

DIGITAL DOWNTIME

WHAT'S IN YOUR DE-STRESS TOOLBOX?

Story // Angela Ambrose

The constant vibrating and ringing of your smartphone may be stressing you out, according to research presented at this year's British Psychological Society meeting in Chester, England. The study showed a relationship between people's stress levels and the number of times they check their phones for personal messages and social networking updates.

"You're being constantly stimulated, and anyone that is constantly stimulated is going to get overwhelmed," says Robert Puff, Ph.D., clinical psychologist and meditation expert in Newport Beach, Calif. To help reduce stress, Puff recommends taking regular breaks from the digital world. Here are a few simple tools to help you power down and relax:

EXERCISE Engaging in physical activities not only strengthens your body and immune system, but also allows you to let go of pent up emotions and boost your mood and energy level. Choose activities you enjoy, from hiking, running or biking, to jumping rope or swimming laps. Taking your exercise outdoors into the sunshine and fresh air can have an added calming effect and help your body produce Vitamin D.

DEEP BREATHING AND MEDITATION "Meditation is basically having your mind still and following your breath," says Puff. Breathe deeply in and out through your nose and lengthen your breath as you slowly count to four on the inhale and exhale. When introducing meditation to kids, Puff recommends using guided meditations.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION Focus on one body part at a time as you alternately contract and relax your muscles, starting with your face and working your way down to your chest, arms, stomach and legs. Tense each muscle group as you take a deep inhale and hold your breath for several seconds, then relax the muscles as you exhale. Repeat with each muscle group until you have covered your entire body.

ESCAPE WITH A FAVORITE ACTIVITY Find a hobby or activity that you love and immerse yourself in it, such as reading a novel, writing in a journal or listening to music. Taking a long, soothing bath or calling a close friend can also help you unwind and let go of negative emotions.

EAT AND SLEEP WELL Don't forget to fuel your body with healthy, nutrient-rich foods and power down your electronics early in the evening, so you'll get a long, restful night's sleep. 

