

STRESS MANAGEMENT QUICK REFERENCE

Six techniques that actually work — evidence-based, no app required

01 PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGH

Two quick inhales through the nose, one long slow exhale through the mouth. Deflates CO₂ buildup in the alveoli faster than any other single breath pattern. Used in Stanford stress research.

~30 SECONDS

02 COLD WATER FACE DUNK

Submerge your face in a bowl of cold water for 30 seconds. Activates the diving reflex — heart rate drops measurably within one minute. Used in DBT as a crisis de-escalation tool.

~1 MINUTE

03 BILATERAL STIMULATION

Alternate tapping — left knee, right knee, repeat — or cross-body shoulder taps. Used in EMDR therapy. Interrupts the feedback loop of anxious rumination.

2–5 MINUTES

04 FIDGET TO REGULATE

Physical sensation competes with anxious thought for cortex bandwidth. Putty, textured objects, resistance tools. Not distraction — sensory regulation. Supported by OT research on proprioceptive input.

AS NEEDED

05 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING

Name 5 things you see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can touch, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste. Forces prefrontal cortex engagement, interrupting the threat-detection loop.

~3 MINUTES

06 COLD SHOWER FINISH

30 seconds of cold water at the end of a shower raises dopamine levels by ~250% in controlled studies. The effect lasts up to three hours. Not comfortable. Works anyway.

30 SECONDS

