

# 2 minutes to ahhh

Instant ways to take stress out of your day

by Diane Donofrio Angelucci



We all have a secret fantasy. When the pile of bills doesn't match the balance in the checkbook, the daughter's boyfriend is a jerk and not one more thing can be squeezed into a jam-packed schedule, wouldn't it be great to sneak away where no one can find you? Just to savor the quiet.

Of course, the fantasy remains just that. But the truth is, there are ways to find serenity without having to take a secret getaway—and they're easier to come by than you might think.

## free your mind

**Tap it out** When was the last time you felt totally relaxed? Were you gazing at a rolling ocean? Taking a leisurely walk with your husband? Concentrate on every detail of that moment, and while continuing to focus on the memory, lightly tap your fingertip on the spot between your eyebrows in an easy rhythmic pattern for one minute. (Go ahead,

try it!) This technique lets your nervous system memorize the positive feeling associated with that memory and creates a sense of calm, says Susan Gayle, behavior modification expert and certified hypnotist.

**Ditch the drama** When you're swamped at work and your inner voice moans, "I'll never get it done" or "This is horrible," remind yourself of past successes in similar situations. "When we are stressed, we tend to have exaggerated negative thoughts," says Katherine L. Muller, Psy.D., clinical psychologist at the Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, New York. "To get a more realistic perspective, talk back to

the negative thoughts by saying, "I've been through this before, and everything turned out fine."

**Divert your senses** Certain scents—lavender, eucalyptus, peppermint—have the power to calm and relax. If you're at home, light a great-smelling candle. For portable stress release, consider an essential oil or pressure-point balm from [fruits-passion.com](http://fruits-passion.com). Music also gets the feel-good chemicals in the brain going, so make it a part of the solution. Tote an MP3 player, a cell phone with music or a favorite CD with you and experiment to find your own stress-busting playlist. "I'm not a huge fan of rap, but when I'm stressed it gets me thinking differently," Dr. Muller says. "The loudness and the beat really help."

**Channel the flow** It may sound wacky, but for instant calm, repeat to yourself, "My hands feel warm." "When you think (Please turn to 79)



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about your hands getting warm, you're increasing the blood flow there, which triggers a whole-body response of relaxation," says Claire Michaels Wheeler, M.D., Ph.D., author of *10 Simple Solutions to Stress: How to Tame Tension and Start Enjoying Your Life*.

**Corral concerns** If worries have you staring at the ceiling at 3 A.M., jot them down and make an appointment to tackle them during the day. Knowing that you've set aside time to deal with what's bothering you frees your mind and allows you to go back to sleep, says Dr. Wheeler.

**Silence stimuli** How many distractions are stimulating your senses right now? A radio? Nearby chatter? A blowing fan? Turn off as many of those as possible, and relish the peace and quiet.



Creating a sense of calm can be as easy as gazing at the color orange or smelling lavender.

**Take a break** Feeling frazzled? Distract yourself with a puzzle or something silly. Do the crossword, recite the alphabet backward or drink a glass of water in exactly 27 sips, suggests Laura Stack, M.B.A., C.S.P., author of *Find More Time*. "When you concentrate on the puzzle, it forces out any negative self-talk because you're making your brain think about something completely different."

**Dial it down** Does your inner voice nag you about all the things you need to do? Close your eyes, take a deep breath and picture yourself turning down the volume on those stressful thoughts, suggests Jeffrey Brantley, M.D., coauthor of *Five Good Minutes in the Evening*.

**Color your mood** For a new attitude, try gazing for 30 seconds at a cheerful color, such as orange. As a reminder throughout your day, keep an orange (Please turn to 81)

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