WellBeing

SPECIAL REPORT

DE-STRESS *for success*

Do you feel like you are losing control over your life? Are you worried, tense, irritable and moody? Do you find your mind never stops and you feel overwhelmed by never-ending lists of tasks you have to complete on a daily basis? Do you wake up exhausted? You are busy, you are overloaded, you are stressed ... and you are not alone. The wonderful news is there are powerful natural ways to de-stress.

WORDS / MASCHA COETZEE

In 2013, the Australian Psychological Society conducted their third Stress and Wellbeing Australia Survey to examine the levels, causes and impacts of stress among 1548 Australians aged 18 and over. According to the results of the survey, 73 per cent of Australians experienced some level of stress while almost one in five (17 per cent) of Australians reported significantly higher levels of psychological stress having a strong effect on their health.

Their stress and distress levels impacting on their physical and mental health had increased while the state of their wellbeing had declined compared to 2011 and 2012. The survey participants reported that their financial difficulties, problems at work, thoughts about the future, family and personal health issues were the leading causes of stress.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a natural physiological human response to any stimulus or challenge, be it negative (such as fear, injury, trauma, recurring pressure at work, death in the family) or positive (getting out of bed, falling in love, playing sports,

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learning a new skill, being excited about a holiday).

The concept of stress was introduced in 1935 by Hans Selye, who suggested stress should not be viewed in a negative context, as it is the reaction an individual has to the stressor that determines the potential health impact, not the stimulus itself.

When you face a stressful situation, your body activates the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), the fight-or-flight response, by releasing hormones such as cortisol and adrenalin, which in turn increase your blood pressure, metabolism and heart and respiration rates. This physiological response and the changes you experience are vital as they help you get through the challenging events.

While some stimuli can sharpen your focus, stimulate creativity and increase energy levels, strength, motivation and alertness, other stressors (like ongoing pressures at work, job insecurity, financial concerns, family issues, information overload or exhaustion) can result in chronic stress and have a harmful effect on your health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, most of the modern-world stressors, and/or our reactions to them, tend not to be resolved overnight; they leave your stress response system either switched on or constantly reactivated, keeping your cortisol levels high as well as leaving you anxious, indigested, unfulfilled and unable to relax.

Scientific evidence suggests that repeatedly high levels of cortisol are linked to elevated fasting blood-sugar levels, high blood pressure, depression, overeating, decreased bone density, depleted immunity, worsened memory, increased inflammation and moodiness. Multiple studies are also showing that stress can lead to some of the biggest physiological and psychological problems existing in Australia: anxiety, chronic fatigue syndrome, depression, headaches, heart disease, hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome, multiple sclerosis (MS), osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid disorders, type 2 diabetes and ulcers.

> Deep breathing is a great anchor to use when you feel stressed out or anxious.

As Dr Timothy McCall, the medical editor of *Yoga Journal*, puts it, "All told, it could be argued that stress is the number one killer in the Western world today." The question is: does it have to be that way?

THE GOOD NEWS

Although you cannot escape stress in the modern world, you can change the way you interpret and react to its triggers. The good news is that it has been proven that by consciously activating the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), the rest-and-digest response, the normal resting state of your brain and body can be achieved; stress levels can be lowered; your mood can be lifted; and healing, quietude of the mind, clarity of thinking, tranquillity and relaxation can be attained.

Psychoneuroimmunology studies have now established the connection between body, mind and emotions, which ancient Ayurvedic and traditional Chinese medicine practitioners and yogis recognised centuries ago, suggesting that the mind and body should be treated as one. Thus, changing your reactions to the stress you experience, incorporating breathing and relaxation techniques and altering your diet together with using the stress-reduction recommendations described below will help activate your PNS, take better care of your body and mind and reduce stress as well as its potential impact on your health.

IDENTIFY THE WARNING SIGNS

Listen to your body and mind to identify the troubling signs of stress. Are you tired or chronically exhausted? Do you experience constant muscle tension and headaches? How are your thoughts? What mood are you in? Take a moment to acknowledge the stress triggers in your daily life: they could be job deadlines, family commitments, demanding children, money concerns, hunger.

Note them down, prioritise the tasks you can do and generously give yourself time to complete them. Take a few deep breaths and accept the things you do not have control of and move on. Deep breathing is a great anchor to use when you feel stressed out or anxious.

CULTIVATE POSITIVE EMOTIONS

According to Rick Hanson PhD, conscious cultivation of positive feelings activates the rest-and-digest response by lowering cardiovascular activity, allowing a person to be more relaxed and optimistic.

Another scholar, Barbara L Fredrickson, a Kenan Distinguished

Photography Getty Images





Professor of Psychology based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the US, has spent many years conducting research on how positive psychology affects individuals' wellbeing, intellectual ability and social relationships. Her "broaden and build positive emotions" theory and its evidence suggest your positive emotions (such as joy, interest, contentment and love) broaden your mindset, widen your emotional and peripheral awareness, promote creativity and build your decision-making skills and resilience, which allows you to recover faster from the adversities of daily life.

Fredrickson and her students conducted an experiment where they divided the study participants into groups and showed them short films inducing either positive emotions like amusement and contentment, negative emotions, such as fear and sadness, or no emotions at all. The participants were then assessed on how broadly they could think, by being asked to judge which two comparison visual figures were close to the "standard" figure.

The participants who experienced positive emotions chose the global configuration of the image, suggesting broadened thinking patterns, which build intellectual, social, psychological and physical resources and coping skills in the future. Other benefits of positive emotions include reduced levels of distress and improved wellbeing.

Positive thinking starts with self-talk. Make a commitment not to say anything to yourself that you would not say to your loved ones. If you experience a negative thought, reaffirm it with a positive. For example, if your thought is "I'm not good enough", change it to "I'm positive, I'm changing and I deserve the best".

To generate a positive emotion, start with a smile and then try to focus on what you are grateful for in your life, visualise the objects of your gratitude, praise yourself while acknowledging your strengths and attributes, and cultivate compassion and loving kindness towards yourself and your loved ones. Anything that brings you joy and satisfaction, like painting, cooking, spending time with your loved ones, playing with your cat and doing other fun activities, will increase your positive thinking.

EXERCISE MODERATELY

Choose a moderate form of exercise you truly respond to and find uplifting. In fact, strenuous physical activities can increase your cortisol levels and therefore are not recommended if you are already stressed out. So there is no need to push yourself to run a marathon or go hours on a spin bike.

Try yoga instead, take a brisk walk in nature, dance to your favourite songs, go for a light jog in the bush, jump on a trampoline, sign up for a qi gong class, cycle, swim, surf — just do what you love!

> A healthy balanced wholefood diet is proven to be effective in managing stress and restoring health and wellbeing.

SLEEP

According to the Australian Centre for Education in Sleep, an average adult should get 7–9 hours sleep a night. However, as the Lifeline 2013 Stress Poll reveals, almost two-thirds of Australians experience lost sleep due to stress.

A good night's rest is essential for the healthy functions of your nervous, immune and cardiovascular systems, it helps restore your body, keep you alert and metabolise nutrients, and it improves your mood.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH SUPPORT

The support network of people you spend time with is vital for your health and wellbeing. Surround yourself with uplifting people you trust and can reach out to when you need practical assistance or emotional support when you are burnt out or stressed. If you continue to feel overwhelmed, you may like to consult your family doctor, a health coach, psychologist or other licensed health practitioner.

YOUR ANTI-STRESS DIET

A healthy, balanced wholefood diet is proven to be effective in managing stress and restoring health and wellbeing. Leah Hechtman, a highly respected naturopath and the author of *Clinical Naturopathic Medicine*, explains: "An individual suffering from stress or anxiety must support the biochemistry of the body by following some important dietary guidelines."

Drink plenty of water, eat a plant-dominant diet and try to incorporate the following easily accessible foods, rich in essential nutrients, and teas to support your body and mind in coping with stress.

Complex carbohydrates

Quinoa, brown rice, oats, buckwheat, rye bread, wholegrains, legumes, sweet potatoes and other root vegies. Complex carbohydrates are made of fibre and starch, contain multiple nutrients and require digestion, so they are released into your bloodstream more slowly than simple carbohydrates (white sugar, white flour, sweets, corn syrup), curbing your appetite as well as restoring your physical and mental energy.

High-quality proteins

Lentils, kidney beans, mung beans, organic tofu, quinoa, kale, fish, lean grass-fed, hormone-free meat, free-range eggs, nuts and seeds. Protein is required by your organism to foster growth and repair of every cell in the body. Not only does it assist in the maintenance of healthy hair, nails and other tissues like muscles and bones; protein is also an important source of the energy required to maintain the fuel necessary for the stress response.

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Easy Pose (*sukhasana*).

Vitamin C-rich foods
Oranges, kiwifruit, green capsicums, berries, tomatoes, pineapple, broccoli, parsley. Vitamin C is an antioxidant, generally known for boosting immunity. A German study in the journal *Psychopharmacology* also found that vitamin C can help reduce the physical and psychological effects of stress by lowering blood pressure and cortisol levels when under stress.

B-complex vitamins
The eight B vitamins are essential for energy production in the body, formation of nervous cells and normal brain and memory functions. They occur naturally in food and are required in very small amounts. Eating a balanced diet will generally provide you with those vitamins, unless a supplement is prescribed by your health professional. B_{12} supplementation is usually suggested to vegans as B_{12} is found only in animal foods.

Magnesium-rich foods
Spinach and other dark leafy greens, almonds, cashews, walnuts, avocado, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, soy beans. Magnesium is, as *The New York Times* bestselling author Dr M Hyman calls it, a "relaxation mineral" that is essential for energy production, brain and nerve functions and blood pressure regulation. It encourages better sleep and helps maintain muscles in a relaxed state, preventing muscular tension that can occur in stressful situations.

Omega-3 fatty acids
Found in abundance in flaxseed oil, chia seeds, linseed, salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna, miso, walnuts and soy products. Did you know your brain is the fattest organ in the body and may contain up to 60 per cent fat? Healthy fats, including essential omega-3 fatty acids, are vital for your vision, skin condition, regulation of blood pressure, cortisol reduction, memory and proper brain and nervous functioning. Patrick Holford, one of the world's leading nutrition experts, also suggests that omega-3 possesses anti-inflammatory properties, promotes a healthy heart and relieves depression, attention deficit and hyperactivity.

Herbal teas
Brahmi, chamomile, licorice, mint, tulsi. These healing teas are widely used in traditional herbal medicine for inducing calmness, settling restlessness, clearing the mind and elevating mood, together with reducing stress and stress-related sleeping disorders.

Avoid or reduce
Try to avoid or reduce stimulants such as alcohol, cigarettes, coffee and other caffeinated beverages, as well as processed fatty foods and sweets.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES: BREATHING, MEDITATION, YOGA

An exciting study was conducted by Professor Luciano Bernardi of the Italian University of Pavia, who reported that slowing the breath to six breaths a minute could positively affect heart rate variability and reduce blood pressure and the activity of the sympathetic nervous system. His conclusion was, "Rhythm formulas that involve breathing at six breaths per minute induce favourable psychological and possibly physiological effects." So, to achieve the benefits mentioned in Bernardi's study, you need to slow your breathing rate to deactivate your sympathetic nervous system and turn on the rest-and-digest response (parasympathetic nervous system).

Together with breathing and yoga, incorporate mindfulness meditation into your daily practice: this has been proven to be a powerful method of reducing stress levels. Mindfulness is maintaining awareness of the present moment, paying attention to arising thoughts, feelings, sensations and surroundings with kindness towards yourself and without judgement or attachment.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre in the US, together with Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin and his colleagues, conducted a breakthrough study — *Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation* — which was published in *Psychosomatic Medicine Journal* and is now widely referred to by researchers, psychologists and meditation and yoga teachers.

> Commencing yoga practice, meditation, breathing and relaxation exercises can be effective in stress management.

In the study, 25 people from a high-tech work setting under very high levels of stress did eight weeks of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) training. This clinical study revealed that the MBSR participants "shifted from having more right-sided activation in the PFC (prefrontal cortex of the brain) to more left-sided activation", concluding that a short-term mindfulness meditation program produces positive effects on the brain. The right PFC is linked to anxiety and discomfort while the left is connected to calmness, happiness, intelligence and wellbeing.

In Australia, researchers from Deakin University in Melbourne conducted another interesting study on yoga as a preventive treatment for symptoms of mental illness across three groups of participants: regular yoga practitioners, beginners to yoga and those who did not practise yoga. The yoga program was spread over six weeks and included breathing, postures, meditation and relaxation. On completion of the program, the beginners' group showed lower-than-average symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression, yet again validating that yoga practice, meditation, breathing and relaxation exercises can be effective in stress management.

BREATHING & MEDITATION PRACTICES

For each of the practices below, sit in Easy Pose (*sukhasana*), with each foot

Photography Rick Coetzee

under the opposite knee, on a folded blanket or cushion to gently elevate your hips and tilt your pelvis slightly forward and down. Alternatively, you may choose to sit in Burmese Pose with your hips elevated on a cushion, blanket or block, feet placed in front of each other in front of the pelvis, and knees spreading wide and resting on the floor.

Place your hands on your thighs or your knees with palms facing down. Relax your shoulders with shoulder blades flat on your upper back, neither rolled forward nor squeezed towards each other.

Keep your upper torso above your hips and your spine elongated with the crown of your head lengthening towards the ceiling. Your chin is slightly tucked in and your tongue, jaw and facial muscles are relaxed.

10-count breathing practice exercise: *ujjayi*

In yoga, *ujjayi*, or "oceanic breathing", also known as "victorious breath", is considered a tranquilising and relaxing practice that also has a warming effect on the body. It calms the mind, soothes the nervous system, enlivens the lungs, releases tensions in the body and helps expel stress.

To start the practice, sit in *sukhasana* or Burmese Pose with your eyes closed. Bring your awareness to the present moment. Become aware of the space you are in, the sounds around you and physical sensations and tensions within your body. Notice the state of your mind, your feelings, thoughts and emotions. Take a few deep breaths.

Now begin *ujjayi* "oceanic" breathing practice. Although it is traditionally done through the nostrils, it's helpful to learn it first by exhaling through the mouth. Inhale through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth, making the sound *"hahhhh"*, closing off your glottis and breathing mainly through the back of your throat, as if you are trying to fog your sunglasses for cleaning. Count to four as you inhale, hold for one count, count to four as you exhale, again hold for one count. This is one round equalling 10 counts, making it a total of six breaths per minute.

Do this a few times with your mouth open, focusing on drawing the breath in and out of the throat and listening to the *"hahhh"* sound you produce.

Then close your mouth and breathe through your nose while continuing to make the audible sound in the back of your throat on both inhalation and exhalation. Continue the practice for 12–18 rounds, remembering to count to four as you inhale, hold for one count, count to four as you exhale, and again hold for one count.

Meditation: mindfulness of breath

Sit in *sukhasana*, Burmese Pose or on a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Keep your head in line with the rest of the spine and your back straight.

Rest your hands on your knees or thighs; or take a *dhyani mudra*, resting both hands on your lap with your right hand on top of the left, palms up and thumbs touching lightly.

Become aware of your breath, taking a few breaths to settle into your natural rhythm without forcing or manipulating the natural pattern of your breathing.

- **Method A.** Bring your awareness to the area of your nostrils and upper lip. Observe the sensations around the nostrils at the beginning, middle and end of each inhale and exhale. Feel the refreshing coolness of the in-breath and the nourishing warmth of the out-breath.
- **Method B.** Place your awareness into your abdomen, the area three-finger width above the navel. Let your breath quieten and soften, allowing your abdomen to rise as you inhale, and fall as you exhale. As you breathe in, feel as if your

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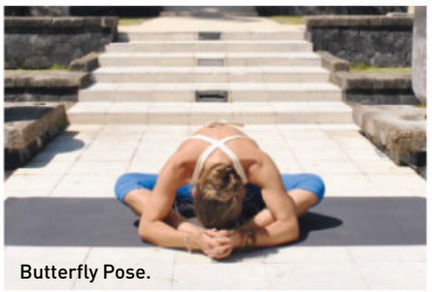
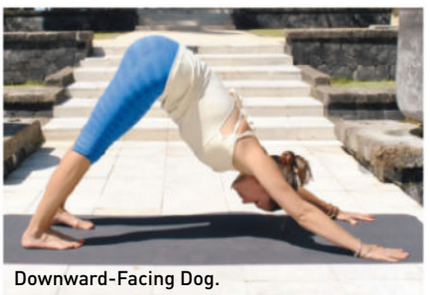

Butterfly Pose.


Cow Pose.


Cat Pose.


Downward-Facing Dog.


Mountain Pose.


Triangle Pose.


Tree variation.

abdomen fills in with the breath and expands. Exhale and let your abdomen relax back towards the spine.

Experiment with methods A and B and see which works better for you. You can practise mindfulness of breath meditation with the attention at either your nostrils and upper lip, or at your abdomen. If you find both methods effective and stilling, you can alternate, shifting your attention from the nostrils to the belly as you watch your breath.

Do this meditation for 6–12 minutes.

What should you do when your mind wanders away?

A few minutes into the meditation, you may catch yourself losing focus on the present moment and your breath. As physical sensations become strong in the body, various emotions come up and thoughts about the past or the future enter your mind. You may notice the change in your breathing pattern or even start experiencing judgements towards yourself, thinking, "It's too hard; I can't do that." It is normal to have those thoughts. Meditation is a practice that needs to be learnt and requires effort and consistency.

If you notice your mind wanders and thoughts creep in, simply acknowledge those thoughts as "thinking, thinking, thinking", "planning, planning, planning", "memory, memory, memory" and return to breathing.

If you identify physical sensations or feelings and emotions that are stronger than your breath, mentally name them to yourself, stay with them until they pass and then come back to your breath. The most common sensations and emotions you may experience are ease, tightness, pleasure, itchiness, pain, tension, warmth, cold, tingling, pins and needles, sweating, shivering, throbbing; desire, love, anger, contentment, restlessness, doubt, fear, wanting, bliss, disappointment, joy and resentment.

If you still find it difficult to stay with the breath, try using this counting technique to regain the concentration needed for the mindfulness meditation practice. Deepen your breath slightly. Inhale fully into the abdomen and then exhale completely, allowing it to draw in towards the spine, mentally counting "one". Again, take a long breath in, exhale, emptying the lungs, and count "two". Continue this practice until you reach a count of five breaths and repeat counting back from five to one.

Repeat this technique if you need to until your mind settles and then return to the natural rhythm of breathing into the abdomen.

YOGA PRACTICE FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

Note: use *ujjayi* breathing technique throughout this yoga practice.

Easy Twisting (*parivrtta sukhasana*)

Start sitting in *sukhasana,* crossing your legs and bringing your right leg closer towards you. Sit tall with your spine upright and place your right hand or fingertips behind you on the floor and left hand on top of your right knee.

Inhale, lengthen through your spine, lifting the chest. Exhale, empty the lungs and twist to the right, turning from your torso, not shoulders. Gaze to the right or over your right shoulder. Hold the pose for five breaths.

To exit the pose, inhale, look to the front; exhale, release and repeat on the other side.

Butterfly Pose

Come into a seated position on the floor and bring the soles of your feet together to touch. Slide your feet away from your groin and fold forward, resting your hands on your ankles, feet or the floor.

Allow your back to round and relax your head towards your heels. Stay in this pose for three minutes.

To come out of Butterfly, use your hands to lift up and push the floor away from you. Lean back onto your hands and release your hips by bending the knees and straightening one leg at a time.

Photography Rick Coetzee

Cow–Cat Flow (*bitilasana-marjaryasana vinyasa*)
Start in a tabletop position with your wrists placed directly under your shoulders (shoulder-width apart) and your knees directly below your hips (hip-width apart). Look at the floor between your hands and exhale.

Inhale, lift your chest and sitting bones towards the ceiling, gazing between your eyebrows, arching your back and allowing your belly to drop towards the floor. Exhale, round your spine towards the ceiling, tucking your chin and tailbone in and gazing at the navel.

Repeat six times, connecting your movements with breath and equalising the lengths of your inhalations and exhalations.

Downward-Facing Dog (*adho mukha svanasana*)
Begin in a tabletop position on all fours with your hips stacked over your knees hip-width apart and your shoulders over your wrists shoulder-width apart.

Walk your hands slightly in front of the shoulders. Inhale here. Exhale, tuck your toes under, raise your hips and straighten your arms. Straighten your legs, pressing them back and extending the heels towards the floor and the tailbone towards the ceiling.

Press your palms flat into the floor grounding evenly with all 10 fingers. Draw your shoulder blades towards the tailbone, rotating your triceps outwards to broaden your upper back.

Remain in this pose for 5–10 breaths. Then inhale, look between your hands, walk your feet towards the front of your mat, tuck your chin in and slowly roll all the way up to standing.

Mountain Pose (*tadasana*)
Stand with your feet parallel and hip distance apart with your weight distributed evenly between all corners of your feet. Extend the crown of your head upwards, lengthen your neck and relax your shoulders, gazing forward.

Lengthen your tailbone towards the floor, keeping your spine straight and lifting the front of your chest. Extend your arms to the sides, fingers pointing down towards the floor.

Stay in this pose for six breaths.

Triangle Pose (*trikonasana*)
Step your feet one leg-length apart. Turn your right foot out 90 degrees and your left toes in and left heel slightly out.

Inhale, spread your arms to the sides, parallel to the floor, while engaging the quadriceps but keeping a micro bend in the knees to avoid hyper extending.

Exhale, take right arm down, left arm up, so your right shoulder is over your left. Place the back of your right hand below the knee, against the right shin or resting it on the right ankle, or place the fingertips on the floor.

Open through the torso, keep your abdominals engaged and lengthen through the sides of your waist. Look up towards your left thumb.

Stay in the pose for five breaths. To release, inhale, stretch all the way up and come back to standing. Exhale, repeat on the other side.

Tree variation (*vrksasana*)
Stand with your feet together and gaze forward. Bend your right knee and bring your weight into the left foot. Turn the right foot and place it onto the left ankle. Stay there, or place the right foot just below the left knee or on your inner left thigh, pressing the left thigh into the right foot to avoid pushing your hips out. Engage your core and extend your arms upwards in a V-shape to broaden through your upper back.

Remain in Tree Pose for five breaths. After five breaths, inhale, then exhale and release, bringing your feet together. Repeat on the other side.



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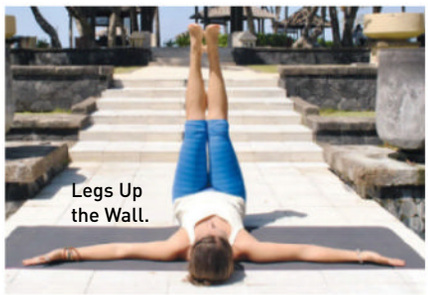
Locust variation.


Marichi variation.


Child's Pose.


Legs Up the Wall.

Locust variation (*salabhasana*)
Lie on your belly with your forehead on the floor, your arms by your sides and feet hip-distance apart. Take a few centring breaths. Then engage your legs and rotate your inner thighs up.

Inhale, interlace your hands behind your back, squeezing your palms towards each other, and lift your arms off your back. Exhale there. Inhale again and lift your head, chest and thighs from the floor. Keep your neck elongated. Lengthen through your legs and breathe deeply. Remain in the pose for three breaths.

Release back onto the floor on the exhalation, turn your head on one side and relax for a few breaths, swinging your hips from side to side. Repeat two more times with a short rest in between.

Child's Pose (*balasana*)
Sit on your heels with your feet and knees together. Inhale here. As you exhale, fold your torso over your thighs and rest your forehead onto the floor relaxing your shoulders and neck. Place your arms along the sides of your body with your palms facing up.

Stay in this pose for six breaths.

Marichi variation (*marichyasana C*)
Begin seated on the floor with your spine straight and your legs together and extended in front of you. Bend your right knee and place your right foot flat on the floor in front of your right sitting bone.

Inhale and lift your left arm. Exhale to turn your torso to the right, wrapping the left arm around the right knee or placing your left elbow outside of the right knee to deepen the twist. Place the right hand or fingertips on the floor behind you.

Take five breaths, lengthening your spine on every inhalation and deepening the twist from the upper back on every exhalation. Avoid compressing the lower back. Then inhale and turn your head forward. Exhale and release.

Repeat on the other side.

Legs Up the Wall (*viparita karani*)
Sit on your mat with your right hip pressing against the wall. Pivot around and lie down on the mat with your legs placed up the wall, hips and backs of your legs against the wall. Relax your shoulders. Keep feet and knees together.

Spread your arms to the sides or rest them on your belly and close your eyes. Remain in this pose for 18 *ujjayi* breaths, watching the rise and fall of your chest and abdomen.

To release the pose, bend your knees and roll onto your right side to come back to sitting.

Corpse Pose (*savasana*)
Sit on the floor with your knees bent, feet on the floor, and lean back onto your forearms. Lift your pelvis slightly off the floor and release your upper buttocks onto the floor.

Extend your legs, taking your feet hip- or mat-distance apart and lowering all the way down on the floor. Let your feet fall out and soften your lower back. Rest your arms by the sides of your body, palms facing the ceiling and fingers relaxed and curled in. Tuck your chin slightly in and keep a soft smile on your face to relax the facial muscles. Stay in the pose for five minutes.

To release, bring some gentle movement into the body, starting with your feet and hands. When you are ready, bend your knees, roll onto your right side and come back to a seated position.

YOUR DE-STRESS ACTION PLAN

Sample action plan to reduce stress levels and increase your wellbeing.

Before breakfast	10-count breathing practice (5 minutes) Mindfulness of breath meditation (6–12 minutes) Yoga practice for stress management (30 minutes) *Incorporate the yoga routine when it best suits your schedule, either in the morning on rising, as suggested here, or in the evening before dinner*
Breakfast	Green smoothie (be creative, eg leafy greens, banana, pineapple, orange, avocado) sprinkled with chia seeds *and/or* Rolled oats with nut milk of your choice, nuts, seeds and mixed fresh or frozen berries
Lunch	Grilled fish or tofu and mixed vegetable salad with cold-pressed olive or flaxseed oil dressing *or* Vegetable stirfry (carrots, capsicums, snowpeas, broccoli, cauliflower, tofu) with brown rice
Before dinner	30–45 minutes of exercise of your choice (yoga, walking, light jogging, swimming, tai chi or other preferred exercise)
Dinner	Roasted vegetables (sweet potato, carrots, pumpkin) with quinoa or buckwheat *or* Lentil curry or bean and vegetable casserole with brown rice
Snacks	Carrot and celery sticks with hummus *or* Fresh fruit *or* Raw nuts and seeds (almonds, walnuts, pumpkin or sunflower seeds)
Drinks	Herbal teas (brahmi, chamomile, licorice, mint, tulsi) Water
Before bed	10-count breathing practice (5 minutes) Mindfulness of breath meditation (6–12 minutes) Hot bath

Mascha Coetzee is a certified holistic health and wellness coach and yoga teacher who believes in using wholefoods and yoga to heal the body, tame the mind and improve wellbeing. Mascha is based in Launceston, Tasmania, where she teaches yoga classes and holistic health workshops. You can contact her by emailing coetzee.mascha@gmail.com or visit maschacoetzee.com.

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