De-stress in 5 minutes or less

By Leslie Pepper, Parenting

If you've got five minutes, you have enough time to try one of these stress busters. What are you waiting for? Try one now!

Lighten up
When the body absorbs sunlight, it enhances the effect of mood-stabilizing chemicals like serotonin. Catch some rays, whether by moving playdates outside or parking your car a little farther from a store so you have to walk a ways to get where you're going. In the winter, throw open the curtains during the day.

Take a (virtual) vacation
"I close my eyes and visualize being on a luxury ocean liner," says Alisha Bush, a mom of one in Madisonville, Tennessee. "I feel the rhythm of the waves and inhale the smell of the ocean."

Jump rope
It's not just for third-grade recess anymore. Jumping rope for 20 minutes triggers your body to release feel-good endorphins, and its repetitive motion makes you relaxed and focused, says Patricia Arcari, Ph.D., director of the Calm Mother, Happy Child program at Massachusetts General Hospital. Grab your kid and see who can go the longest.

Crank up some tunes
Play music that brings up good memories. "Many people find they have a visceral reaction to something they heard in their youth," says Suzanne Hanser, chair of the Music Therapy Department at Berklee College of Music, in Boston. Choose anything that triggers a positive image, like your wedding-dance song or the music that played during a first date or at the first rock concert you went to as a teenager.

Breathe deeply
I touch my middle finger and thumb together on each hand to signal to myself that I should stop what I'm doing and take a deep, cleansing breath," says Sharon Wren, a mom of two in East Moline, Illinois. "It sounds goofy, but it works. You can do it wherever you are -- in the grocery store or even at a parent-teacher conference."

Say your CBA's
When I'm upset, I recite the alphabet backward," says Ann Eide, a mom of one in Columbus, Mississippi. "I really have to concentrate on the letters, so by the time I get to 'P,' I've forgotten what was bothering me."

Connect with a grown-up
Social support is one of the most effective coping mechanisms we have when we're feeling anxious and stressed, say experts. If you can't reach a friend on the phone, send a quick message.

Turn the world upside down
"I lie across several stairs upside down," says Annette Nikolich, a mom of two in Lake Barrington, Illinois. "I'm not sure how it started -- I think I probably just collapsed one evening after chasing a preschooler and a toddler all day. It must have something to do with all that blood rushing to my head, but since then, whenever I'm going insane, a few minutes upside down on the stairs totally changes my outlook and mood."
**Laugh it off**
Numerous studies show that laughter lowers your levels of cortisol, which is a stress hormone. So go ahead and giggle out loud at your husband's bad knock-knock jokes -- it'll make you both feel good.

**Get busy in bed**
Having sex releases endorphins that improve your mood and decrease symptoms of stress. (No instructions needed.)

**Spritz off stress**
"I use lavender essential oil to get calm," says Marguerite Wright, a mom of four in Dixmoor, Illinois. "I put it in a plug-in diffuser or add a few drops to distilled water in a spray bottle and spritz it on myself, the kids, and all over the house."

**Rub the right way**
No, we're not talking about getting a massage; we're talking about *giving* one -- to your baby. Research shows that when women massage infants, their levels of the stress hormone cortisol drop, which in turn calms them down, says Tiffany Field, Ph.D., director of the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine. Before putting on your baby's pj's, dab a few drops of baby oil onto your fingers and give her a rubdown. If you're unsure of your technique, don't worry. "Moms know instinctively how to massage," says Field.