



# Take a *moment*

How is your relationship with stress? Can you feel your blood pressure rising the minute you walk into work? Let **Dean Hodgkin\*** show you how to take some time out.

### The stress ogre

A recent survey revealed that jobs within the medical/dentistry sectors rank as the second most stressful on the vocational map. No doubt the incessant tide of patients flowing through the – apparently revolving – doors of your surgery bear testament to such. If you consider that, according to the Health and Safety Executive, stress is now the biggest cause of working days lost through ill health (an estimated 12.8 million days per annum) it makes sound sense to ensure you protect yourself from its debilitating effects. The old maxim ‘prevention is better than cure’ should not merely be the reason behind you advising your patients to religiously adhere to their oral hygiene schedule. It

also applies just as readily to your relationship with the ogre that is stress.

The good news is, you don’t have to fly to a deserted island, chant under waterfalls or do yourself a mischief trying to fold your legs into the lotus position, as the following list of self-help tips are designed to fit around your working day and to make it just that little bit more bearable.

When it comes to relaxation techniques, one size definitely doesn’t fit all, so experiment with the following to find what works best for you. You will also find benefit in using different locations. At the start of each day, during your lunch break or even between patients (if possible) try to find a quiet place, a comfortable position and **take a moment...**

**1. Physical techniques**

**Stretch**

All stretch positions should be held at the end of the range of movement, where you feel mild tension, for at least 15 seconds.

Drop the left ear to the left shoulder whilst simultaneously reaching the fingers of the right hand to the floor. Repeat on the other side.

Clasp the hands together and raise in front of your chest, with the palms facing towards you. Keeping the arms

bent, as if trying to hug a wide tree, reach the hands forwards and feel the shoulder blades pull apart.

Place both hands behind you with the palms resting on your lower back, just above the buttocks. Keeping the tummy pulled in, squeeze the elbows towards each other and hold.

Lift the right arm up overhead and bend the elbow to drop the palm onto the upper spine. Simply walk the fingers as far down the vertebrae as possible and hold the lowest position. Repeat on the other side.

*'You don't have to chant under waterfalls or do yourself a mischief trying to fold your legs into the lotus position...'*



**Mitchell's**

You will need to actually read this script to yourself the first few times, although you'll soon become familiar with it. You will notice that each movement command is followed with a 'STOP' which is important as it ensures you cease moving that part and prepare the body for the next joint action. This is best done lying down but can also be adapted to a sitting position.

**Shoulders:** Pull shoulders towards feet. STOP. Feel the shoulders are further away from your ears, your neck feels longer.

**Elbows:** Elbows out and open. STOP. Feel the upper arms away from the body. The weight of both arms should be resting on the support (floor, chair, desk).

**Hands:** Fingers and thumbs long and supported. STOP. Feel the fingers stretched, separated and touching the support.

**Hips:** Turn the hips out. STOP. Feel the thighs rolled out and the kneecaps facing out.

**Knees:** Slightly bend and extend the knees until you find a comfortable position. STOP. Feel the comfort in the knees.

**Feet:** Push your feet away from you. STOP. Feel the heaviness of your feet.

**Torso:** Push your body into the support (floor, chair). STOP. Feel the contact of your body on the support.

**Head:** Push your head into the support (floor, back of chair). STOP. Feel the contact of your head on the support.

**Jaw:** Pull the jaw down. STOP. Feel the separated teeth, heavy jaw and lips just touching.

**Tongue:** Press the tongue downwards. STOP. Feel the throat and tongue loose.

**Eyes:** Close the eyes. STOP. Feel the lids resting gently over the eyes without screwing up the eyes. Enjoy the darkness.

**Forehead:** Begin at the eyebrows and imagine you are smoothing your fingertips up into the hair, over the hair and down the back of the neck.



## 2. Breathing techniques

### Intercostal breathing

Place the palms on your ribcage, right side to right side and left to left, with the fingers spread to embrace as much of the thoracic cavity as possible. As you inhale deeply, apply pressure with the hands so the respiratory muscles are forced to work a little harder. Relax the pressure as you exhale.

### Nasal breathing

Close the mouth, inhale and exhale through the nose only. Try to slow your cadence, listen to the breath and feel as the warmed air sinks into your centre.



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## 3. Meditative techniques

### Concentrative

In order to aid concentration, choose an object for your attention, eg counting how many strides you walk with each in/ out breath cycle, maybe silently say the word 'peace' each time you breath in, or focus on an image (such as a candle flame). When you notice your attention beginning to wander, do not try to block out the incoming thoughts but rather, let them come and then go, as you return to the source of your attention.

### Contemplative

The underlying principle behind the contemplative technique of meditation is to provide you with the means to gain first-hand understanding of the way things are, without reliance on opinions or theories. It also gives rise to a sense of deep calm that comes from knowing something for yourself, beyond any doubt. To try this, briefly shut out the outside world by donning your headphones and listening to a piece of relaxing music. Think about how it makes you feel or what the lyrics mean, whatever, just let your thoughts wander and enjoy the escapism.

*\* Dean Hodgkin is a health and fitness expert based at spa resort Ragdale Hall. He was three times world karate champion, was voted Best International Fitness Presenter in New York and has written articles for a wide range of publications including The Times and Men's Health. He has also appeared on TV, including resident slots on the Terry Wogan and Gaby Roslin show. [www.deanhodgkin.com](http://www.deanhodgkin.com)*



Many thanks to AWB Textiles for providing our model with raspberry scrubs.