

Home > Lifestyle > Health and Fitness > Know your body

Ten simple daily stress-busting tips

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Step up: Reap the myriad benefits of regular walks CREDIT: GETTY

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A strong mind is one of the foundations of wellness – and after a tough year, it's time to give stress and anxiety a send-off in style

While it's been a challenging, anxious year for all of us, we've surprised ourselves. From taking up a new fitness habit to getting creative in the kitchen, we're more resilient than we often give ourselves credit for.

This is partly down to a collective realisation that health is so much more than diet and exercise. As we have discovered, mental wellness plays a huge role, too. "Wellbeing comes from long-term changes in mindset and activity, which requires patience and time," says Dr Lara Batchat, a GP in Finchley, north London. "It's important to be self-aware and directed by the needs of your own body and mind."

Information is key when it comes to understanding your body and mind – especially when that information comes in the form of data. This is the thinking behind the latest Fitbit, the advanced health smartwatch Fitbit Sense.



Fitbit Sense: Enjoy a free six-month trial of Fitbit Premium with every purchase

This smartwatch helps you keep track of all the important health metrics, from your daily activity levels, to heart rate, to sleep. It's the world's first smartwatch with an EDA sensor. Electrodermal activity (EDA) responses are tiny electrical changes on your skin which may indicate your body's response to stress – so this type of sensor allows you to monitor your mood and understand how your body reacts to stress, leaving you more informed to help you manage your health holistically through mindfulness tools, for example.

Here are 10 easy ways to factor self-care into your life – in tandem with Fitbit Sense:

1 Get outdoors

A walk in the park has become a lockdown tonic for millions, but there's more to it than just getting some air. "Research suggests walking in nature can have a restorative effect by reducing the level of the stress hormone cortisol compared to exercising indoors or watching TV," says clinical psychologist Dr Georgia Halls, who works at London's Three Ps clinic. And a study by the University of Essex found that while all types of outdoor exercise have an impact on our mental health, being near water generates the greatest benefits.

2 Eat your oats

From your morning porridge to that afternoon energy ball, the humble oat packs a healthy punch. "Oats can help calm our brains," says nutritionist Kirsten Brooks, who runs Eat Yourself to Health in south London. "They contain complex carbohydrates that provide slow-release energy, which can prevent blood sugar crashes and the release of stress hormones we get after eating sugary, refined foods." For added benefit, combine with a protein source, such as nuts or yogurt. "This provides tryptophan," says Kirsten, "which can be converted in our brain into serotonin – the happy, soothing neurotransmitter."



Sweet dreams: Improve your sleep score with smart tech CREDIT: GETTY

3 Sleep smarter

Struggling to nod off? You're not alone. A study by Sleep School found that a whopping 54 per cent of the UK population is having trouble with its shut-eye. "Good sleep is imperative for a healthy body and mind," says Dr Batchat. Her recommendations are straightforward. "Wind down with a book or bath, then go to bed at a set time. Keep your bedroom dark, with a temperature between 18C-24C." You can boost your sleep routine by using Fitbit Sense's Sleep Score function, which is based on heart rate, restlessness and more, to see where you could improve, then set it to "Smart Wake" you with a quiet vibration during a lighter sleep stage, helping you wake up feeling more refreshed and rested.

4 Structure your morning

From Gwyneth Paltrow to Obama, successful people love a morning routine. "A set routine that incorporates self-care, such as stretching, a favourite coffee or just washing your face, helps us start the day on a good note," says Dr Georgia Halls. "Routine can give us a sense of control over our lives and a sense of achievement. Plus, once routine becomes a habit, this reduces your 'cognitive load', and allows space for other more important things you'd like to think about."

5 Phone a friend

It's been a year of enforced distancing, with the Office for National Statistics reporting that one in four people experience some form of loneliness. "When we lack human connection, or we don't feel heard, we can feel low," says Dr Georgia Halls. "So it's important we make the effort to contact our loved ones." She recommends calling rather than texting. "Hearing their voice can increase the feeling of connection and it might make it easier for you to feel understood."



Seafood diet: Up your oily fish intake for stress-relieving goodness CREDIT: GETTY

6 Go fish

Oily fish has long been linked with cardiovascular health, but that Friday-night sushi order might be a secret weapon against stress, too. "Oily fish such as salmon and mackerel contain omega-3 fatty acids – in particular the compounds EPA and DHA – which have an anti-inflammatory effect and can help relieve low moods," says nutritionist Kirsten Brooks. "Omega-3s are also needed for healthy cell membranes in the brain to allow neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine to work effectively."

7 Get moving...

Exercise has magic powers – fact. “Evidence shows physical activity improves mood and relieves symptoms of anxiety and depression,” says Dr Batchat. “Exercise creates opportunities for self-control, social interaction and self-confidence, fuelling a positive cycle of wellbeing. Plus it releases feel-good endorphins – neurotransmitters that interact with receptors in the brain to reduce the perception of pain and trigger positive feelings in the body.” You can enhance your physical activity habits using the Fitbit Sense’s all-day activity monitoring to track your heart rate and intensity levels. Active Zone Minutes track your time spent in a heart-pumping activity such as walking or cycling, based on your personal heart rate zones. The WHO recommends 150 minutes of moderate activity per week; so you can keep track of your Active Zone Minutes and your daily steps to help maintain healthy exercise habits.

8. ...But think beyond the mat

When it comes to workouts with mental health perks, there’s more than yoga to choose from. Yes, Downward Dog is great for de-stressing, but the most effective activity will be the one you actually enjoy. “Some people find the repetitive movement involved in aerobic exercises such as jogging or swimming helps divert their mind from anxious thoughts,” says Dr Batchat. “Finding what works for you is the most important thing.”

9 Tune into your cravings

It’s 3pm: work is intense, you’re starting to flag and the biscuit tin is whispering to you (we’ve all been there). “Craving sugary treats is normally a sign your blood sugar is getting low, often because you haven’t eaten foods that sustain you well earlier in the day,” says nutritionist Kirsten Brooks, who adds that this ‘low’ often happens around 3-4pm when our cortisol levels naturally dip. To help counter this, aim for meals which combine protein and slow-release carbohydrates, such as rye bread and eggs, with plenty of veggies thrown in too.



And breathe... Getting it right is core for any mindfulness regime CREATOR: GETTY

10. Don't forget to breathe

Take a big, deep breath – it feels great, doesn’t it? Being aware of your breathing is one of the basic tenets of mindfulness, which has been found to improve our mental health. Spiritual leader Thich Nhat Hanh says mindfulness “allows you to live deeply every moment that is given you to live”, and teaches that following our in-breath and out-breath brings us back to the present moment. With a six-month free trial of Fitbit Premium (for new users only) that accompanies every Fitbit Sense, you’ll get access to stress-busting mindfulness content, including the Mindful Method from Deepak Chopra, helping you find your Zen a little more easily.

Achieve your holistic health goals

The past year has been a real rollercoaster, with many of us feeling more stressed as we juggle working from home with childcare and self-care. But there have also been some positives. We’ve learned some valuable lessons about how resilient we really are, and about how we de-stress – and that’s where tracking our own health data has come into its own.

Fitbit Sense can help you connect the dots between activity, sleep, nutrition and stress management, with tips on how to understand your body better and ultimately help improve your overall health and wellbeing.

For more information, visit [Fitbit.com](https://www.fitbit.com)

