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## Research-Backed Ways to Reduce Depression and Anxiety

*For best results, experts recommend making one or two a daily habit*

Looking for relief from garden-variety stressors? Feeling mired in one of life's larger challenges? Weary of sweating the small stuff? The recently published results of a five-year study show that people who learn stress-intervention skills — and then practice them daily — develop more positive approaches to life.

The skills, known as a positive emotion regulation intervention, are not specific to any particular kind of stress. The study showed that individuals in all kinds of challenging life circumstances with high levels of depression and stress have the ability to experience positive emotions, and doing that helps them cope better. The same skills also help with daily hassles

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That's not to say that anyone needs to deny or suppress negative emotions, because they are important, but it's also important to experience positive emotions alongside negative ones, and that's what these skills are designed to help people do.

□ ***Choose from a 'Buffet of Options'***

Because different solutions work for different people, choose from "a buffet of options" — eight ways to help cultivate more positive emotions. You may want to give each option a try and then pick one or two to stick with as a habit. Here are the eight proven skills:

1. **Identify one positive event each day.** *Humans have evolved to pay attention to what's going wrong. Things that are stressful draw your attention so you can do something about it, but when you're hyper-focused on things that are stressful, you don't notice the good things. Making time to do that helps you take a step back, get some distance.*
2. **Talk with someone about the positive event or share it on social media.** *This is a way to savor or capitalize on something good. You don't have to share it. You could just think about it again, and remember how great it was. Examples might include preparing a good meal or watching a beautiful sunset.*
3. **Write in a gratitude journal every day.** *This is a second way to notice the good moments in the day. Keep a gratitude journal where you can write about events or write that you are grateful for the sunshine or for clean water.*
4. **Reflect on a personal strength and how you've used it recently.** *When you're under stress, your thoughts may spiral downward and lead to self-criticism. Instead, recall good things about yourself, maybe tell yourself that you are a great friend or that you're someone smart who can come up with a plan to deal with your stress.*

5. **Set a small daily goal and note your progress.** *When you feel as though you're making progress — even if you aren't necessarily achieving success — that increases positive emotions. Find the sweet spot of goal setting, something that's not way beyond what's possible.*
6. **Develop a “positive reappraisal” habit to reframe a troubling daily activity in a more positive light.** *How we interpret an event determines our emotional reaction to it. But there's almost always a positive reappraisal that you can pull out of any situation, even when you start small.*
7. **Perform an act of kindness every day.** *This simple practice gets you outside yourself. Simple things like walking your shopping cart back to the storefront, or making way for drivers attempting to merge onto the highway or. complimenting a stranger on a pretty scarf or a welcoming smile counts, too.*
8. **Concentrate on the present moment.** *When you're upset, instead of rehashing what already happened or rehearsing what might happen next, pay attention instead to what's happening in the present, what your thoughts and experiences are right now. When we're more mindful, we're more aware of positive events.*

#### □ ***Meditation Can Help You Master Mindfulness***

It's a tool for achieving mindfulness, and research shows that meditation reduces our sense of stress. You can take up a formal practice, or an informal practice, where you bring mindfulness to your daily activities.

You can practice mindfulness while in the shower. Often we might want to ruminate about anything we're worried about or try to do a lot of planning instead of just being in the shower. But remind yourself to be present, and not let your thoughts launch you into your day. Concentrate instead on the heat of the water, the feel of the water on your skin, the smell of the soap and the feel of the shampoo as it cascades down your face.

This focused approach also works while washing dishes or even brushing your teeth, and if your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the moment.

The more we bring mindfulness into our lives, the more impact it has. Think of it as a muscle you are developing — a way to help yourself.