

## The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

### Developing A First Aid Kit For Stress

from the American Counseling Association

While most of us have first aid supplies for physical injuries, it's also possible, and a good idea, to put together a first aid kit for stress.

One part of our stress first aid kit is short term stress antidotes that use our five senses. With sight, for example, you can use your eyes to focus on things that relax and calm you. Maybe it's simply looking out the window at nature, or looking through some favorite pictures, say from that relaxing vacation last fall.

Sound can also be a good means of reducing stress. Listening to some favorite, slow, relaxing music or other soothing sounds is always a good stress reducer.

And yes, your nose can also help. The variety of scents available in candles, air fresheners, lotions and aromatherapy oils can all soothe. Scents like lavender and apple tend to calm, while lemon and peppermint help to energize many people.

Taste is another way to find short term relief from stress. There's a reason why comfort foods have earned that name.

And touch? While a soothing massage may be the ultimate stress reducer, simply stroking your pets, taking a relaxing bath or shower, or exchanging hugs with someone close to you are all good ways to use touch for fighting stress.

Other approaches to fighting stress take more effort but produce long-term relief. Things that make your heart feel happy are some of the most effective. That usually means connecting with others and finding acts of kindness that make you feel better.

Tied to that is identifying activities that help you feel good about yourself and your place in the world. It might be volunteering, helping a sick friend, or taking up a craft or some other activity that allows you to be creative.

Some people find that developing a more spiritual side to their lives is a great way to reduce stress. That can mean formal religion, but can also mean spending more time in nature or getting involved in community activities where you find you are able to contribute and do good.

We live in a time when stress is a common affliction that most of us face. While there may be no way to make all the stress of daily living disappear, being aware of the stress you face and taking simple steps to help you better handle it will certainly make life easier.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.*

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