

# THE ART THERAPY APPROACH to Reducing Stress

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If you find doodling relaxing, there's science that supports your opinion. **A number of studies suggest that art therapy and other creative activities can have positive effects on your brain**, including stress reduction.

For example, some research has found that making art or just visiting an art museum can lower stress hormones like cortisol. Other studies say that sculpting and drawing can increase blood flow to the reward centers in your brain and increase the happiness hormone dopamine.

Working with a trained art therapist maximizes these results. However, you can also see some benefits from expressing your creativity on your own too. Try these ideas for using art to fight stress.

## **Tips for Using Art to Reduce Stress:**

1. **Have fun.** Your studio skills are less important than your attitude. Pick a project you find interesting and let go of expectations. Try to immerse yourself in the experience.
2. **Block out time.** If you sit around waiting for inspiration to strike, your canvas may remain blank. **Designate a portion of each day for creative efforts.** You could start out with 15-minute sessions and work your way up.
3. **Design a space.** It also helps to have one or more spots in your home where you can work on your masterpieces. Turn a guest room into your private studio. Keep your supplies in a portable caddy that you can carry to your backyard or

sunroom, depending on the weather.

4. **Experiment with different media.** Are you feeling overwhelmed by choices? Start with something you liked as a child or visit your local library for ideas. Branch out when you're ready for your next challenge.
5. **Take lessons.** You can fight stress by drawing stick figures and building popsicle stick boxes. However, a little instruction might increase your motivation and help you to express yourself more fully.
6. **Try coloring books.** The market for adult coloring books keeps growing, and it's an easy way to begin. **There's even some evidence that coloring inside a shape is especially effective for enhancing your mood.**
7. **Share your works.** Talk about your art with others. Join social media groups for painters and potters. You can give each other constructive feedback and post pictures about what you're doing.
8. **Find an art therapist.** Working with a professional is likely to have more impact, as you'll have more opportunities for discussion and reflection. Contact your local chapter of the American Art Therapy Association to find resources near you.

#### **Other Natural Methods for Reducing Stress:**

1. **Strengthen your focus.** Make your art projects part of your self-care. Train yourself to make conscious decisions and focus on one activity at a time.
2. **Eat healthy.** Choose foods that help to reduce stress and stabilize your mood. Ensure that your diet includes plenty of complex carbohydrates, vitamins, and

omega-3 fatty acids. Limit alcohol, caffeine, and added sugars.

**3. Sleep well. Adequate amounts of high-quality rest make you more resilient too.** Stick to a consistent bedtime that allows you to wake up naturally feeling refreshed and recharged.

**4. Stay active.** Physical exercise is another constructive method for dealing with daily pressures. You may even enjoy some creative breakthroughs while you're lifting weights or swimming laps.

**5. Consider counseling.** Simple arts and crafts are a pleasant way to spend your time, but you may need more assistance if you're dealing with significant anxiety or depression. Talk with your doctor about art therapy and other treatment options appropriate for your individual needs.

**Make art part of your daily life.** Fight stress with your own creative activities or find an art therapist who can help you focus on your personal development and empowerment.