



# More Joy, Less Stress!

RELAX AND GET HAPPY WITH A WEEK'S WORTH OF SIMPLE STRATEGIES. *By Jane Bianchi*

**Juggling a family, a social life,** a job and community demands? A little stress can be a sign of a full life. But it is important to be extra-cautious about overdoing it because Latinas are considered a “high-risk” group for anxiety and depression, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. One possible reason: “Like many women, Latinas tend to have the majority of the home responsibilities,” says Anagloria Mora, PhD, a licensed psychotherapist in Miami. “My patients tell me they wish they could clone themselves.” (Wouldn’t that be nice!) Instead of worrying about how you’re going to do it all, just incorporate these simple strategies, one day at a time, into your weekly routine.

GETTY



### **Say no to just one request**

Realizing that it's OK to put yourself first every now and then can help you fight strain. For example, if your sister asks you to watch her kids during the half-hour that you normally do Zumba, say politely but firmly: "I'm sorry, but I can't at that time." Maybe you can compromise on another day—or perhaps she'll ask someone else.



### **Break up a large task**

Instead of writing "clean the house" on your to-do list, break that task into seven smaller ones (such as "vacuum," "dust," "clean the bathroom") and schedule each one ("Tuesday, 7 to 8 A.M."). If you assign yourself a huge task without setting a time to finish it, chances are it won't get done—and that will leave you even more anxious.



### **Eat oats for breakfast**

Carb-rich foods like oatmeal and whole-grain bread calm you down by increasing your levels of serotonin (called "the happy hormone" because it regulates your mood). Eat a low-sugar version of *avena* in the morning to help your body (and mood) stay steady and even-keeled all day.



### **Reach out**

Use the 5-minute rule. Whenever you're feeling overwhelmed, take just 5 minutes to call, Skype or text with a family member or friend. Releasing your worries will make you feel more relaxed and less alone.



### **Take an activity break**

In a recent study in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, Latinas said "lack of time" was the top reason they skipped fitness. But you don't need hours: Simply going for a walk, biking around the block or dancing around your living room can boost circulation and lead to a more peaceful you.



### **Make a date—with yourself**

Pencil in at least 30 minutes a week to do something that makes you happy. A regular date to read a book or sit outside with *manzanilla* tea will help you feel fulfilled.



### **Cuddle**

When you're too tired for sex, it's easy to skip even touching your husband. But snuggling for a few minutes can actually cause your body to release oxytocin, a feel-good hormone that eases tension.

## **TENSION TAMERS THAT WORK**

Steal these secrets for extra relief.



“I dissolve 2 cups of Epsom salt into a very warm bath for a stress-relieving ‘mineral spa.’ Then I put on some calming music for about 20 minutes and feel my muscles relax.”

**Elaine Costa, 38**  
Fort Lauderdale, FL



“I turn on Janelle Monáe and dance for exactly 7 minutes nonstop. It's just enough time to get me out of my stressed-out funk, but not so long that I get distracted from whatever I was doing before.”

**Bren Herrera, 34**  
Washington, DC



“I sing a song in Spanish. It reminds me of my heritage and my mother because I used to hear her singing when I was growing up. It soothes me and reminds me that all is OK.”

**Yesenia De Avila, 41**  
New York City

### **When stress turns serious**

If you try these strategies and anxiety is still interfering with your daily life, consider reaching out to a mental health professional. Find one near you via [Mental Health America \(NMHA.org\)](http://MentalHealthAmerica.org), or call 800-273-TALK to chat with a trained counselor for free.

SOURCES: Ximena Jimenez, MS, RDN, Latino nutrition specialist. Anagloria Mora, PhD, licensed psychotherapist, Miami. Maria Ramos, licensed clinical social worker, Houston. Stefanie Julissa Torres Ramirez, MD, sleep medicine specialist, University of Kentucky Medical Center, Lexington.