



22 summer stress busters

Relax your mind, body and soul with our simple little tension fighters **by Rachel Moser**

Ahhh, summer. Supposed to be relaxing, right? But between softball games, cookouts and vacations, it's easy to feel, well, pressure to make the most of every moment. Call it the are-we-having-fun-yet syndrome. "People tend to have high expectations for the summer," says Robert Leahy, Ph.D., director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy and author of *The Worry Cure*, "which can lead to increased anxiety and worry."

Have no fear—we've rounded up the best stress busters for the moments when tension begins to creep in.

make time for fun

"Dedicate time to doing interesting activities just for you," suggests Dr. Leahy.

Get your game on "My son and I have a 500 rummy tournament each summer," says Rose Hoornbeek of Accord, New York. At the end of the summer, the loser has to buy the winner lunch (or fix his or her favorite meal).

Let loose As soon as the weather is warm enough, Blynda Killian of

Sacramento, California, rolls down the windows, turns up the music and sings at the top of her lungs whenever she's in the car—even if she doesn't know the words to the song. "I put together a playlist of upbeat tunes that put me in a great mood," she says.

Be playful To banish tension, Beth Batig of Redmond, Washington, shaves a big bowl of ice cubes into "snow" (using her countertop Ice

Shaver from Target), then has a snowball fight in the backyard with her husband and daughter.

Get the giggles Lorri Hafer of Spring Hill, Florida, pops in an *I Love Lucy* DVD to wind down. "Laughter is a great stress reducer!" she says.

Catch up on reading Been wanting to finally read *The Great Gatsby*? *The Catcher in the Rye*? *The Da Vinci Code*? Make a list of the books you haven't had the time for, recommends Dr. Leahy. Then actually get through each one.

Daydream "It always feels good to talk about your aspirations," says Lee Bach of Barnegat, New Jersey. She'll invite a good friend over to sit and chat about the things they'd most like to do in life.

Rekindle the romance On breezy summer nights, Deborah Maloney of Medford, Massachusetts, and her husband get ice cream cones and sit on the beach talking, just the two of them.

Go fishing "Summer is the best time to appreciate nature," says Dr. Leahy, "which (Please turn to 82)

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teaches us about tranquility and peace." Take a rowboat out on a lake and watch the birds fly by, or spend an afternoon fishing. Leave your iPod at home and turn off your cell.

get moving

"Exercise boosts your mood by releasing endorphins, the feel-good hormones," say Erica Gragg and Melissa Perlman, owners of Amansala resort and spa in Mexico and coauthors of *Bikini Bootcamp*. "And exercising outside ups the benefits even more, as exposure to sunlight is an automatic mood elevator."

Make fitness a family affair

During the summer, Theresa Winterhalter of McDonough, Georgia, trains for the Women's Tri-Fitness race in Tampa with her 14- and 17-year-old daughters. "Training together is a very special time for us," says Theresa, "and staying physically fit feels great."

Bust a move Take a dance class you've never tried before, maybe Indian or tango, suggests Dr. Leahy. And really get into the music.

Be sporty When she comes home from work, Jenine Jones of Bowie, Maryland, likes to go outside and play a game of kickball or basketball with her kids (she has six). "Since there's more daylight in the evening, I have a few hours to spend quality time with them and get my exercise in."

Loosen up with yoga Gragg and Perlman recommend doing several yoga sun salutations first thing in the morning, five days a week. "The cardiovascular and toning benefits are incredible, and the meditative aspect eases stress while awaking your body, mind and spirit," says Gragg. Find easy-to-follow yoga poses at abc-of-yoga.com/yogapractice/sunsalutation.asp.

Start the day walking Jill Ryer-Powder of Ladera Ranch, California, takes a walk early in the morn-

ing so she can watch the sun rise. "It's the perfect calm setting to work out and plan my day," she says.

don't forget nutrition

"The best recipe for reducing stress is to eat regularly—every four to five hours," advises Lona Sandon, M.Ed, R.D., spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association and assistant professor at University of Texas Southwestern in Dallas. "Skipping meals allows blood sugar levels to fall, which makes you irritable, anxious and unable to function at your peak."

Feeling frazzled? Find time to do something you love, like taking a walk in the park or going for a swim.

Stock your pantry Keep whole-some foods in your home, like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins (such as skinless chicken breast or lean sirloin), suggests Sandon. They're the most efficient sources of fuel for your body.

Control caffeine intake "If you normally drink caffeinated beverages, you can probably continue to do so without increasing stress," says Sandon. But if you suddenly add more caffeine to your day, you may feel irritable or anxious.

Keep gum on hand Some research shows that chewing gum may relax tension in the jaw and help you focus on the task you're working on, advises Sandon. It also keeps your mouth busy so you don't pig out on unhealthy snacks.

go zen

"Meditation helps you to stay in the present moment and find peace of mind," says Dr. Leahy.

Bring vacation home "My husband and I visited the Caribbean islands on a cruise and wanted to bring that laid-back feeling back home with us," says Trish Barron of McKean, Pennsylvania. So they cre-

ated a canvas-covered summer oasis on their deck with plants that look like they belong in the Caribbean. "Sipping my morning coffee in our island-inspired haven takes all my cares away," says Trish.

Relish quiet time "We go camping at the lake quite a bit when the kids are out of school," says Cori Diepdael of Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada. "I enjoy staying up a little later than everyone else, sitting quietly by the fire or watching the stars."

Let go of tension Stress often begins in your mind, then lodges itself in the body, says Gragg. To

get rid of it, sit down, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Focus on the top of your head and your forehead, sensing any tension and giving yourself permission to let it go. Move progressively down through the rest of your body, paying close attention to any tension in each group of muscles and releasing it.

Take a load off Lie down on the floor and extend both legs up against a wall, suggests Gragg. (Your legs should be perpendicular to your torso.) Close your eyes and stay like this for five minutes. This posture increases circulation, refreshes your entire body and brain and helps counter the effects of gravity.

Soak in the tub Take a bath an hour before bedtime and add a few chamomile tea bags to the hot water, suggests Perlman. Then place a rolled towel under your neck and breathe in the aroma.

Reflect "At night I like to sit outside for about half an hour to meditate," says Barbara Karpinski of Somerset, New Jersey. "I close my eyes and try to focus on one sound, then on another and another, until I let them all become one melody." **wd**