

## ● Ask America's Ultimate Experts

# “Help! I’m stressed and anxious!”

Almost 50% of women say their stress and anxiety levels have intensified over the last five years. The good news: We’re also increasingly likely to do something about it. Here, our experts share their secret:

## 1 Tame worries instantly! 2 Feel-good ways to squash stress!

### Take a musical time-out!

Music soothes the stress beast. “Put on any song you like, turn down the lights and relax,” suggests women’s health expert **Stephanie McClellan, M.D.** To boost the benefits, sing along, adds stress expert **Debbie Mandel**: “It releases tension instantly. No one needs to hear you, either. Just belting one out in the shower helps!”

### Massage your face!

“Your brain is built to read facial expressions—even your own!” notes Dr. McClellan. “So if your facial muscles are tense, your brain thinks there’s a threat to you and activates stress pathways.” A quick way to get your brain to relax, therefore, is to relax your face. “Studies show changing your muscle tone can change your mood. Simply massage your temples, close your eyes, relax—and smile.”

### Match your exercise to your worry!

You already know exercise is one of the best stress-busters around, but you may be surprised to learn that activities that “address” your specific stressor can heighten its benefits. “I had a client who was going through a divorce and just felt stuck,” Mandel says. “So we did lunges together to get her legs literally moving forward—the physical reflection of what she wanted to do mentally. Her stress diminished and she was eventually able to psychologically move on, too.” Is your stress making you sluggish? Go for a walk. Want to feel more empowered? Try weight training.



### Bring the woods to you!

Spending just five minutes in the great outdoors lowers your heart rate and elevates your mood. Can’t get out? Wood fragrances—in the form of cedar and sandalwood essential oils—also calm you instantly, says stress expert **Claire Wheeler, M.D., Ph.D.** “Whenever I smell them, I picture myself sitting on a soft bed of pine needles in the forest.” Just use the oils in a potpourri sachet, or do as Dr. Wheeler does: “I sprinkle a few drops on the river rocks and seashells I collect; they absorb the oil and create a visual oasis in my home.”



### Give yourself a p.m. pep talk!

What are your top five worries of the day? Recount them in front of your mirror before you go to bed at night, and they’ll melt away, promises Dr. McClellan. “For example, tell yourself, ‘I’m worried about my son’s test, but I can’t do anything more about it, and I’m going to bed now.’” Simply expressing your stress out loud helps you purge it and put it to rest. Why the mirror? “Seeing the stress on your face helps you realize how it’s affecting you, so you’re motivated to move forward,” she says. Plus, your brain instinctively takes “conversations” more seriously when it sees a face—even your own—staring back.



## 3 Make a stress-melting meal plan!

### Eat a breakfast fit for a queen (bee)!

“A robust breakfast helps reduce stress for the entire day,” says Dr. McClellan, who recommends it include a spoonful of royal jelly. “It’s full of amino acids that help tame stress,” she explains. “Add it to Greek yogurt, which is rich in mood-boosting potassium.” Other smart choices? “Whole-grain bread with a smear of almond butter and sliced avocados,” says Dr. McClellan.



### Take the fastest-acting supplement!

“It’s 5-HTP—which stands for hydroxytryptophan—a building block of the stress-relieving amino acid serotonin,” explains Dr. Wheeler. “Amino acids are found in protein-rich foods like eggs and fish, but it takes time before they work. This supplement, on the other hand, goes directly to the body’s stress-control center, your brain, to literally relax you from top to bottom.”

### Crunch on nuts!

Not only do nuts—like walnuts, pistachios and cashews—contain stress-busting fatty acids, they tame worries with their *texture*. Biting into crunchy foods is actually proven to relieve tension!

—Kristina Mastrocola

## Our expert panel



Women’s health and wellness advocate **Stephanie McClellan, M.D.**, is the coauthor of *So Stressed: The Ultimate Stress Relief Plan for Women*, and has appeared on such programs as *Good Morning America*.



**Debbie Mandel, M.A.**—author of *Addicted to Stress: A Woman’s 7-Step Program to Reclaim Joy and Spontaneity in Life*—is a stress management, health and wellness expert. Visit her at [TurnOnYourInnerLight.com](http://TurnOnYourInnerLight.com).



Physician **Claire Wheeler, M.D., Ph.D.**—author of *10 Simple Solutions to Stress*—is an instructor at Portland State University and an adjunct associate clinical professor at Oregon Health and Science University.