



# RESET. RECOVER. REWIRE. THE 3 R'S OF STRESS RELIEF

*Alison Deutsch is a Certified Positive Psychology Practitioner and Certified Personal Development Coach who experienced the challenge of relocating with her young family – four times over a period of ten years, both domestically and overseas. Utilizing research-proven assessments, tools, and practices, that she’s personally road tested through her own life experiences, Alison helps women Move Out of the Stuck – that overwhelm, fear, and indecision that crop up around big life changes. Her clients gain peace of mind and newfound confidence in their ability to handle anything that comes their way.*



## CAUGHT IN A CYCLE OF STRESS?

### BREAK FREE WITH THE 3 R'S OF STRESS RELIEF

Stress is a *biological response* evolutionarily hardwired into our bodies to help us to rise to a challenge, while anxiety is an *emotional reaction* when we feel threatened. Since our brains can't distinguish between a real physical threat and a perceived emotional one, our bodies can get stuck in "fight-or-flight" when our minds chronically ruminate about the past or worry about the future.

### Stress itself isn't a problem, it's the lack of recovery

Try these proven strategies to immediately override your autonomic nervous system, balance your negativity bias with positivity boosters, stimulate your vagus nerve to recover from stress faster, and ultimately sculpt your brain to get triggered less often.

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**RESET** your brain by using your body to signal your brain that you're safe.

**Breathe Deeply.** A slow, rhythmic breath that originates from your diaphragm engages the rest-and-restore branch of the nervous system. When you perceive a flood of emotions bearing down on you, begin taking deep breaths in and out through your nose, feeling the rise and fall of your belly. Make your exhale twice as long as your inhale. Just three deep breaths will start to slow your heart rate, lower your blood pressure, and clear your head.

**Offer a Gentle Touch.** Hug, snuggle, hold hands, partner dance, massage, cuddle with a pet; a warm embrace reduces the stress hormone, cortisol, releases tension, and sends calming messages to the brain. For self-care place your hands, one hand on top of the other, gently over your heart, or hold your hand over the opposite wrist. Take your time; you'll need about 20 seconds for the "feel good" hormone, oxytocin, to start flowing.

**Start Moving.** Running, walking, and even a short boost of rigorous exercise helps to metabolize stress hormones and release feel-good hormones. If you're short on time take the stairs two at a time, run in place vigorously, or do a few jumping jacks. You can stand in the *Wonder Woman* pose -- with your hands on your hips and legs spread hip-width apart for at least two minutes to elevate your testosterone and feel more courageous. If you have the time, take a walk outside for at least 10 minutes, the natural light will release another "feel good" hormone, serotonin.

**RECOVER** from adversity faster by creating positive experiences that buffer the brain's natural negativity bias and add activities that stimulate your vagus nerve.

**Reflect on the Past.** One way to *create* a positive experience in the present, is to recall a happy memory. Strategically place photos where you are sure to see them and when you need a boost, take a few seconds to pause, recall, and return to the moment the picture was taken. Instead of passively walking by the photo, taking time to embody the positive emotions as if they're happening in the present, installs the positivity into the neural structure of your brain.

**Lower Negativity.** A way to boost positivity is to eliminate or minimize emotionally draining activities. Look for ways to restrict your media consumption, reduce gossip and limit the time spent with negative people.

**Sing in the Shower.** Singing, humming, chanting and even gargling stimulate the vocal cords and the muscles at the back of your throat, areas through which your vagus nerve passes.

**Laugh.** Laughter stimulates the vagus nerve which passes through the diaphragm. A good belly laugh relaxes your muscles, reduces stress hormones, and helps you feel cleansed. Humor offers a more lighthearted perspective and allows you to see events as challenges rather than threats.

**REWIRE** your brain through ongoing meditative and gratitude practices that retrain your brain to see the good and strengthen the communication between the rational and fear centers of your brain. Over time you'll become less easily triggered into stress.

**Retrain Your Brain.** A formal meditation practice strengthens your awareness by refocusing your attention when your mind wanders. Mindfulness -- informal meditation -- can also help you focus your attention on what you're doing as you're doing it; in other words, stop multi-tasking. Research has shown that meditative practices improve the communication between your prefrontal cortex, the rational part of the brain, and the amygdala, the fear center in your brain that gets triggered when it feels threatened. With as little as 3-5 minutes a day, you can strengthen the communication between the two parts and become less easily triggered into stress.

**When We Appreciate the Good, the Good Appreciates.** Your brain is a survival machine designed to find what's wrong – a trait that's evolutionarily hardwired into your DNA. Level the playing field and retrain your brain focusing on what's going well. Instead of only asking: "What's wrong?" "What do I need to fix?" ALSO ask yourself: "What am I grateful for?" "What do I appreciate in my life?" Gratitude practices retrain our brain to notice the good things all around us to which we've become desensitized to as a result of repetitive exposure.

# Create Islands of Sanity Throughout Your Day

Simple, minor shifts in how you do things can bring about significant changes in levels of stress. With persistence and consistency, you can tone your nervous system to bounce back from setbacks more quickly and ultimately rewire your brains, so it doesn't get triggered so easily.

When you understand *how* stress works in your body and *why* stress-reducing strategies work – you can start to notice the infinite possibilities available to introduce *islands of sanity* throughout your day. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

## Leverage Bathroom Time

- Anticipate something to look forward to while brushing your teeth
- Savor a good thing that happened as you brush your teeth at night
- Chant “Om” in the shower
- Take 3 deep breaths on the *throne*

## Capitalize on Drive Time

- Sing along to your favorite songs in the car
- While stuck in traffic, mindfully listen to a piece of music, taking time to appreciate the talent of the composer, musician, or performer
- Take a new route to work, noticing the new sights
- Take 3 deep breaths at each traffic light

## Add New Rituals to Existing Routines

- At dinner, ask each family member to describe an act of kindness they noticed either in themselves or in others
- Ask your family to share a highlight of their week during an existing weekly ritual (going to church, lighting Shabbat candles, Sunday dinner)
- Start business meetings by asking participants to share what's going well

## Break Up The Mundane

- Notice the sights, sounds, and beauty of nature when you take out the trash or bring in the mail
- Introduce more movement in your day (park your car far from the entrance, take the stairs two at a time)
- Stop multi-tasking while doing repetitive chores like preparing dinner or folding laundry, practice informal meditation
- Breathe mindfully and deeply while sitting in front of your computer

## Minimize Distractions

- Turn off push notifications on your phone and computer (email, breaking news, Facebook, Twitter)
- Don't pick up your phone first thing upon waking
- Institute policy of no phones during meals
- Implement a digital sunset in the early evening