

## 7 Ways to Reduce Stress: Calming Techniques for ADHD Adults

**Seven strategies for calming yourself when adult ADHD triggers stress at work or at home.**

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### ADHD Relaxation Responses

People with ADHD often don't recognize that they're stressed until they are in the middle of a meltdown.

Several times a day, take inventory of how you are feeling: Are your muscles tense? Is your heart racing? If so, do one of the following:

Close your eyes and take 20 slow, deep breaths.

Stand up and stretch for several minutes.

Take a five-minute walk outside.

"I finally did it!" Bob, an adult with attention deficit disorder, said to himself, as he walked out of the office at 5 p.m. sharp, to meet his wife for dinner. For the first time in years, he wasn't late.

More important, he was ready to enjoy the night out because he felt relaxed and in control. Bob no longer waited until the eleventh hour to complete his client reports — a stressful pattern that had taken a toll on his health and his marriage.

How did Bob cut workplace stress? By using a watch that beeped every hour, so that he made sure he was following his to-do list, a year-long calendar with color-coded client deadlines, and a notebook in which he "parked" random thoughts during the day. The result: less stress and a happier life.

Many people with ADHD live in a constant state of stress. Their neurobiology makes it difficult to screen out competing stimuli, focus, and slow down, all of which increase frustration levels. Being unable to measure up to people's expectations or feeling guilty about missing deadlines at work creates additional tension.

Like Bob, you can reduce stress with strategies that target your ADHD symptoms. Here are some to try:

### Acknowledge Your ADHD

Stop blaming yourself for forgetting chores or missing a deadline. Recognize the real culprit: ADHD is neurological and it won't go away. Get a proper diagnosis and treatment. Sign up for a local ADHD support group or an Internet forum. Merely realizing that you are not alone can reduce stress.

### Exercise Your Options

Exercise is a potent stress-reducer. Physical activity increases the brain's serotonin levels, which combats the stress hormone cortisol. Studies suggest that one exercise session of 30 to 45 minutes can improve mood and increase relaxation for 90 to 120 minutes. Exercise, over time, raises your threshold for stress.

### Measure Time

Most people with ADHD see time as a fluid thing. To better gauge time, buy a wristwatch that beeps and set it to go off every hour. If you always need “just five more minutes,” get a countdown timer that will sound after five minutes!

My client, Linda, spent hours on the Internet, then found herself scrambling at the end of the day to meet deadlines. A stopwatch, set to go off every hour, periodically roused her from her online reverie.

### Create Boundaries

Overbooking your time can raise stress. Whether the cause is pure impulsivity or an internal voice saying, “I should do x, y, z,” stress takes its toll on your mind. Practice saying no three times a day. And every time you say “yes,” ask yourself, “What am I saying ‘no’ to?” Relaxation? Listening to music?

### Make Structure Your Friend

Although many ADD adults seem “allergic” to structure, a reliable routine can minimize chaos. Try these tips, both of which work wonders for my clients: Before bed, plan the next day — list what you’re going to do, when, and how. You’ll awake more centered. Also, go to bed and get up at the same time each day. This stabilizes body rhythms, increasing your chances of getting a sound sleep.

### Take Time to Play

By not taking breaks from today’s busy life, you set yourself up for burnout. Schedule fun into your life. Have dinner or go to a movie with friends every week. Take a drive into the country or to the beach on the weekend. Figure out what you love and pursue it without guilt.

### Remain Vigilant

Many of my clients have a false sense of security once they make a few gains, and then abandon the strategies that got them there. Forgetting you have ADHD is a hallmark of the condition. Don’t let down your guard!