



Lifestyle Medicine

Ways to Complete the Stress Cycle

- 1. Deep breathing:** Take 3-10 slow deep breaths, exhale longer than inhale. When you are feeling stressed, there is a bit too much carbon dioxide in your lungs. Breathing in for a count of 4 and then breathing out for a count of 5 or 6 helps to restore the balance of air in your lungs.
 - A technique called square breathing can help you focus more easily. Inhale for a count of four, hold your breath for a count of four, exhale for a count of four, and stop breathing for a count of four. Repeat this cycle 4 or 5 times.
- 2. Laugh:** Serves the same purpose as deep breathing, with an added bonus of releasing endorphins and increased dopamine production, which also decreases stress.
- 3. Sing:** Similar to laughing and breathing, but also releases oxytocin.
- 4. Physical activity:** Walking, running, dancing, jumping, etc.
 - Exercise helps your body actively respond to the fight or flight instinct, by literally engaging in flight, which allows the stress response cycle to complete naturally.
- 5. Affection:** Hugs, cuddling, petting a dog or cat, etc. Releases oxytocin, which is a hormone that helps us bond with other people or animals.
- 6. Orienting:** Turn your head to look to the right, then left, then behind you, then in front of you. Every time you turn your head, say to yourself, “I am not in physical danger”.
- 7. Cry:** We often cry when unable to do other things on this list, which is totally okay. Crying can be wonderfully physically cathartic and actually releases cortisol through your tears.

Even better, try combining one or two or more of these techniques, such as laughing, singing, and dancing with a friend, child, or pet or breathing while orienting.