

20 Ways to Improve Your Mental Health Every Day

STRESS, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION—

THESE TIPS WILL HELP YOU OVERCOME IT ALL.

By [BEST LIFE EDITORS](#)

1. Plan your day more efficiently.

"Planning is the most important thing a [busy worker] can do to avoid stress," says Michael Kahn, PhD, a psychologist in Maryland. Plan by the day, week, month, and year—and habitualize each planning session. For, example, check your daily schedule every morning before reading your e-mail; preview your week on Sunday nights; and preview the upcoming month every 27th. "I learned in the Navy that if you make a list of all the things that need to be done, you get them out of your head and don't have to think about them," one of Kahn's CEOs told him. To gain a sense of control, prioritize tasks using the old A-B-C theory: A's need to be done, B's ought to be done, and C's can wait until later.

2. Use the buddy system

"Select a trusted colleague and instruct him or her to pull you aside when he notices that you're raising your voice," says Kahn. A good consigliere can help make you aware of certain behaviors that you are trying to minimize." Explain to them that you demand honesty, even if it stings.

3. Call a time-out.

Effective leaders don't spend a lot of energy on emotional angst, says Kahn. Just as a basketball coach will call a time-out to slow down the pace of the game and regroup when the other team is on a run, successful people know when to disengage in times of high emotion and reflect on their core values before making decisions. When you feel a tide of anger or frustration rising, call a time-out and leave the room to regain your composure. It might help to imagine a bird sitting on your shoulder, a bird that has been observing things and can whisper feedback into your ear. Be aware of what's happening, what you want to be different, and what your options are to facilitate a shift in the process.

4. Know how to say "no."

Someone who has too much on his plate needs to be able to say *no* to more tasks without feeling regret. That's where good planning and delegating can help. Schedule regular appointments into your week—like a Wednesday tennis lesson—so that you're not always reacting to the needs of others. One of Kahn's patients makes a game of trying to get the most work done with the absolute minimum of effort.

5. Develop a healthy arrogance.

Great employees believe unequivocally that they can ace the job. Nurture this belief by reviewing past successes, and identify times when you faced similar obstacles and overcame them.

6. Prioritize you.

Make getting enough sleep and exercise a priority. It comes down to discipline and planning. You stop working at a reasonable hour, period. You schedule exercise as if it were a critical meeting with a client, which it is.

7. Delegate ruthlessly.

A good manager will always relinquish tasks that others can do so that they can focus on the things only they can do.

8. Respect the unexpected.

Kahn says efficient execs tend to be very sensitive to the feeling of becoming overwhelmed. Like canaries in a coal mine, they recognize when the air is getting bad, and they know how to react before stress paralyzes them. Kahn recommends this stress-management ritual:

- Recognize your mind-body signals of distress, such as muscle tension, rapid pulse, sweaty palms, or irritability.
- Disengage by taking a walk or doing a breathing exercise.
- Identify the stress source: Is it a project, a deadline, a personal interaction?

9. Generate a solution that you can implement immediately.

For example, you might recognize, "I'm trying to do two-and-a-half days of work in three hours!" The immediate solution: Delay doing one item on your list and deal with it at another time.

10. Be comfortable with discomfort.

Rename *anxiety* and call it *opportunity*. Most of us think of anxiety as something to avoid, but it's actually fuel for positive change. "Anxiety is a natural emotion that lives in the gap between where we are and where we want to be," says Robert Rosen, PhD, founder of Healthy Companies International and author of *Just Enough Anxiety: The Hidden Driver of Business Success*. "Good leaders see anxiety as productive energy for themselves and their organizations."

11. Then bend over backward.

A study in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* found that office workers who take a 15-minute stretch break feel calmer and more productive afterward. Try these desk stretches recommended by certified strength and conditioning specialist Bill Hartman:

- Thoracic extension: Put your hands behind your head and bend your upper body over your chair's back as far as possible. Draw your shoulder blades together and hold for two seconds. Release. Repeat eight times.
- Hip-flexor stretch: Place one foot on a chair and lean forward while extending your arms overhead. Gently arch your back while moving your arms (keep them straight) back slightly. Hold for two seconds. Do eight reps.

12. Focus on somebody other than yourself.

Bad stress can be triggered by a sense of entitlement and helplessness. "Can you find ways, while you are so self-absorbed, to be considerate of the people who work for you?" asks Kahn. Showing respect and appreciation for others has an amazing ability to defuse obsessive behavior and anxiety.

13. Turn trouble into transformation.

In 1929, some people were so consumed by their financial ruin that they jumped out of buildings. "Yet there were people who walked away from the terror of the Holocaust, moved ahead without a penny, and succeeded," says Mel Schwartz, PhD, a psychotherapist in Westport, Connecticut. "A crisis is an opportunity to escape programmed living and transform yourself. The more creative and participatory you feel when forced outside of your comfort zone, the more balanced and happy you will ultimately be."

14. Pick the low-hanging fruit.

When faced with a seemingly impossible challenge, immediately pinpoint at least one piece of the problem that you can control and then attack it. "When you shift into take-charge mode, you meet the challenge from a position of strength rather than feeling at its mercy," says Kahn. This will buck up your confidence and set you on a path of action.

15. Relive the past to face the future.

Sure, things look bleak out there, but hey, if you're human, you've faced bleak odds before. "We have a much greater capacity to weather disappointment and change than we think we do," says Giovanna Zerbi, PsyD, a clinical supervisor at the University of California at San Diego. Being mindful of your feelings and remembering how you triumphed over past setbacks can give you the confidence to face whatever may be lurking around the corner.

16. Use a spotter.

Have you ever attempted to bench-press your max without having a gym buddy at the ready in case you couldn't push the barbell off of your throat? The same goes for your life beyond the weight rack. "Successful people have friends they can lean on in times of need," says Robert Maurer, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the University of California at Los Angeles School of Medicine. "Our culture tends to value stoicism, self-reliance, and independence, but your mind naturally wants to draw strength from others."

17. Create a three-legged life.

Securing balance in the three areas of your life—home, work, self—will create a buffer against stress. "If one goes down, you have two others to hold you up," says Soliman.

18. Recognize the power of your imagination.

When people worry, they tend to spin stories in their minds that perpetuate their fears, says Tahir Iftikhar Bhatti, a psychiatrist with the Executive Mental Health Program. "That's where self-awareness helps: If you recognize yourself doing it, hit the brakes."

19. Stop comparing yourself.

A preoccupation with comparing ourselves against our friends and rivals can easily get us into mental-health hot water. "People who have a problem with anxiety get lost in judging themselves," says Schwartz. It's a very Newtonian worldview. Schwartz says we measure to create order in our lives, but by doing so, we lose our humanity. "The critical voice is enslaving," he says. "To escape, you need to accept yourself and like who you are."

20. Call someone.

At the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, **1-800-273-8255**, there's always a person available, 24/7/365. If you need to talk to someone, talk to someone.