

 **USA TODAY**

| **6 SECONDS** TO SPICE UP YOUR MARRIAGE

BEST YEARS

FALL/WINTER 2013

FABULOUS LIVING AT 50+

4 Stress-
Busting
Workouts

**Reclaim
That Room**
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Makeovers

**Mariska
Hargitay**

on turning 50

'Bring it on!'

**Best
B&B
Breakfasts**
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Make them
at home

Fashion
Forward

Lips, Hair,
Shoes, Bags
... and Pearls
That Rock



Feeling Stressed?

Relief can be just minutes away.
Here are four ways to move toward serenity.

BY CINDY KUZMA

IN SMALL DOSES, stress has its perks. As your body prepares to fight or flee danger, a surge of blood sugar and hormones sweeps through your system. The resulting burst of energy helps you swerve your car to miss a dog in the road or deliver a witty wedding toast in front of 200 guests.

But enduring stressors—say, caring for aging parents or battling daily traffic—keep your body on continuous high alert. Over time, your blood pressure rises, your blood glucose surges out of control, your anxiety builds up and your heart skips beats.

“If this persists, cardiovascular disease and diabetes and obesity may be a consequence of chronic and unresolved stress,” says Mladen Golubic, medical director at the Cleveland Clinic’s Center for Lifestyle Medicine.


As an antidote, physical activity immediately releases stored tension and energy and restores your balance. What’s more, moving your muscles can produce a compound called brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which strengthens existing brain cells and helps grow new ones in areas key to boosting memory and mood.

Any activity, in fact, that gets your muscles moving and your heart beating faster works. “It doesn’t have to be in a gym, and it doesn’t have to take long—20 minutes off the couch can change your life,” says Vonda Wright, an orthopedic surgeon and author of *Fitness After 40*.

Above all, make it fun. That way, you’ll stick with it long enough to transform your brain and your body.

Before you jump in, check with your doctor to make sure you’re fit for action. Then choose from among these four tried-and-true stress-busters.





**CONTINUE
YOUR PRACTICE:**
Head to yogadownload.com and stream classes on an individual or monthly subscription basis.

Yoga

WHY IT WORKS: Yoga poses release an anxiety-taming neurotransmitter called GABA. Plus, pairing motion with a focus on breath and awareness cultivates a skill called mindfulness.

"The moment your mind is in the body, doing a mindful physical activity, your mind is no longer on some problem of the past or the future," says yoga guru Rodney Yee.

CONSIDER IT IF: You're new to exercise and want a guide. "People who keep going over things in their mind"—a tendency called "ruminating"—often can bend their way to stress relief, says Maryanna Klatt, who researches yoga's health benefits at Ohio State University College of Medicine.

GET STARTED: Practice daily if you can. Even if it's just for 15 minutes, the consistency will maximize the benefits. Find a nearby studio with qualified instructors and classes described with terms like "restorative" and "rejuvenating." Or, check out video classes you can do right in your home. Yee's latest DVD, *Yoga for Energy and Stress Relief*, includes three 20-minute routines appropriate for all levels.



Walking

WHY IT WORKS: "Walking is the natural way in which we're designed to move and travel," says fitness expert Shirley Archer, author of *The Walking Deck: 50 Ways to Walk Yourself Healthy*. "It's rhythmic, steady, easy for people to do and has a low risk of injury."

CONSIDER IT IF: You feel joyful outdoors and you've enjoyed pleasurable strolls before. And if you're aiming to stay trim, a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found daily walks help women stave off weight gain through the years.

GET STARTED: Visit a local athletic shoe store, where trained staff can help you find supportive footwear that matches your

foot type. Then lace up and choose a routine that matches your fitness level. If you're a total beginner, try 10 minutes at a moderate pace. Increase your total time or distance by no more than 5 percent weekly to build fitness while avoiding injury.

Follow Archer's advice to turn your workout into a moving meditation: First, focus on your breathing, observing each inhalation and exhalation. Then pay attention to one sense at a time. Hear the leaves crunch below; feel your heel strike the ground; watch the clouds float by.

STRIDE FARTHER:
The Every Body Walk! campaign, online at everybodywalk.org, offers inspirational videos and an app to track your treks.



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HEALTH & FITNESS



MAKE A BIGGER SPLASH: Paddle on over to the U.S. Masters Swimming website at usms.org to locate nearby pools, download workout suggestions, and even log your laps.

Swimming

WHY IT WORKS: Water lifts and refreshes. "It's usually colder than you think it is, so you kind of wake up and focus on how you feel rather than whatever might be stressing you at the moment," says Jane Katz, a champion synchronized swimmer and author of *Swimming for Total Fitness*. "The graceful quality that the water always allows appeals to the mermaid in you."

CONSIDER IT IF: You have physical limitations such as arthritis or injuries. It may also be just the ticket if you have fond memories of summer-camp pools or family lake outings, or if water brings you a sense of peace.

GET STARTED: First, and this can't be emphasized enough, don't worry about how you look in a swimsuit! No one else cares, and you'll soon be safely beneath the surface anyway.

Can't even doggy-paddle or have a fear of water? Look into lessons. Otherwise, start by walking back and forth in the shallow end of a pool. As you get comfortable, push off the side to see how far you can glide. Then, start moving your arms and legs to propel yourself along.

Gardening

WHY IT WORKS: Research shows that spending time in nature reduces levels of the stress hormone cortisol. "For women whose lives seem chaotic and out-of-kilter, having a garden where they make the decisions can really give them back some independence," says Patty Cassidy, a horticultural therapist and author of *The Age-Proof Garden*.

CONSIDER IT IF: You enjoy scoping out the foliage in parks and gardens or feel a sense of calm in green spaces.

GET STARTED: Begin small and pick the right plants for your space. A knowledgeable nursery staffer, master gardener or horticultural therapist (find one at ahta.org) can help you plan your plot. For maximum stress relief, consider:

- Low-maintenance native plants.
- Flowers reminiscent of your past.
- Perennials, which offer years of enjoyment.
- Fruits or vegetables—growing food provides a strong feeling of accomplishment.

Whether you're weeding, sowing or raking, change up your position and movements every 20 minutes to avoid injury. And take frequent breaks to appreciate the sights, sounds, smells and textures around you.

DIG DEEPER: Learn more about using flora to restore body and mind at the Therapeutic Landscapes Network, healinglandscapes.org.



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