

Comprehensive Fitness

Top-5 Stress Relieving Tips

By Stephanie Weichert

Looking for ways to improve your overall health—physical, emotional, psychological and mental?

Discover the new Army total health program—the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program. Based on the growing evidence that lifestyle is a major factor in our well-being, this initiative encourages more than just push-ups.

The focus of the program is managing stress, and improving our response to it. “Being Army Strong is being more than just physically fit,” said BG (Dr.) Rhonda Cornum, the Army’s assistant surgeon general, in an interview with *GX*. Total fitness is “characterized as high levels of resilience, adaptability, self-confidence and agility.”



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THE BIG PICTURE

Many of us are adept at dealing with situational stress—one problem at a time. But the real goal is to achieve ongoing, long-term balance, stability and peace of mind. For starters, you may need to reprioritize. The more you simplify your life, the less stress you're likely to feel.

Try these top-5 tips to minimize stress and start feeling great:

1. Exercise.

A study by *Science Daily* on runners who ran for two hours revealed that endorphins were released in the prefrontal and limbic regions of the brain. These regions, among others, deal with long-term storage of episodic memories and thoughts of how you feel about yourself. So, exercise—prolonged periods of it will make you feel good.

2. Rest.

Your body needs time to recuperate. The National Sleep Foundation in the United States maintains that for adults, seven to nine hours per night of sleep is optimal. Getting sufficient sleep facilitates:

- * Alertness
- * Increased memory and problem solving
- * Increased overall health
- * Reduced risk of accidents

Tips from the National Sleep Foundation for better sleeping:

- * Avoid caffeine and nicotine close to bedtime.
- * Avoid alcohol, as it can lead to disrupted sleep.
- * Exercise regularly, but complete your workout at least three hours before bedtime.

“A MAN TOO BUSY TO TAKE CARE OF HIS HEALTH IS LIKE A MECHANIC TOO BUSY TO TAKE CARE OF HIS TOOLS.”

>> Spanish Proverb

- * Establish a regular, relaxing, stress-free bedtime routine, such as relaxing in a bath or hot tub.
- * Create a dark, quiet, sleep-conducive environment.

3. Smile.

Smiling can release serotonin and endorphins—natural chemicals that help reduce pain and induce pleasure. Also, studies say that when you smile, you're seen as more sincere, attractive, sociable and competent.

4. Spend time with people who encourage you.

Surround yourself with positive thinkers. Friends who encourage you can help you stay on course and not give up during hard times.

5 Ways to Improve Your Health Fast

TRY THESE 5 TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR LIFE WITH MORE ENERGY AND A STRONGER SENSE OF WELL-BEING.

- 1. HEALTH:** Cut out unnecessary sugar. Think before you reach for a donut at work, mid-afternoon piece of candy or a can of soda. If your body is a car, then the food you eat is the fuel. Eat premium quality foods for maximum performance.
- 2. FREEDOM:** Spend less time on your cell phone or answering emails. Set aside certain times of the day for these tasks, and then move on from them.
- 3. JOY:** Do something you enjoy. This can be as simple as taking time for a good walk or sipping a cup of tea for a few minutes while you gaze out the window.
- 4. KINDNESS:** Do not say anything about yourself that you wouldn't say about someone else. This includes both the running dialogue in your brain and in actual conversation.
- 5. ORDER:** Organize your workspace and your home. At work, go through all of the paperwork on or around your desktop. File what you need, shred and throw out everything else. At home, start with one small space at a time, perhaps a closet or chest of drawers.

5. Stop complaining and think positively.

You can change your circumstances by changing your perception. “Happy people appear to be more successful than their less-happy peers in three primary domains—work, relationships and health.”

Benefits of optimism may include:

- * Decreased stress
- * Increased immune system
- * A sense of well-being and improved health
- * Better coping skills during hardships

BG (DR.) RHONDA CORNUM, the Army's assistant surgeon general, says: This way of thinking takes fitness to a whole new “comprehensive” level. Being fit is no longer solely about physical strength, but about spiritual and emotional fitness, too.