

# Six Surprising — and Simple! — Stress Fighters

Chances are, between home, work and family, you barely have time to breathe, let alone to recover from daily hassles. “Fortunately, there are a number of easy, natural things you can do to de-stress in seconds,” says Kenneth Pelletier, Ph.D., co-author of *Stress Free for Good*. Here, six “who’d-have-thought” tactics to help you unwind.

## **Stressbuster #1: Form a Fist**

The next time you’re frazzled, try this trick: Clench your fists tightly for five seconds, then open them. “You’ll relax instantly,” says Pelletier. The reason: When a muscle tenses as much as possible, it becomes able to de-tense completely. “It’s like pushing an internal reset button in the body,” says Pelletier. Plus, by repeating this exercise, you get in touch with how your muscles feel when you are stressed, and you intuitively learn how to relax them.

## **Stressbuster #2: Grab Some Gum**

Rhythmic, repetitive actions like chewing gum trigger our body’s natural relaxation response, slowing our heart rate, breathing and brain activity, explains Mark Liponis, M.D., author of *UltraLongevity: The Seven-Step Program for a Younger, Healthier You*. For an even bigger boost, pop a stick of peppermint. Studies show this flavor can give you extra pep.

## **Stressbuster #3: Gaze at Blue**

To grab a moment of instant calm, just look for the color blue — stare at the turquoise background on your desktop or gaze at the sky. Blue is the color of the ocean and the sky, so we automatically associate it with the serene feelings that come with being out in nature, says Bernie Siegel, M.D., author of *101 Exercises for the Soul*.



## **Stressbuster #4: Be a Star**

Had a hard day? Pretend you’re on *American Idol* and belt one out. Crooning can slash the body’s level of stress hormones, according to researchers at Frankfurt University in Germany. “When we sing, we’re breathing deeply,” explains Lois Levy, author of *Undress Your Stress: 30 Curiously Fun Ways to Take Off Tension*. “And this lowers the body’s blood pressure and heart rate, decreasing stress.”

## **Stressbuster #5: Make Someone’s Day**

“Being kind to others produces a rush of feel-good chemicals in the brain, creating what’s known as a ‘helper’s high,’” says Pelletier. The endorphin surge boosts our mood, distracting us from the woes that stress us out.

## **Stressbuster #6: Plant Some Calm**

Adding a little green to your environment can keep stress at bay, say experts at Kansas State University. In their study, women who kept plants in their work spaces had less anxiety. Why? They capture our attention, giving us a mental break from the negative feelings that lead to stress, says Eunhee Kim, Ph.D., lead researcher in the study.

## **Did You Know?**

Men and women react to stress differently, reveal UCLA researchers. While women experience a tend-and-befriend response, bonding with other women during times of worry, men exhibit a fight-or-flight reaction, often opting to tackle the stress-producing problem aggressively.