Weird but wonderful!

16. A spoonful of honey. Mother nature’s delicious treat has compounds that reduce inflammation in the brain which can help improve a low mood. Bee happy... (sorry, couldn’t resist).

17. Turn up the music and dance. Combining music and dance can help build self-esteem, lift your mood and reduce anxiety. Dancing may also help express emotions and experiences that are difficult to communicate in words alone... so go dance like no one’s watching!

18. Watch a tearjerker. Ok, so you’re only on the first scene of ‘Up’ and you’re already in floods... don’t panic! The tear-eyed may experience a slight dip in their mood following the film but not long after you’ll notice your mood improve considerably from its original state and crying is an excellent way to relieve stress too so get the tissues out!

19. Try self-hypnosis. Ok so forget dangling pendants and special powers, self-hypnosis could really work! There’s loads of mp3’s you can download online to help reprogram your subconscious to reduce stress and anxiety so have a listen.

20. Doodle. You may associate doodling with being bored in class but doing it in your spare time can be a great way to relax. When we’re stressed, we can get caught in our thoughts but by doodling you’re engaging the creative upper right side of your brain which will give you the space you need to calm down and find a fresh perspective.

21. Play games. Board games, cards and even online/video games (in moderation!) can be an effective way of relaxing. Fun games can trigger the release of endorphins and may help shift your attention away from stress. Interacting with friends and families through games can help ease stressful dynamics too. Looks like I’ll be playing Call of Duty forever then...

22. Have a hug. Hugging increases serotonin levels which are linked to happiness and releases oxytocin which lowers stress hormones like cortisol. How lovely.

23. Have a massage exchange. Most of us don’t have 50 quid lying around to splash out on a professional massage, so relieve tension the frugal way and exchange massages with a friend. For example, try massaging the muscle under the thumb to relieve tension in the hands (you’ll look just like a pro!) There are loads of tips online so you, your mate and your bank balance can enjoy the benefits of relaxation!

24. Drink hot water. Learn from the tradition of Chinese healing and drink a cup of good ol’, clean hot water. Ok, so it may not be as delicious as a hot chocolate, but it will cleanse your system of toxins that have accumulated in the body and may be causing tension. You could try adding some lemon for flavor, vitamin C and its mood-enhancing properties (e.g. reducing anxiety).

25. Support someone else. Moving your attention outside yourself can help take the pressure of stressors in your own life and supporting others can also give you valuable insight on how to redress your issues. Seeing the impact, you make on that person’s life will also boost your self-esteem which in turn, can reduce stress.

26. Visit a free museum or gallery. Cultural centers provide a safe haven of positive distraction, reduce tension and inspire our creativity too. Often, you get free entry or reduced rates so check out what’s available in your area.

27. Watch cute animals on YouTube. Oh, the power of cute! Watching our furry friends doing their thing can help reduce your stress levels and lift your mood. Aww!

28. Go Stargazing. Laying down and watching a starry night is not only awesome but it increases your brain’s alpha waves which rapidly enables you to relax. Cool, huh?

29. Light some incense. Scents like Sandalwood and Sage can help calm anxieties and aid relaxation (and make your room smell wonderful!)

30. Squeeze a stress ball. Using a stress ball could help alleviate tension by promoting muscle relaxation and providing a general sense of release.
31. Keeping a diary. Venting all those thoughts and emotions onto paper can make your feelings and problems seem less intimidating. Bullet-journals have taken off recently and shown that writing can be both insightful and therapeutic so get those words down on paper!

32. Chew gum. Chewing gum for a few minutes can help release anxiety, improve your mood and you’ll never have to worry about bad breath again!

33. Drink green tea. Feeling all worked up? Green tea is a source of the chemical L-Theanine which can help relieve anger.

34. Call an old friend. Feeling out of control? Speaking to an old friend can be really grounding. Social connectedness can reduce stress levels and no doubt the nostalgia will get you smiling and laughing too!

35. Snuggle up with a pet. Cuddling your pet helps reduce anxiety through the release of oxytocin in your brain, ease feelings of social rejection and make you feel cared for which can help boost your self-esteem. The cutest therapy going!

36. Sniff those flowers. Did you know that certain smells can change our mood? Floral scents can lift your mental state and make you feel less anxious... so go stick your nose in your neighbor's rhododendron bush!

37. Stretch it out. Stretching has been linked to relaxation and stress relief as well as a greater sense of wellbeing. It's also incredibly satisfying.

38. Organize your space. Mess can really start to clutter up your mind so clean your room and reorganize your desk. Tidy room, tidy mind (sorry, we said it).

39. Take a walk in nature. Not only will walking trigger the release of endorphins which can reduce stress hormones but being out in nature can boost serotonin levels which can also contribute to an improved sense of wellbeing.

40. Wash dishes. Ok, so I get that you've probably spent half your life avoiding this task but you'll be surprised at how therapeutic it is. Not only will mindfully washing the dishes relax you, but you'll please your other household members too and feel a sense of self-esteem boosting accomplishment. Concentrate on letting your mind and body experience the task with serene awareness (e.g. focus on the smell of the soap, the feel of the dishes and the warmth of the water).

41. Visualization. Your mind is a powerful tool. Whether you use it to visualize success, visit a happy place, or embark on an imaginary journey, the technique can help alleviate anxiety and sadness so go get creative in your head!

42. Sleep well. Whilst stress can interfere with sleeping, sleeping can also relieve stress. So use some of our chilling out tips to help you relax before bed and follow our DTL Sleep Guide so you can ensure that you're spending a third of your life in bedtime bliss...

43. Cook your favorite dish. Nourishing yourself with a good meal can help boost your sense of self-worth. Cooking can be a relaxing and rewarding process and hopefully, you'll feel accomplished instead of poisoned by the end!

44. Write a card for someone you care about. Whoever it is I assure you that they'll appreciate a card letting them know you're thinking of them. Random acts of kindness like this have beneficial effects for both you and the person at the receiving end. You can feel good about making someone else feel great and performing these acts has been linked to helping socially anxious people feel more positive.

45. Light some candles. Candlelight is known for its calming effects and (even better) scented candles have aromatherapeutic properties which can improve wellbeing. Watching the flame of a candle can also be a great starting point for meditation. So, sit back and enjoy the glow!

46. Take a nap. Don't feel guilty, naps aren't just for those over the age of 65! The afternoon power nap can effectively reduce stress, improve your mood and increase alertness, so we give you full permission to climb back into bed!

47. Countdown from ten. Caught in chaos? Take a couple of minutes out of your day to mindfully countdown from ten and back up again. Continue this process until you feel calm enough to resume your day.

48. Wake up and smell the coffee. Finally, a saying that makes literal sense! Smelling coffee reduces stress hormones, so we suggest you have a good whiff of a decaf variety over breakfast.
49. Enjoy being in water. Paddle down to your local swimming pool and let the water do its magic. Exercise releases feel-good chemicals that can help improve our mental health and swimming is a peaceful way of achieving this. Moving in water has relaxing effects on the body as it allows oxygen to flow to your muscles which consequently regulates your breathing.

50. Give your temples a good massage. Learn from the great art of acupuncture and give those temples a gentle knead with your index and middle fingertips. Massaging your temples helps relax the other muscles in your body as well as soothing your headache symptoms (bonus!).

51. Feed the birds. Enjoy the company birds can bring and track all the different species you can view from your doorstep. Ok, so I know it's not exactly a night out with your mates but give it a try...being around nature has a range of positive effects on our mental health (such as reducing anxiety) and you will be able to see the happiness you've bought to these cute little creatures.

52. Have a sleepover. Whilst some social situations can be stressful, a sleepover with your best mate can be a great way to chill out. Spending time with someone you trust in a relaxed environment can do wonders for your wellbeing and we're sure you'll be laughing all night long too!

53. Hum the tune of your favorite song. Feeling anxious? Humming can dramatically slow down your heart rate and ground you. It also has a relaxing effect on your face, neck and shoulder muscles. Humming your favorite tune will lift your mood and ensure you don't get some other irritating song stuck in your head!

54. Open the windows. Not only does fresh air promote wellbeing and relax you but getting more oxygen to the brain improves concentration and gives you the energy boost you need without the same sugar comedown of a chocolate bar (damn).

55. Play team sports. Whilst any exercise works wonders, team sports may be better for your mental health than exercising alone as they promote a sense of connection and can reduce social anxiety. Quidditch anyone?

56. Be nice to yourself. Criticizing yourself again? Take some time to practice self-love, whether that means starting the day repeating positive affirmations about yourself or nourishing your body with the nutrition you need. Remember ditching negative self-talk really will relieve a lot of stress. Check out some of DTL's tips on building your self-esteem.

57. Have a bath. Taking a dip in a hot bath will relax your muscles, enabling you to unwind both physically and mentally which can help prepare you for a good night's sleep too. A good soak is also a great way to reduce daily anxiety... unleash the rubber ducks!

58. Get up earlier. Sorry guys. Whilst I wish early starts weren't the reality, setting your alarm clock even just 15 minutes earlier could reduce your stress levels by eliminating that morning rush. Waking up earlier also provides you with some valuable time to relax with yourself and prepare for the day ahead...so wake up sleepy heads! (Yawn).

59. Avoid negativity. Don't let other people's negativity shoot your adrenaline levels through the roof. It's important not to judge someone for being negative, try to support them but make sure you separate your identity and emotions from it. If their negativity is aimed at you, it looks like their engaging in bullying behavior so read DTL's advice on how to talk to someone who's bullying you.

60. Have a picnic. Outdoor activities like this promote our mental and physical wellbeing. Going on a picnic with your friends or family can help reduce the stress we associate with school, work and home whilst providing a bonding experience that can alleviate feelings of social isolation. Jam sandwich anyone?

61. Buy a plant. Not only does filling your room with flowers look pretty and purify the air but being around plants helps people feel more relaxed and actually reduce your likelihood of developing stress-related depression.

62. Get knitting. Get creative using your motor skills to make repetitive motions that relieve stress. Give your brain a much-needed break and if your thoughts get distracted, return to the movement. Start designing your own knitwear and you'll never have to worry about being caught in the same outfit as someone else (bonus!)

63. Relax your jaw. Release the tension you're carrying in your jaw by opening it wide for a half a minute, breathing through your nose and gently closing it. Great practice for the dentist too
64. Reflect on the day’s achievements. Don’t get stressed about what you should be doing, feel great about what you have done instead. We’re not expecting you to have climbed Mount Everest, you could have just given a friend some good advice. The reflection process can help boost your self-esteem and ease anxiety as you’ll see how great you are already!

65. Munch some crunch. It’s important not to use food as a stress reducer as this can lead to unhealthy eating habits. But when you do reach for a snack, try some carrot sticks or a handful of almonds as this will help reduce stress by working your jaw muscles as well as giving you a nutritious boost. Gnaw away!

66. Deep breaths. When we’re feeling anxious, our breathing changes and this ‘overbreathing’ can actually produce more anxiety. But deep breathing will encourage your mind and body to slow down and return to normal. So next time you feel yourself getting anxious, have a quick break and take a deep diaphragmatic breath in through your nose for 4 seconds, hold it for 2 and exhale slowly through the mouth for 4 (wait a few seconds and then repeat). Panic over!

67. Decompress your stress. Invest in a 3-pack of flannels, soak them in warm water and place one on each of your shoulders and your neck, then close your eyes and relax those muscles. Ta da!

68. Turn off ALL electronic devices. Technology can be wonderful, but interconnectedness comes at a price...laptops, phones and tablets all subtly increase our stress levels making us feel constantly ‘wired’. They can also disrupt your sleep which will only contribute to stress so make sure you switch them off an hour or two before bed. Oh, the conflicting joys of the 21st century!

69. Browse books. Go to your local library and spend some time browsing their book selection in the peace and quiet. Sit back, relax and get lost in the good book you’ve found. Research suggests that reading even for just six minutes can reduce your stress levels by two thirds!

70. Clear your closet. Having a closet full of clothes, you never wear just creates clutter and adds to the stress bucket. So, make a day of it, auction off your unwanted clothes and donate the proceeds to Ditch the Label! Thanks.

71. Study a new topic. I know it sounds counterproductive considering the stress studying causes, but study a topic you don’t do at school, like gender across cultures, or survival skills...we would all feel more relaxed if we knew how to survive on a desert island.

72. Mix up your route. Commuting through traffic jams could be sending your stress levels haywire unnecessarily. Try riding your bike to school or college instead for a calm and collected arrival. Or if you walk everywhere, try taking different routes to ensure your usual zombie walk stays within Shaun of the Dead.

73. Take a break from social media. Whilst interconnectedness and the opportunities of social media offer us so much, using it too often can have adverse effects. It could lower your self-esteem, take you away from the moment and bring drama into your life. All of these factors massively contribute to stress so take a break!

74. Have a good cry. Bottling up your emotions can lead you down a dangerous path and suppressing those tears increases your stress levels so make sure you let it all out and you’ll be surprised by the relief it brings. Get the violins out!

75. Write a gratitude list. Unsurprisingly, stressful events can leave us feeling negative and as if we’re lacking in some way. But having a greater sense of appreciation for the people and things in your life can really help you gain perspective, feel more positive and enable you to better handle stress. So, try writing down 5 things you’re thankful for.

76. Try herbal remedies. Mother nature scores again! Next time you’re feeling stressed try sipping on some chamomile tea, full of anti-anxiety components, or drip some lavender oil on your pillow at night to help relax you for a peaceful night’s sleep.

78. Don’t procrastinate. We’ve all been there...one minute you’re revising, the next minute you’re checking out the photos of your friends’ mutual friends’ friend on Facebook (wow, that even sounds as stressful as it is), but all procrastination does is put things off and stops you achieving your goals which only generates more stress!
79. Lower your standards. Setting ridiculously high standards for yourself generates anxiety by putting pressure on you to perform and it can make you particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of emotional stress. Nobody's perfect so try loving and accepting yourself as the great individual you are.

80. Get a hobby. Pursuing a new hobby is a fun way to break away from life’s demands, as well as allowing you to build your self-esteem, forge new friendships and express yourself, which all contribute to the reduction of stress. Why not give photography a go or try out a free yoga class in your area...do whatever interests YOU!

81. Watch the sunrise (or set). Ok, so perhaps getting up at the crack of dawn to watch a sunrise is a little bit ambitious but watching a sunset on a clear summer’s evening is both breathtaking and incredibly relaxing. So, let go of your worries and let yourself get immersed in the colors. It’s true that the best things in life are free.

82. Ask for help. Everyone needs a helping hand sometimes. Trying to cope with everything on your own just exacerbates stress. Whether you open to a trusted friend, family member or us here at Ditch, a problem shared is a problem halved!

83. Eat stress free. Incorporate stress-busting foods into your diet like avocados, oily fish, whole wheat varieties and oatmeal. Please Sir, can I have some more?

84. Enjoy simplicity. Living life in the fast lane? Rushing around is not only stressful, we forget about the simple things that bring us happiness too so learn to stop and notice life’s little pleasures like laughing with your friends or enjoying the feeling of sun on your skin. Mindfulness can significantly reduce anxiety so relax and enjoy the moment!

85. Strike a (yoga) pose. There are loads of yoga poses you can try at home that may help reduce anxiety. Have a go at the child’s pose by sitting on your knees and bending forwards so that your face is resting on the floor, keeping your arms by your sides. This comforting pose helps us turn inside for a while and slow down our racing minds.

86. Stop judging. With so many things to worry about, don’t let worrying about what other people do with their time be one of them. Sitting around gossiping about others and criticizing them isn’t going to make anyone happy. Try supporting them instead. If you often find yourself judging others it’s likely that you’ve been giving yourself a hard time too so ditch the criticism and you’ll not only feel better about yourself, but you’ll have a lot more time to relax too!

87. Spend a day at the beach. Beautiful views, the soothing sounds of water in the rain...what’s not to like? Whether you go in a group or roll solo, the beach is a relaxing break away from everyday stresses and the negative ions you soak up will have positive effects on your body and mind back in reality too.

88. Nurture yourself through words. Read whatever inspires you; poems, positive affirmations and empowering quotes....let the words ground you, calm your mind and regenerate you.

89. Avoid caffeine. That comforting cup of coffee may not be so kind to your nerves. Whilst giving you a temporary boost, caffeine injects adrenaline into your system and increases levels of the stress hormone cortisol. A cup of coffee can brew trouble for anxiety sufferers so try an equally heart-warming decaf alternative instead.

90. Learn to forgive. Everyone makes mistakes, that’s how we learn. Bullying yourself, mulling over petty grievances and begrudging others is only going to hurt you so start forgiving yourself and other people and you’ll find there’s a lot less to stress about!

91. Say no sometimes. Being a ‘yes’ person isn’t easy. People pleaser’s listen up! Saying ‘no’ doesn’t mean you’re selfish or rude. Practicing saying ‘no’ will help simplify your life and give you the valuable time you need to relax with yourself.

92. Get some sun. Vitamin D (which our bodies absorb through exposure to the sun) can play an important role in your mental health but by the time it gets to those long winter months many of us are lacking in it. Keep calm and soak up all the sun you can and if you’re running low, top up with vitamin D rich foods like oily fish and eggs.

93. Listen to calming music. Oh, the power of music! Research suggests that chilled out tunes slow down our pulses, lower blood pressure and decrease stress hormones. So, plug in and relax or if no one’s listening sing/shout along to release even more tension!
94. Stand tall. Did you know good posture can make you feel more in control and less anxious? Power poses of confidence can decrease levels of the stress hormone cortisol, so stand proud and your mood will follow.

95. Drink more water. Even slight dehydration can lower our moods and it may increase levels of the stress hormone, cortisol. Dehydration can also cause your body to stop functioning properly which can result in anxiety too... so get sipping!

96. Do a puzzle. Feeling all keyed up? Try and crack a sudoku, a crossword or piece together a puzzle to unwind and get your mind into a state of relaxation.

97. Take your brain on holiday. As much as we'd all love to be sunbathing in the Caribbean right now, most of us are constrained to mind wandering instead. But daydreaming can help you solve stressful problems, relax you and inspire creativity. So, get lost in your thoughts and see where your mind takes you!

98. Spend less. Advertisers capitalize on the notion that buyers ruthlessly spend in response to stress and low self-esteem. Remember that having lots of things just adds to stress and won't solve negative feelings. So next time you're about to part with your cash, take a step back and ask, "why do I want this?" and "do I really need this?"

99. Do your nails. There are loads of tips online for giving yourself the ultimate DIY Mani and Pedi. Spend some time looking after number one, feel relaxed and get creative with nail art too!

100. Listen to an audiobook. Being read a story is ridiculously relaxing and a comforting way to wind down before bed. It's much less effort than reading and there's a huge choice of audiobooks at Audible and podcasts so do check them out.

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**Self-Care Calendar: One Month to Make Yourself a Priority**

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