

Surprising Strategies for Quick Stress-Relief

The following is taken from the article [Need a quick stress-reliever? Try one of these surprising science-based strategies](#), by Jelena Kecmanovic of The Washington Post, September 8, 2021

Here are some outside-the-box, but science-based strategies to help us calm down quickly.

Spur your mammalian diving reflex

One of the most effective stress resets involves submerging your face in ice-cold water while holding your breath. This activates the [diving reflex](#), which slows the heart rate and redirects blood away from the periphery of the body, toward the heart and other vital organs. These physiological changes have been shown to [decrease anxiety](#).

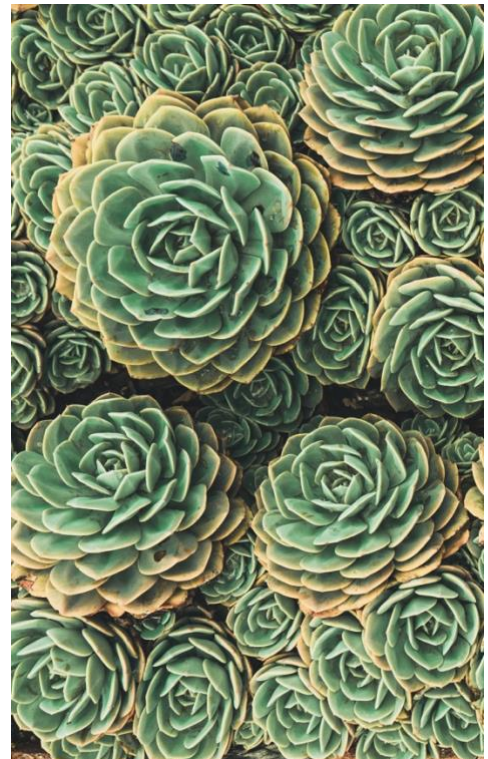
If a bowl or a bucket with icy water is not at your disposal, you can press ice packs against your eyes, upper cheeks and temples while leaning over and holding your breath. Stay like this for 15-30 seconds, or as long as you can. People with low blood pressure, heart problems or eating disorders should get clearance from their doctor before attempting this strategy.

Distract yourself with strong sensations or mental games

When we are very stressed or anxious, [our attention narrows](#) and only focuses on the negatives. If you are having a hard time objectively looking at a situation and making decisions, chew on a hot pepper, listen to loud music, hold ice cubes in your hands or smell a pungent cheese to briefly shift your attention away from stress. Alternatively, you can make a list of car models, flowers, colors, or create a mental top 10 list of your favorite movies, novels or places.

Look at fractal shapes in nature or art

A fractal is a never-ending pattern. Our affinity for fractals probably came through evolution, because there are no perfect shapes or straight lines in the natural world. Whenever possible, spend time in nature to reduce stress.



Speak to yourself in the third person

Talking to yourself in the third person takes the edge off stress and defuses it, often quite quickly. Even if it seems silly or contrived, try advising or coaching yourself the way you would talk to someone you care about the next time you get stressed. Doing so silently will work, but you might want to experiment with saying the words aloud if your environment allows for it.

Chew gum

The [earliest study](#) examining the calming effect of chewing gum, published in the journal Science in 1939, reported beneficial effects on muscle tension associated with stress. More recently, research has found that chewing gum can [reduce anxiety, stress and cortisol while increasing alertness](#).

Act the opposite of the way you feel

Each emotion is associated with certain bodily postures, facial expressions and behavioral urges. For example, when you get angry, you probably tend to have an erect posture, frown and speak loudly or yell. If you find yourself getting angry when stressed, try intentionally changing your posture to a nonaggressive one, relaxing your expression into a smile and speaking very softly. Research suggests that this technique, called “opposite action,” [reduces the intensity of the original emotion](#).

Make yourself yawn

Research suggests that [yawning has a brain-cooling function in vertebrates](#), including humans. Brain temperature increases during times of stress and anxiety. Yawning naturally occurs before and during stressful situations, promoting relaxation and better cognitive functioning.

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