High-tech stress management

We all have stress in our lives – looming deadlines, squabbles with friends and family, or demands of life in general. Fortunately, de-stressing can be as easy as a touch of a screen or a click of a button. Read on to learn be a convenient and quick anti-stress elixir.



Online games for stress relief
You may think online games are child's play, but you'd be surprised at how many free online gaming options are available that can help you manage your stress level. By concentrating on the game, you change your mind's 'channel' and relax as you focus away from the source of stress. Just playing one online game that requires your full attention for a few minutes can immediately reduce your stress level! Be aware, however, that some online games can be habit forming. So stick with non-addictive games that focus on simple tasks, such as:

Stress relief paintball
Solitaire

- Sudoku

Perhaps you've never considered your family's gaming system as a stress reliever, but many systems offer programs that engage the mind and body, helping to reduce stress. By strapping on a controller, or standing on a board, you are transported into the game, so to speak. It's not only fun, but it's also a workout – one of the best ways to combat stress.

Online support groups and stress management programs
Not the type to join an in-person support group, but feel that you could benefit from sharing with those who have faced similar issues? Then an online support group may be for you. With a click of your mouse, you can find countless groups online that are working through personal struggles and learning new coping mechanisms. Even if you choose not to participate, just reading other people's stories can help to reduce your stress. According to the Mayo Clinic, the benefits of joining an online support group include:

- Feeling less lonely or judged
- Reducing distress, depression or anxiety
- Improving your coping skills

While an online support group can help you manage your stress, it shouldn't replace standard medical care.

Online programs provide convenience, privacy and a more structured digital experience. For example, LifeWorks·fgi's Online Stress Management Program begins with a detailed stress assessment that captures and highlights your most significant sources of stress. From there, you can take advantage of expert articles, interactive action planning and goal setting; all designed to help you make positive changes through proven clinical stress management techniques.

Reducing stress through social media
Love it or hate it, social media is here to stay. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and hundreds of other sites have been designed to help us reach out to a broad audience very easily. Whether you're a frequent poster, a reluctant participant or just a browser, you can put social media to work for you and help you reduce your stress level.

YouTube is the world's most popular video-sharing website, where you can upload, share and view videos. By spending a few minutes surfing the site, you're bound to find videos that can elevate your mood and reduce your stress level. For example, you can:

- Play fun, upbeat music videos from your teenage years and enjoy the trip down memory lane

- Teach yourself how to dance – it's great for your physical and mental health
- Find comedic relief watching the latest stand-up comedians – an instant stress reliever
- Learn about new hobbies through instructional videos – such as how to meditate or how to paint

Pinterest is a free virtual corkboard that allows you to 'pin' and share interesting or inspiring things you find on the web. You can also browse other people's boards, which is particularly fun when you discover those who share your interests. Pinterest can also help you set goals and manage stress; for example, when scrapbooking meets journaling combined with your favourite magazines online.

Relieving stress with apps
Many people are starting to discover the wide array of applications (apps) for your mobile device specifically designed to keep your stress levels under control – whether it's through doodles, serene scenes and sounds, better organization or health and wellness information.

LifeWorks·fgi's very own My EAP app features interactive tools, such as My Stress Index and My Relationship Meter. Need instant assistance? The First Chat tool allows you to instantly chat with a professional counsellor directly on your mobile device.

The "perfect app" for you will depend on your personality, preferences and stress sources. But if you realize it's your mobile device that is a major source of stress in your life, then give yourself permission to turn it off, disconnect and tune in to the world around you instead.

Low-tech stress management

Tapping into your techie side to reduce stress is all about having fun, refocusing your thoughts and relaxing with enjoyable activities that suit your personality. But if you prefer to fight stress the "old fashioned" way, here are five fundamental stress-busting tips that can help:

1. **Relax.** Learn relaxation techniques for immediate as well as longer-term stress reduction. Meditation can also help settle the mind so you can think calmly throughout the day. It puts you in control of your thoughts by forcing you to be present in the moment and observe your thought processes.
2. **Spend time with friends, family and pets.** Share your thoughts and feelings, seek support and give support. Reciprocal, respectful and nurturing relationships are essential to good mental health. Further, pets can be a source of unconditional love that ask for little and give so much back.
3. **Write.** Keep a diary or journal, and record your thoughts and feelings. You don't have to show anyone. The act of writing often gives us a new perspective on situations, others and ourselves.
4. **Remain positive.** Negative self-talk, over-generalizing and perfectionism aren't good practices to keep. Learn "cognitive reframing" techniques and become a positive thinker. Be gentle with yourself and others. You're only human and you're doing the best you can.
5. **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** You can't do everything yourself, and you don't have to do it alone. If you're finding it difficult to cope, talk about it with a trusted friend, family member or counsellor.

Stressing the numbers

- In 2010, Statistic Canada found that nearly 24 per cent of Canadians aged 15 or older reported most days were extremely or quite stressful, up from 22 per cent in 2008
- Daily stress rates in Canada are the highest among the core working ages of 35 to 54
- In 2011, 6.5 million Canadians owned a smart phone
- 51 per cent of people surveyed said they check their phones continuously on vacation