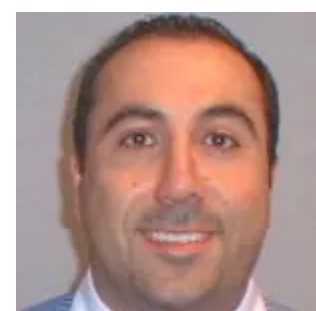


Top Stress Reducers Are Dogs

Stress-related illnesses are at an all time high in America, and there is no sign it will lessen. For the most part, doctors have identified the basic cause of this to be our seriousness. By that they mean taking ourselves too seriously, thus causing so much pressure that any meaningful stress management is impossible. When things are beyond our power to solve, we must drop the ball; not easy for non-quitters. Unhealthy levels of stress show as mood changes, migraines, hair loss, worry, agitation, sleeplessness, weight gain and the more serious level; depression. Stress contributes to half of all illnesses in the U.S. and 70% of all visits to the doctors office. But before you see your doctor to ask if Valium is right for you lets consider some natural options. Laughter is an antidote to stress. When we laugh, blood [michel alkhail md](#) flow to the brain is increased and endorphins (that hormone that gives us a sense of well-being) are released and levels of stress drop dramatically. We can begin this healing by laughing at our own selves, our perfect imperfection that makes up all of us. Force yourself to be more sociable because under stress our instincts tell us to withdraw and isolate ourselves. Nothing could be worse according to stress experts. Isolation allows us to concentrate on our problems, which perpetuates negative thinking instead of resolving it, we intensify it. When you feel stressed to the max, call a friend or put yourself among children; they have a way of making anyone forget their worries. Volunteer work is a good stress-buster. Indecisiveness can intensify stress, so we must learn to be more assertive. Some may associate assertiveness with hostility or aggression, but we simply mean expressing your feelings, letting others know your opinions and acting on your own behalf. Some things we can practice are: speaking up when you feel its warranted initiate conversations make an effort to seek out and form new friendships. Dont be afraid to disagree. Give out and accept compliments. Ask for information. When trying to break the sleeplessness cycle, avoid alcohol, caffeine and tobacco all of which have negative effects on sleep. Do something calming before bed; a warm bath, soft music, scented candles. Talk positively to yourself and pat yourself on the back now and then for a job well-done. Then give yourself a reward because when you do that you will realize a boost in your immune system that can last for several days. This can be a pair of shoes or as simple as a dish of ice cream (or both)! Slowing down nearly everything in your life is another stress reliever. Holistic studies have taught me to stop running for the phone when it rings why did I always do that? I now concentrate on driving slower, pausing after I park the car in the garage just to relax as I ease into another transition. I dont hurry my meals, but chew more slowly and with all of this you can feel the stress ebb away.



Also, write down those nagging problems. Make two columns on the paper: one Worries I can do something about and the other Worries I cant do anything about. Reading these from your notes offers another dimension and you can begin to accept the ones you cant change, and go about finding solutions for those you can. One doctors research of 480 people under stressful conditions found that, the top stress reducers are dogs. People who were facing unbearable situations had the lowest heart rates and blood pressure if they were with their dogs even lower than those who were with the spouses. Possible reason: Dogs are perceived as completely nonjudgmental.