

## 5 Time-tested Ways to Dissolve Stress for Parents

by Kevin Doherty, L.Ac.

Is there any job that is more stressful and demanding than parenting? While family life undoubtedly brings most parents great joy, it is a 24/7 responsibility that requires patience and discipline. Many parents have come to see me in my acupuncture practice to reconnect with themselves and ‘do nothing’ for an hour but rest their bodies and minds and come back to a place of inner balance. After raising two children myself and witnessing the challenges many other parents are facing, I believe that the following recommendations can be profoundly helpful tools for stress reduction. I make these suggestions knowing that time is always an issue for parents. Even ten minutes a day practicing the first two suggestions can truly relax and rejuvenate stressed out parents.

- 1) **Meditation:** Practiced for thousands of years in many Asian cultures, meditation has long been recognized as one of the most powerful tools we have for cultivating peace of mind and balance. Numerous studies have proven the incredibly positive effect that meditation has on stress reduction. There are literally hundreds of meditation techniques taught around the world. For beginners, the most helpful approach is to start with basic mindfulness techniques that develop both relaxation and alertness. Once a basic ground of awareness has been stabilized, then more advanced meditation practices can be undertaken. Meditation is a practice that helps us identify with stillness and silence. It cultivates intuition and surrender. It can deeply help just about anybody, but is truly a miraculous practice for reducing stress and anxiety.
- 2) **Yoga:** This ancient practice has also been utilized by millions of people throughout history. Yoga is considered a form of meditation that involves putting the body into a variety of poses in combination with deep breathing to induce mental clarity, increased energy, and physical strength and flexibility. The healing benefits of yoga have been repeatedly documented by a variety of clinical studies. There are many forms of yoga and it is best to experiment to determine which form feels the most helpful for your needs. I highly recommend combining yoga with sitting meditation, as they work synergistically to induce deep states of relaxation.
- 3) **Acupuncture:** One of the pillars of traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture has been practiced for at least 2,500 years. Perhaps one of the last truly holistic forms of healthcare remaining on the planet, acupuncture works with the Qi (life force) of the body in order to induce a variety of therapeutic effects. The safety and efficacy of this practice are well documented which accounts for its incredible surge in popularity in the Western world. Acupuncture is considered one of the most powerful treatment options for stress reduction. Only seek acupuncture treatment from licensed acupuncturists (as opposed to chiropractors or MD's who practice acupuncture).

- 4) **Herbal medicine:** There are a variety of both Chinese and Western herbal formulas that have been clinically proven to reduce stress and create emotional balance. Herbs are much less concentrated than pharmaceuticals, which is why they have far less side effects (but can still be as effective). If you are interested in this treatment option, many acupuncturists can skillfully prescribe herbal formulas. This is recommended over buying herbs over the counter with little knowledge of their intended usage.
  
- 5) **Nutrition:** Eating a diet high in antioxidants, essential fatty acids, and low glycemic carbohydrates can go a long way toward healing stress. The standard American diet (high in processed foods, saturated fat, sugar, and trans fats) has been linked to anxiety, depression, and increased stress in numerous studies. Change your diet to an organic, whole foods approach and both your body and mind will reward you beyond measure. Poor adaptability to stress is often a sign that our brains are starving for nutrients that we aren't getting from our standard American diets.

Making these lifestyle changes may not be easy in the initial phases. It is often helpful to seek out the support of a health care practitioner to guide you through these transitions. Once you start feeling the enormous payoff of making such changes, there truly is no turning back, as your whole family will benefit from your commitment to increased health and balance.

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