

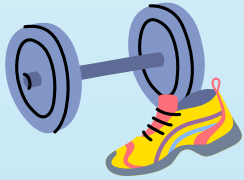
THE
**SUMMER
SELF-CARE
GUIDE**



TIPS TO LOWER STRESS LEVELS

Is stress making you frustrated and irritable? Stress relievers can help restore calm and serenity to your chaotic life. You don't have to invest a lot of time or thought into stress relievers. If your stress is getting out of control and you need quick relief, try one of these tips.

GET ACTIVE



Virtually any form of physical activity can act as a stress reliever. Even if you're not an Athlete or you're out of shape, exercise can still be a good stress reliever.

Physical activity can pump up your feel-good endorphins and other natural neural chemicals that enhance your sense of well-being. Exercise can also refocus your mind on your body's movements, which can improve your mood and help the day's irritations fade away. Consider walking, jogging, gardening, housecleaning, biking, swimming, weightlifting, a fitness class or anything else that gets you active.



EAT A HEALTHY DIET

Eating a healthy diet is an important part of taking care of yourself. **Aim to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, and whole grains everyday. Be mindful of proteins and fats and especially added sugars.** Try to lower your added sugar intake to balance your blood sugar levels for less mood swings throughout the day.



AVOID UNHEALTHY HABITS

Some people may deal with stress by **drinking too much caffeine or alcohol, smoking, eating too much, or using illegal substances.** These habits can harm your health.



MEDITATE

During meditation, you focus your attention and quiet the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. Meditation can instill a sense of calm, peace and balance that can benefit both your emotional well-being and your overall health. Guided meditation, guided imagery, visualization and other forms of meditation can be practiced anywhere at any time, whether you're out for a walk, riding the bus to work or waiting at the doctor's office. You can also try deep breathing anywhere. **The Merritt App offers several Meditation options in the Wellness section under On Demand.**

Have you heard of Yoga Nidra — mediation for healthier sleep? What about Sound Therapy? These and many more stress-reducing options are now being offered at Merritt Clubs through our Wellness Department.



LAUGH MORE

A good sense of humor can't cure all ailments, but it can help you feel better, even if you have to force a fake laugh through your grumpiness. **When you laugh, it not only lightens your mental load but also causes positive physical changes in your body. Laughter fires up and then cools down your stress response.** So read some jokes, tell some jokes, watch a comedy or hang out with your funny friends. Try a joke of the day app that sends you notifications for a silly break in your mid-morning slump.



CONNECT WITH OTHERS

When you're stressed and irritable, your instinct may be to isolate yourself. Instead, reach out to family and friends and make social connections. **Social contact is a good stress reliever because it can offer distraction, provide support and help you tolerate life's up and downs.** So, take a coffee break with a friend, email a relative or find a workout buddy to motivate you for a fun, refreshing way to boost your endorphins. Got more time? Consider volunteering for a charitable group and help yourself while helping others.



ASSERT YOURSELF

You might want to do it all, but you can't, at least not without paying a price. Learning to say no or being willing to delegate can help you manage your to-do list and your stress.

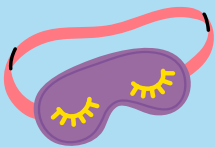
Saying yes may seem like an easy way to keep the peace, prevent conflicts and get the job done right. But it may actually cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family come second, which can lead to stress, anger, resentment and even the desire to exact revenge. And that's not a very calm and peaceful reaction.



TRY YOGA

With its series of postures and controlled-breathing exercises, yoga is a popular stress reliever. Yoga brings together physical and mental disciplines which may help you achieve peacefulness of body and mind. Yoga can help you relax and manage stress and anxiety.

Check the Merritt App for yoga classes at all of our locations. On a trip or in vaca mode and don't want to go to the club, no worries, we have got you covered. Merritt On Demand on the Merritt App offers Yoga as well as many other classes with our fantastic group fitness team that you can do anytime, anywhere.



GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Stress can cause you to have trouble falling asleep. When you have too much to do — and too much to think about — your sleep can suffer. But sleep is the time when your brain and body recharge. And the quality and amount of sleep you get can affect your mood, energy level, concentration and overall functioning. If you have sleep troubles, make sure that you have a quiet, relaxing bedtime routine, listen to soothing music, put clocks away, and stick to a consistent schedule.

Our Merritt Health Coaching team is certified in Sleep Behavior Management and can really help you get the proper amount of sleep for you. Schedule a free assessment today.



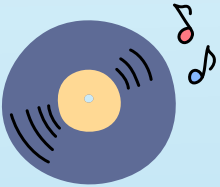
KEEP A JOURNAL



Writing down your thoughts and feelings can be a good release for otherwise pent-up emotions. Don't think about what to write — just let it happen. Write whatever comes to mind. No one else needs to read it, so don't strive for perfection in grammar or spelling.

Just let your thoughts flow on paper — or computer screen. Once you're done, you can toss out what you wrote or save it to reflect on later.

GET MUSICAL AND BE CREATIVE



Listening to or playing music is a good stress reliever because it can provide a mental distraction, reduce muscle tension and decrease stress hormones. Crank up the volume and let your mind be absorbed by the music.

If music isn't one of your interests, turn your attention to another hobby you enjoy, such as gardening, sewing, sketching — anything that requires you to focus on what you're doing rather than what you think you should be doing.

SEEK COACHING OR COUNSELING



If new stressors are challenging your ability to cope or if self-care measures just aren't relieving your stress, you may need to look for reinforcements in the form of health coaching, therapy or counseling. **Health Coaches help you work on ways to modify your behaviors to benefit your own self-care. You can learn new stress therapies, create goals for stress management and have your coach hold you accountable for making healthier decisions for your own well-being.** Therapy also may be a good idea if you feel overwhelmed or trapped, if you worry excessively, or if you have trouble carrying out daily routines or meeting responsibilities at work, home or school.

Professional health coaches, counselors, or therapists can help you identify sources of your stress and learn new coping tools. To find out more about the services offered at Merritt Clubs, contact Programs Director, Sherri Lively at slively@merrittclubs.com.



BENEFITS OF WATER EXERCISE

from Licensed Massage Therapist Regina Prevosto

RESISTANCE

Water offers heavy resistance — 12 times the resistance of air to be exact. That means pool exercises engage more muscle fibers and burn more calories in a shorter amount of time. Best part? You don't need to know how to churn out laps to get a solid workout in the pool. Consult your doctor to determine whether water exercises are appropriate for you.

HEAT

Heat can to a great extent relax muscles, decrease pain and stiffness and allow you to move through their exercises and daily activities with greater ease. Warm water is soothing and comfortable.



MOBILITY

Regular exercise helps keep joints moving, restores and preserves flexibility and strength, and protects joints against further damage. Exercise can also improve your coordination, endurance and ability to perform daily tasks. Exercising in water is a gentle way to exercise joints and muscles. The buoyancy of the water supports and lessens stress on the joints and encourages freer movement. Water may also act as resistance to help build muscle strength.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

When first entering a spa or pool, relax and enjoy the soothing water. When your muscles and joints feel more comfortable and relaxed, slowly begin your exercise routine. Allow enough time after exercising to again relax muscles before getting out of the water. **The Arthritis Foundation recommends the following guidelines when doing water exercises:**

- Submerge body part being exercised
- Move the body part slowly and gently
- Begin and end with easy exercises
- Follow through a complete joint range of motion if possible, but do not force movement. Stop if you experience any sudden or increased pain
- Do three to eight repetitions as tolerated
- Pain that lasts for more than one to two hours after exercise may indicate overuse. Cut back next time
- Remember the weakening effects of heat when exercising in warm water
- Start slowly and don't overdo.
- Any individuals who have severe joint damage or joint replacement should check with their doctor or surgeon before doing any of the following exercises

10 EXCELLENT POOL EXERCISES



1 WATER WALKING OR JOGGING

Alternate jogging for 30 seconds with walking in place for 30 seconds. Continue for 5 minutes.



2 FORWARD AND SIDE LUNGES

Standing near a pool wall for support, if necessary, take an oversized lunge step in a forward direction. Do not let the forward knee advance past the toes. Return to the starting position and repeat with the other leg. For a side lunge, face the pool wall and take an oversized step to the side. Keep toes facing forward. Repeat on the other side. Try 3 sets of 10 lunge steps.



3 ONE LEG BALANCE

Stand on 1 leg while raising the other knee to hip level. Place a pool noodle under the raised leg, so the noodle forms a “U” with your foot in the center of the U. Hold as long as you can, up to 30 seconds, and switch legs. Try 1–2 sets of 5 on each leg.



4 SIDESTEPPING

Face the pool wall. Take sideways steps with your body and toes facing the wall. Take 10–20 steps in 1 direction and then return. Repeat twice in each direction.



5 HIP KICKERS AT POOL WALL

Stand with the pool wall to one side of your body for support. Move 1 leg in a forward direction with the knee straight, like you are kicking. Return to start. Then move the same leg to the side and return to the start position. Lastly, move that same leg behind you. Repeat 3 sets of 10 and switch the kicking leg.



6 POOL PLANKS

Hold the noodle in front of you. Lean forward into a plank position. The noodle will be submerged under the water, and your elbows should be straight downward toward the pool floor. Your feet should still be on the pool floor. Hold as long as comfortable, 15–60 seconds depending on your core strength. Repeat 3–5 times.



7 DEEP WATER BICYCLE

In deeper water, loop 1–2 noodles around the back of your body and rest your arms on top of the noodle for support in the water. Move your legs as if you are riding a bicycle. Continue for 3–5 minutes.



8 ARM RAISES

Using arm paddles or webbed gloves for added resistance, hold arms at your sides. Bend your elbows to 90 degrees. Raise and lower elbows and arms toward the water surface, while the elbows remain bent to 90 degrees. Repeat for 3 sets of 10.



9 PUSH-UPS

While standing in the pool by the pool side, place arms shoulder width apart on pool edge. Press weight through your hands and raise your body up and halfway out of the water, keeping elbows slightly bent. Hold 3 seconds and slowly lower back into pool. (Easier variation: Wall push up on side of pool: place hands on edge of pool shoulder width apart, bend elbows, and lean chest toward the pool wall.)



10 STANDING KNEE LIFT

Stand against the pool wall with both feet on the floor. Lift 1 knee up like you are marching in place. While the knee is lifted even with your hip, straighten your knee. Continue to bend and straighten your knee 10 times, and then repeat on the other leg. Complete 3 sets of 10 on each leg. For more of a challenge, try this exercise without standing against the pool wall.

Healthy Summer Snacks

Sherrí Lively, Wellness Director

My goal for snacks is to make every bite count. Sounds a little crazy when it comes to summer chill vibes but just hear me out.

I don't want summer snacks to just be filler. Snacks typically include a protein, a healthy fat, some fiber, and carbs. All those things a growing (or fully grown) body needs to thrive.

This way, you'll avoid the blood sugar spikes and crashes that lead to mood swings and temper tantrums from hungry people.

Summer is meant to be fun. So, junk food and favorite summer treat options should be served (like ice cream). It's not always all healthy summer snacks in my house, but 80%ish should be healthier options with a focus on real food. This summer try to keep your fridge stocked with ingredients and foods that make this easy.



Sherrí's Top 30 Snacks:

- Seasonal Fruit and Cheese
- Ants on a Log (celery, peanut butter, raisins or dried cranberries)
- Granola bars – check the ingredients lower added sugar options are best and no fake sugars – try for brands where you can read all the ingredients or make your own
- Fruit and Yogurt Cups – plain or vanilla flavored Greek yogurt and add your own fresh or frozen fruit
- Mango Pineapple Smoothie
- **Fruit and Nut Bites (Recipe below!)**
- Crackers or Pretzels and Hummus
- Veggies and Homemade Ranch Dip
- Trail Mix (create a make your own trail mix bar on Sunday and have your kids make little baggies for every day of the week. Dried fruit, nuts, popcorn, pretzels, dark chocolate chips, yogurt covered raisins, granola, etc.)
- **Fruit Kebobs and Yogurt Dip (Recipe below!)**
- Cottage Cheese & Pineapple
- Banana Sushi (tortilla, nut butter, banana) Cherry Tomato & Mozzarella Kabobs (add fresh basil for a caprese kabob)
- Apple Sandwiches – toast cheddar cheese, sliced granny apples and a sprinkle of cinnamon open faced in the toaster oven or air fryer
- Muffins
- Tortilla Chips and Salsa or Guacamole
- **Homemade Rice Crispy Treats (Recipe below!)**
- Chocolate Peanut Butter Overnight Oats
- Yogurt Sticks
- Peanut Butter Crackers
- Cherry Berry Smoothie
- Homemade Popsicles
- Beef Jerky
- Rice Cake, Peanut Butter, & Banana
- Snack Board
- Turkey & Cheese Roll Ups
- **Omelet Cups (Recipe below!)**
- Chocolate Protein Yogurt
- Overnight Oats Without Yogurt
- Peanut Butter Banana Toast



RECIPE #1:

FRUIT AND NUT BITES (SERVES 12)

*PREP TIME 10 MINS
TOTAL TIME 10 MINS*

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup nuts or seeds (Whatever you have in your pantry! These were made with crispy walnuts. Pecans, almonds, or, if you are nut free, sunflower seeds all work! I like to soak/dehydrate my nuts and seeds using this method to reduce the phytates and make the nutrients more available for digestion).
- 1 cup medjool dates pitted
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries or another
- 1/2 dates
- 1-2 TB shredded unsweetened coconut optional

DIRECTIONS

- 1.** Put everything into your food processor and blend to combine. You can grind the nuts completely before adding the remaining ingredients if you don't want pieces of nuts showing in the bites — some kids might not like those bits!
- 2.** Press the mixture together and roll the bites into the desired size. If you want coconut on the outside, roll the bites in the coconut shreds.
- 3.** Store the bites in the fridge to stay fresh — or you can freeze them to last longer. They make a great pull-out lunchbox addition for summer camps or road trips!



RECIPE #2:

FRUIT AND YOGURT DIP (SERVES 10-12)

PREP TIME 2 MINS
TOTAL TIME 2 MINS

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
- whole milk or dairy-free yogurt
- 1 TB honey, or to taste (or maple syrup)
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp pure vanilla extract
- fresh fruit (such as apples, pineapple, berries) cut into bite-size pieces for dipping

DIRECTIONS

1. Put yogurt into a bowl or storage container with lid.
2. Add honey and spices.
3. Stir until all ingredients are mixed thoroughly.
4. Serve immediately with cut up fruit or chill for later.

VARIATIONS

This sweet dip is such an easy recipe to customize and change up with different add-ins. Here are a few delicious options...

Peanut Butter: Add 1-2 tablespoons of peanut butter to the yogurt and honey mixture. If you love peanut butter as much as I do, this is a fun variation. (You should also make peanut butter chocolate overnight oats—amazing!) If you're nut-free, use a seed butter (like sunflower seed butter).

Lemon Zest or Orange Zest: Add the zest of an orange or lemon (or lime) to the yogurt sauce. This will add a bright fresh citrus flavor. You only need a small amount of zest (the grated peel) to get a ton of flavor. Alternatively, you could add a squeeze of lemon juice or a splash of orange juice.

Chopped Mint: I'm a huge mint and yogurt fan (see this homemade strawberry Fro-yo recipe for an example). Add about 1 tablespoon of finely chopped fresh mint to the yogurt, honey, and spices for a vibrant mint flavor.

Strawberry Preserves: For a strawberry yogurt dip, add 1-2 tablespoons of strawberry preserves (jam; not jelly) to the yogurt mixture.

Cocoa Powder: For a chocolate dip, add a couple teaspoons of cocoa powder to the yogurt dip, until you reach your desired level of chocolate flavor. Add a pinch or two of salt as well to enhance the chocolate flavor.



RECIPE #3:

NATURALLY SWEETENED RICE CRISPY TREATS (SERVES 9)

PREP TIME 5 MINS
COOK TIME 5 MINS

INGREDIENTS

- 8 TB butter I've been using salted butter, but unsalted should also work great.
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/3 cup peanut butter
- 1 1/2 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 4 cups puffed rice cereal (I prefer Arrowhead Mills brand which you can find at most health food stores for about \$3/bag)

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large pot (I use a 3 qt. Dutch oven), begin to melt the butter over medium heat. Once the butter is almost completely melted, add the honey and peanut butter. Whisk the ingredients together. The ingredients should bubble and foam. Keep an eye on the bubbling and continue to cook the ingredients for about 3 minutes, stirring often.
2. Remove the pot from the heat and add the vanilla extract. The ingredients will bubble slightly with the addition of the alcohol from the vanilla. This is normal.
3. Stir in the puffed rice cereal.
4. Pour the cereal mixture into a parchment-lined 8x8 baking pan. I like to leave a bit of extra parchment overflowing on the sides of the pan so I can easily remove the rice treats after refrigeration. Press the rice treats down into the pan. The top of the treats should appear smooth versus lumpy.
5. Refrigerate the rice treats for about 1-2 hours. Alternatively, you can place the rice treats in the freezer for about 30 minutes. You'll know the rice treats are ready to cut when they feel firm on top.
6. Remove the parchment (and rice treats) from the pan. Cut the rice treats into squares.
7. Keep the bars refrigerated in an air-tight container.





RECIPE #4:

MADE AHEAD — GRAB & GO OMELET CUPS

PREP TIME 10 MINS

COOK TIME 30 MINS

SERVING 14-15 MUFFIN-SIZE CUPS

INGREDIENTS

- 1 TB extra virgin olive oil
- 2 bacon slices chopped
- 1/2 cup diced green onions whites and greens
- 1 1/2 cups diced bell pepper red, green, or yellow
- 2 cups baby spinach optional
- 9 eggs
- 1/4 cup whole milk
- 1 1/4 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp black pepper

DIRECTIONS

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 350F. Line a muffin tin with muffin liners. I prefer silicone liners for easy clean up, but paper may also work. If you're using paper, peel the wrapper before storing the cups in the fridge or freezer.
- 2.** In a large skillet, over medium-high heat, (I use my cast iron skillet), heat the olive oil. Add the chopped bacon, diced green onions, and diced bell pepper. Wait to add the spinach, if using. Sauté the mixture for 10 minutes, until the veggies "sweat" and soften and the bacon starts to brown on the tips. If using baby spinach, add the spinach and cook for another 1-2 minutes, stirring until the spinach is wilted. If there's lots of fat in the bottom of the pan (since bacon can differ so much in fat content), drain it before the next step.
- 3.** In a medium-size bowl, beat the eggs and milk. Whisk in the cheddar cheese, salt, and pepper.
- 4.** Spoon 1 tablespoon of the veggie/bacon mixture into each muffin cup. Pour the egg mixture over the top of the filling.
- 5.** Bake for 20 minutes until the eggs are firm and the tops spring back when touched.