9 stress-busting tips for busy nurses

Keep the pressures of your work and home lives from threatening your health

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01. LAUGHTER. It's the best medicine in the world. Studies prove that laughter reduces the stress hormones. It improves circulation, stimulates the nervous system, heightens the immune system, and even makes the heart stronger. Like a built-in safety latch, we laugh hardest when we have been feeling the most stress. As Mark Twain said, "The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that is laughter."

02. NURTURE YOURSELF. Nurses spend so much time caring for others, we sometimes forget to care for ourselves. Set aside leisure time every day, just for you. Take a long bath, curl up with a good book, listen to music, or watch a favorite show.

03. WATCH YOUR CAFFEINE INTAKE. Caffeine is a strong stimulant that can generate a stress reaction in the body. A recent study revealed that too much caffeine can leave our bodies in a state of perpetual stress.

04. HIT THE GYM. Regular exercise is the easiest way to dissipate the excess energy from the fight-or-flight syndrome, draining ongoing stress by keeping its hormones under control. It doesn't have to be a pounding aerobic workout! According to the Mayo Clinic, any form of physical activity can help you unwind, from walking to gardening.

05. A MOMENT OF ZEN: Ten to 20 minutes of meditation or relaxation every day can help reduce your levels of stress hormones. Major health benefits of regular meditation include lower blood pressure, better sleep, and less anxiety—and methods like yoga can make your body more flexible.

06. RECORD YOUR THOUGHTS. The Mayo Clinic suggests keeping a journal of your response to a given situation to help identify your stress and how you reacted. This can help you solve the problems causing stress or find better ways to cope with the situation.
07. **TAKE CONTROL.** Unrealistic expectations or demands are a common source of stress in any situation. When expectations are realistic, life feels more predictable and thus more manageable. This means being able to say "no." Don't over-commit. Prioritize tasks, delegate responsibilities, and be willing to compromise. Not all stress can be avoided, but it can be managed.

08. **TALK IT OUT.** Sometimes the best stress-reducer is simply sharing with someone close to you. Talking things out can help you see things differently and more clearly. Create a support system. Telling your story or crisis in the presence of a trusted listener can be very therapeutic.

09. **ADEQUATE SLEEP:** Studies show inadequate rest can cause physical, emotional, and even cognitive symptoms, making you more susceptible to stress and less able to deal with its demands, both physically and mentally. If you've slept well, you should wake up naturally, before the alarm goes off, and feeling refreshed and energized for your day (or night). Some experts even suggest a 20-minute nap if you can't get a full night's rest.