



Stress Reduction Tactics Every Health Care Worker Should Try

Patient care is only as good as the care you give yourself.

That's the message Alison Hernandez, Ph. D., RN-BC, has for all front-line caregivers: "The more you fill up your own cup, the more you can pour into the cups of others."

Find what works for you and do more of it. It's important to find stress reduction tactics to eliminate high stress levels. If you aren't sure what that could be for you, just know it's anything that helps you unwind and brings you joy.

1. **The tried-and-true stress reliever: exercise.** There's a reason exercise is always mentioned in stress reduction articles: it works. Purposeful exercise or leisure physical activities — like gardening or walking your dog — will help get your heart rate up and your endorphins flowing. Both are linked to physiological, stress-reducing benefits. "Incorporate some movement on your days off, even in small ways," Hernandez said. "Exercise does not have to be running a marathon; it can be cleaning your house."
2. **When you snooze, you win.** "Getting enough sleep is as important as the air we breathe," Hernandez said. "Sleep renovates and restores our bodies. It gives your brain a recharge so you can be more efficient."
3. **Trust your gut.** Chronic stress leads to both over and underrating behaviors. When we're stressed out, we tend to reach for highly-processed, carbohydrate-heavy foods because our bodies are asking for quick energy. But our gut is a reservoir for feel-good neurotransmitters like serotonin that gets diminished with processed foods. Eating whole foods — like veggies, protein or good fats — can help buffer stress from the inside out.
4. **The power of the mind: positive psychology.** You can't control everything that happens during your shift. Research from Judy Moskowitz, Ph. D., shows you can take control of your thoughts and reactions and instantly reduce your stress. Here are a few ways to start:
 - a. Reappraisal: anytime something negative happens, reframe the issue and look for the silver lining. For example, if you make a mistake at work and a coworker corrects you, look at it as a learning opportunity instead of a threat. Think: "I can be a better employee because someone made sure I was doing this the right way."
 - b. Savor and amplify positive events: anytime you have a moment of success, big or small, pause and celebrate.
 - c. Gratitude journal: of course you're thankful for your health, your job and your family. Instead of repeating the same things you're grateful for, get smaller. (Examples: a co-worker helped you out with a tough situation, a beautiful sunrise or sunset, the ability to be of service to your fellow man, etc.)

- d. Random acts of kindness for yourself: as a health care worker, you're always doing things for others and this has shown to have a positive effect on health, but you may struggle with self-compassion. To lower stress levels, you must take care of yourself and not feel guilty about it. (Examples: indulge in and prioritize what brings you joy like crafting, reading, spending time with friends, taking bubble baths or taking naps.)

High stress levels affect quality of life and can lead to burnout — a serious state that not only burdens your mind and body, but also the quality of your work. The more you use stress-reduction tactics, the more they become like a muscle — strong and usable without thinking twice.