

CANYON RANCH®

8 WAYS TO DE-STRESS

**DIRECTOR OF SPIRITUAL WELLNESS AT CANYON RANCH TUCSON,
STEPHANIE LUDWIG, PROVIDES INSIGHTS INTO HEALING STRESS**

January 2018 – It shows up as the work deadline that was moved up by two weeks; the friend's illness that has you sleepless with worry; or simply the to-do list that seems perennially unfinished. Stress surfaces at various times and manifests itself in different ways, affecting our physical, mental and emotional health. While you may already know that regular exercise, a healthy diet and mindful breathing are all powerful ways to counteract that ubiquitous tension, there's another source of stress relief that you may not have considered: nurturing your spiritual side.

Just as our minds and bodies experience the stress we feel—sweaty palms, racing heart, anxious thoughts—so do our *souls*. “Stress, especially the prolonged stress of grief or trauma, causes constriction in our deepest selves which can leave us feeling disconnected and alone, even fragmented,” says Stephanie Ludwig, Ph.D., M.A., M.Div, Director of Spiritual Wellness at Canyon Ranch Tucson. Taking the time to listen to and care for your inner self with these eight practices can help you feel calmer, more centered and closer to peace.



1. FEEL WHAT YOU FEEL.

Any time we try to stop an emotion or change it without letting it run its natural course, stress builds. Tremendous spiritual healing can come from simply letting tears flow, expressing anger or frustration when you feel it or even allowing your joy to bubble up. Holding back feelings, something we may do without even realizing it, can add to the already present tension. By giving yourself permission to feel whatever you feel when you feel it, you are taking the pressure off. “We create a dam in our hearts, like a dam in river, when we resist or hold onto difficult feelings. Letting feelings flow naturally and spontaneously, without resisting or acting upon them, is healing and spiritually freeing,” Ludwig adds.



2. TAKE AN ENERGY ASSESSMENT.

We all have both positive and negative energy that we take in and give out. (Think of it as a spiritual bank account in which you always want positive, healing energy flowing.) Make a list of the people, habits and activities in your life that contribute to your energy and assess whether they add meaning, motivation or joy to your days, or make you feel overwhelmed, frustrated, or upset. Once you can more clearly see what or who connects with negative energy, you can begin to take steps to adjust those situations or relationships.



3. SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY.

By freeing your mind from worrying about things that are out of your control or of little importance, you gain energy for what is worthy of your attention. Maybe that means letting go of thoughts about a rude encounter you had with someone earlier in the day or accepting the fact that you can't *make* your sister listen to your career advice. Instead, try focusing more on the present moment through practices like mindfulness and meditation. Additionally, clearing up your physical space—getting rid of clutter and excess—and considering ways in which you might live a simpler life can help reduce feelings of stress and encourage the strengthening of your spiritual self.



4. CONNECT WITH OTHERS.

Who makes up your community? Who are the people that support you, appreciate you, comfort you and motivate you? Those are the family, friends, neighbors (even pets) who you want to surround yourself with, because those meaningful connections nurture your spirit and your heart. Stress feeds off a feeling of powerlessness, but building deeper bonds with the people who positively impact your life can help you feel in control.



5. CHANGE THE STORY.

Oftentimes, we assume we know what others are thinking about us without really having any idea what might be going through their minds. “Humans are storytellers, and we can choose how we will interpret and make meaning from the events of our lives. When stress is present we have often forgotten this choice is available,” notes Ludwig. Consider that what you’re telling yourself (*My boss’s response was a bit harsh; he must be disappointed in my work*) may not be accurate. Instead, try to reframe it in a way that allows you to feel calmer: *I have no reason to believe my work isn’t up to par; he may just be having a bad day*. Reminding yourself of what you do know will make it easier to escape from the stress-inducing loop playing in your head.



6. LIVE FROM LOVE, NOT DUTY.

When too many of the things you do are out of obligation—and you’re sacrificing most of your time for others—it can weigh on you mentally and physically. As you simplify your life and focus on connecting with others, try to act from a place of love and compassion for yourself too. It may not even be that your behavior shifts very much, but that you become more aware of your internal source of energy so that you are giving to others from a “well” that feels full. “Staying connected to that energy through a daily spiritual practice is what keeps us healthy, whole and living fully,” says Ludwig.



7. REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE LOVABLE AND WORTHY.

One of the biggest sources of stress is feeling like we need to do and be more than what we are in order to be accepted: that we should earn more money, be a better parent or partner, have an impressive title at work, and so on. You are always worthy of love, just as you are, and acknowledging that on a daily basis can help minimize ongoing feelings of worry.



8. HAVE A LITTLE FAITH.

It can be tough to learn to respond to fear with an authentic belief that you *will* be OK—that things *will* turn out fine, if not always in the ways you hoped for. Practicing reassuring self-talk, that calms chronic worry and anxiety, especially about the future, is a good way to build your trust. “Repeating these assuring words from Julian of Norwich aloud can be powerfully centering: ‘All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well,’” suggests Ludwig. Alternatively, mentally repeating words like “peace” and “breath” (or another word or phrase that has meaning for you) can stop runaway thoughts when you feel tension starting to get the better of you. Eventually, you’ll have faith that you can handle whatever arises, in whichever way it unfolds, allowing you to be more present and live fully in the moment.

About Canyon Ranch®

Canyon Ranch® has been a pioneer and an industry-leading proponent of the wellness lifestyle for nearly 40 years, operating the world's most celebrated collection of life-enhancement properties. Canyon Ranch has wellness destinations in Tucson, Arizona and Lenox, Massachusetts. In addition, Canyon Ranch operates Canyon Ranch spa + fitness at The Venetian® & The Palazzo® hotels and Canyon Ranch spa + fitness onboard Cunard Cruise Line®, Oceania Cruises® and Regent Seven Seas Cruises® and on Celebrity Cruises®. Canyon Ranch is a 13-time winner of Travel + Leisure's Best Spa Award, an 11-time recipient of the Condé Nast Traveler Best Destination Spa Award and is recognized as the 'Best Wellness Program' by Virtuoso's 'Best of the Best' 2017 awards.