



My Drift

Title: Calming the Mind

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The ongoing COVID pandemic has had a negative effect on many people's minds. People are stressed out to the max! They are worried and even distraught about things like getting sick, relationships, losing their jobs, and not having enough money to pay the bills. Yes, people's troubled minds are racing 90 miles an hour and they can't seem to calm them down.

Like this Man





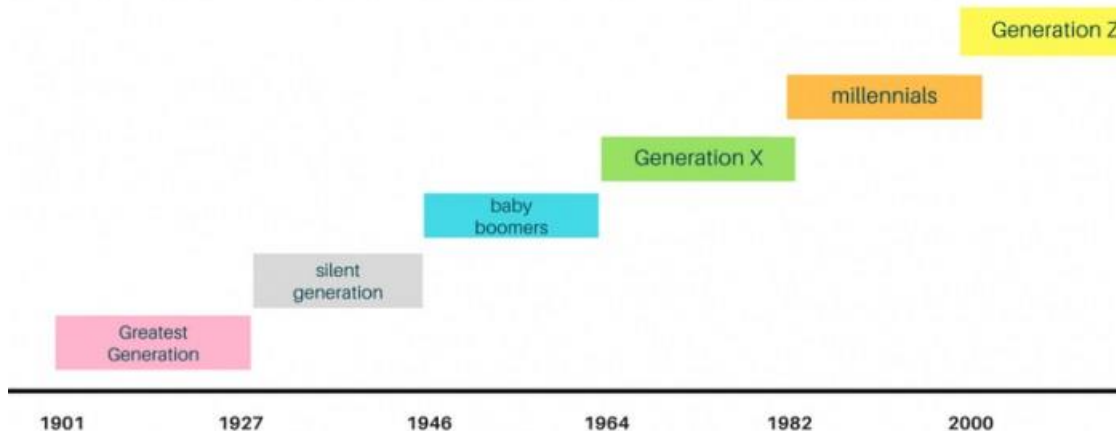
STRESS IN AMERICA

Here are a few facts that demonstrate how the pandemic has jacked up the stress level in most Americans:

- ❖ There have been over 38 million cases of COVID-19 and over 630,000 deaths in the United States (as of August 2021). Most families have been affected by this virus in one way or another.
- ❖ A majority of adults (61%) reported experiencing undesired weight changes since the start of the pandemic, with most saying they gained more than 15 pounds.
- ❖ Two in 3 Americans (67%) said they are sleeping more or less than they wanted to since the pandemic started. 35% reported less sleep and 32% reported more sleep than desired.
- ❖ One fourth (25%) reported drinking more alcohol to cope with their stress during the coronavirus pandemic.
- ❖ Nearly half of Americans (47%) said they delayed or canceled health care services since the pandemic started.
- ❖ Black Americans were most likely to report feelings of concern about the future. More than half said they feel uneasy about adjusting to in-person interaction once the pandemic ends (57% vs. 51% Asian, 50% Hispanic and 47% white).
- ❖ Gen Z adults (46%) were the most likely generation to say that their mental health has worsened compared with before the pandemic, followed by Gen Xers (33%), Millennials (31%), Boomers (28%) and older adults (9%).

Alright, I know what generation I fall in (the old fart or silent generation), but I don't know the difference between a Gen X, Y, Z, Millennials, or Boomers – I had to look it up.

A Rough Guide to Generations



The bottom line here is the fact many people are stressed to the point where they need treatment from a mental health professional. Is the pandemic driving you crazy? Is your mind racing with a clutter of negative thoughts?

Like this Lady



The lockdown, staying home, working from home, wearing a mask, social distancing, washing your hands frequently, avoiding crowds, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, getting a COVID test, GETTING VACCINATED, etc. It makes you wonder if there are any sane people left in America.

Fear of Uncertainty

Life is always uncertain. Significant life events like unemployment, death, divorce, or the diagnosis of a serious illness or disease remind us of this reality.

This leads to increased stress.

Which in turn leads to a troubled mind.



We all worry and get upset from time to time. It's a normal part of life, right? But what happens when that anxiety or anger takes over, and you can't calm down? Being able to calm yourself is often easier said than done.

That's why having a few strategies you're familiar with can help you when you're feeling anxious or angry. There will be times when we need to relax and calm our minds. I have searched the Internet and here are a few ways the experts say are best for Calming the Mind.

#1 Deep Breathing Exercises

Breathing is a necessity of life that usually occurs without much thought. When you breathe in air, blood cells receive oxygen and release carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is a waste product that's carried back through your body and exhaled.

But, when people are anxious, they tend to take rapid, shallow breaths that come directly from the chest. This type of breathing causes an upset in the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the body resulting in an increased heart rate, dizziness, muscle tension, and other physical sensations. Your blood is not being properly oxygenated, and this may signal a stress response that contributes to anxiety and panic attacks.

Simple Breathing Exercise

- Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Keep your shoulders relaxed.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth. As you blow air out, purse your lips slightly, but keep your jaw relaxed.
- Repeat this breathing exercise. Do it for several minutes until you feel better.



#2 Meditation

If stress has you anxious, tense and worried, consider trying meditation. Spending even a few minutes in meditation can restore your calm and inner peace. Anyone can practice meditation. It's simple and inexpensive, and it doesn't require any special equipment.

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years. Meditation originally was meant to help deepen understanding of the sacred and mystical forces of life. These days, meditation is commonly used for relaxation and stress reduction.

Meditation is considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine. Meditation can produce a deep state of relaxation and a tranquil mind. During meditation, you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. This process may result in enhanced physical and emotional well-being.

Elements of meditation

Some of the most common features in meditation include:

- **Focused attention.** Focusing your attention is the most important element of meditation. It helps free your mind from the many distractions that cause stress and worry. You can focus your attention on such things as a specific object, an image, a mantra, or even your breathing.
- **Relaxed breathing.** This involves deep, even-paced breathing using the diaphragm muscle to expand your lungs. The purpose is to slow your breathing, take in more oxygen, and reduce the use of shoulder, neck and upper chest muscles while breathing so that you breathe more efficiently.
- **A quiet setting.** Practicing meditation is easier if you're in a quiet spot with few distractions, including no television, radios, or cellphones. Your bedroom, outside patio, while walking, at the beach, or at the park are all good places for meditation.



**Lucky we live in Hawaii.
It is not hard to find a place near the
ocean to meditate.**



**A park bench is a good place to
meditate. I like to stop at the Waipio
park to sit and read or watch the
people. It is relaxing!**

- **A comfortable position.** You can practice meditation whether you're sitting, lying down, walking, or in other positions or activities. Just try to be comfortable so that you can get the most out of your meditation. Aim to keep good posture during meditation.
- **Open attitude.** Let thoughts pass through your mind without judgment.
- **Meditation takes practice.** Keep in mind, for instance, that it's common for your mind to wander during meditation, no matter how long you've been practicing meditation. If you're meditating to calm your mind and your attention wanders, slowly return to the object, sensation, or movement you're focusing on.

#3 Exercise

The physical benefits of exercise — improving physical condition and fighting disease — have long been established, and physicians always encourage staying physically active.

Exercise is also vital for maintaining mental fitness, and it can reduce stress. Studies show that it is very effective at reducing fatigue, improving alertness and concentration, and at enhancing overall cognitive function. This can be especially helpful when stress has depleted your energy or ability to concentrate.

When stress affects the brain, with its many nerve connections, the rest of the body feels the impact as well. Or, if your body feels better, so does your mind. Exercise and other physical activity produce endorphins — chemicals in the

brain that act as natural painkillers — which can also improve our ability to sleep, which in turn reduces stress.

Scientists have found that regular participation in some form of exercise has been shown to decrease overall levels of tension, elevate and stabilize mood, improve sleep, and improve self-esteem.



Acrobatics is one of the best exercises for stress relief



Walking for one hour a day will do wonders for your health



Play a sport like basketball to stay physically and mentally fit



Pickleball has become a popular sport for middle-aged Americans



Yoga is a great exercise for the body and the mind

#4 Listen to soothing music

Reducing stress through the power of music. Music can have a profound effect on both the emotions and the body. Faster music can make you feel more alert and concentrate better. Upbeat music can make you feel more optimistic and positive about life. A slower tempo can quiet your mind and relax your muscles, making you feel soothed while releasing the stress of the day. Music is effective for relaxation and stress management.



RAP and LOUD music will increase your stress and destroy your brain!



Research confirms these personal experiences with music. Current findings indicate that music around 60 beats per minute can cause the brain to synchronize with the beat causing alpha brainwaves (frequencies from 8 - 14 hertz or cycles per second). This alpha brainwave is what is present when we are relaxed and conscious. To induce sleep (a delta brainwave of 5 hertz), a person may need to devote at least 45 minutes, in a relaxed position, listening to calming music. Researchers at Stanford University have said that "listening to music seems to be able to change brain functioning to the same extent as medication." They noted that music is something that almost anybody can access and makes it an easy stress reduction tool.

So, what type of music reduces stress the best? A bit surprising is that Native American, Celtic, Indian stringed-instruments, and flutes are very effective at relaxing the mind even when played moderately loud. Sounds of rain, thunder, running water, waves, birds singing and other nature sounds may also be relaxing particularly when mixed with other music, such as light jazz, classical, and easy listening music.



Sound of Running Water Relaxes the Mind

Since with music we are rarely told the beats per minute, how do you choose the relaxation music that is best for you? The answer partly rests with you: You must first like the music being played, and then it must relax you. You can tell when you find music that relaxes you. You can also tell when the music irritates you and creates tension – don't listen to it.

It is important to remember that quieting your mind does not mean you will automatically feel sleepy. It means your brain and body are relaxed, and with your new calm self, you can then function at your best in many activities.

#5 Find an interesting hobby

According to mental health experts, “hobbies are one of the best ways to develop a positive attitude and achieve happiness.” Hobbies can make you happier because they boost your confidence and self-esteem.

Picking up a hobby has many benefits such as the following:

- **A hobby can give you a sense of self-efficacy.**
- **A hobby can be a creativity outlet.**
- **Having hobbies will keep your brain engaged.**
- **A hobby gives you something to look forward to.**
- **A hobby can give you something to be passionate about.**
- **Hobbies are fun and good for you; that's a winning combination.**

There are hundreds of different hobbies but here is a list of some of the more popular ones:

Writing	Painting	Collecting coins/stamps
Reading	Cooking	Gardening
Fishing	Shopping	Playing an instrument
Playing games	Putting puzzles together	Singing and/or Dancing
Watching TV*	Learning a new language	Knitting

***Depends on what you watch – most shows don't reduce stress or calm the mind**



Writing



Reading



Fishing



Playing Cards



Watching Sports on TV

What can hobbies do for you?

In general, hobbies offer a break from the things in your life that are important but can be draining, like work, raising children, caring for older or sick people, and looking after your home. Here's exactly what a hobby can do for you:

- **Relieve stress.** Stress lives only in your head. By distracting your mind with something else that is more enjoyable – and less stressful – you will relieve the feeling of work-related stress.
- **Coax you into taking a break from work.** Sometimes you just need something to do in order to pull yourself away from your work.
- **Offer a new challenge.** Work and raising a family can be tough enough, but a hobby can challenge you in an entirely different way.
- **Learn more about yourself.** By taking on something completely different than you're used to, you will learn more about who you are.
- **Improve yourself.** I'm not saying you aren't perfect already, but a hobby can help you learn a new skill and improve in certain aspects of life.
- **Stop wasting time.** Too many people spend their free time in front of a screen, whether it be a TV, their mobile phone, a computer, or a tablet. What a waste of time! A hobby pulls you away from this technology and fills your time in a more beneficial way.
- **Mindfulness.** Something we hear more and more about in today's day and age is mindfulness. Most hobbies are great practice in mindfulness and staying present, rather than looking in the past or toward the future.
- **Meet new people.** Hobbies can be the perfect way to meet new people. If you are in a new place, or just want to meet some new people, a hobby will create new similarities and can be great conversation starters.

- **Be more patient.** Everything moves so fast when you're raising a family, or are at a busy workplace, or are just commuting in today's society – everyone is in such a rush. A good hobby is a great patience builder and can force you to take a deep breath and relax.

So, it should be pretty apparent now that it's important to have a hobby and keep yourself busy with things that are not related to work. It's good for your brain, it can eliminate stress and, in turn, will make you more productive at work.

#6 Church and Prayer

Prayer for Peace of Mind and Heart

“Loving God, please grant me peace of mind and calm my troubled heart. Give me the strength and clarity of mind to find my purpose and walk the path you've laid out for me. I trust your Love, God, and know that you will heal this stress. Just as the sun rises each day against the dark of night.”



A Christian Prayer for Peace of Mind

“Almighty God, we bless you for our lives, we give you praise for your abundant mercy and grace we receive. We thank you for your faithfulness even though we are not that faithful to you. Lord Jesus, we ask you to give us all around peace in our mind, body, soul, and spirit.”

Can going to church and prayer ease anxiety and calm the mind?

Yes, going to church and praying absolutely helps anxiety. But maybe not quite in the way you think. It's not like the moment you pray, all your panic attacks and anxiety and worry and fear will go away. God isn't a drug that suddenly makes you feel an overwhelming feeling of peace and calm. Rather, prayer connects you to the God of inner peace which results in a calmer mind.

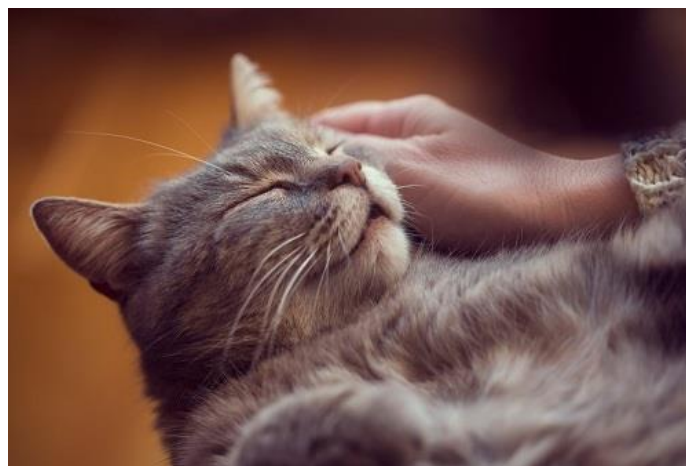
#7 Having a Pet



Therapy animals have long been the trusted companions of people with disabilities. Now, animals of all kinds (mostly dogs and cats) are proving their value to individuals dealing with a wide range of mental health conditions, including stress, anxiety, depression and even dementia.

Simply petting an animal can decrease the level of the stress hormone cortisol and boost release of the neurotransmitter serotonin, resulting in lowered blood pressure and heart rate and, possibly, in elevated mood.

When thinking of ways to reduce stress in life, usually techniques like meditation, yoga, and exercising come to mind. These are great techniques, to be sure. But getting a new best friend can also have many stress relieving and health benefits. While human friends provide great social support and come with some fabulous benefits, a pet might even provide greater benefits.



A Cat's Purr can reduce stress and improve your mood

How Pets Lower Stress and Calm the Mind

Research shows that, unless you're someone who really dislikes animals or is absolutely too busy to care for one properly, pets can provide excellent social support, stress relief, and other health benefits—perhaps more than people.

Improve Mood

For those who love animals, it's virtually impossible to stay in a bad mood when a pair of loving puppy eyes meets yours, or when a super-soft cat rubs up against your hand. In addition to the social support, stress relief, and general health benefits pets can bring, research supports the mood-enhancing benefits of pets.

Having a Pet can Reduce Blood Pressure

Yes, it's true. While ACE inhibiting drugs can generally reduce blood pressure, they aren't as effective in controlling spikes in blood pressure due to stress and tension as a pet. Research has concluded that there are positive physiological effects, especially lowered blood pressure, to petting dogs and social interaction with companion animals. Touch, the actual act of petting the dog, appeared to be the major component of the so-called pet effect.

Encourage Exercise

Whether we walk our dogs because we both need it or because we are more likely to enjoy a walk when we have companionship, dog owners do spend more time walking than non-pet owners. Because exercise is good for stress management and overall health, owning a dog can be credited with increasing these benefits.



Walking the Dog

Provide Social Support

When we're out walking, having a dog with us can make us more approachable and give people a reason to stop and talk, thereby increasing the number of people we meet, giving us an opportunity to increase our network of friends and acquaintances, which also has great stress management benefits.

Unconditional Love

Pets can be there for you in ways that people can't. They can offer love and companionship, and can also enjoy comfortable silences, keep secrets, and are excellent for snuggling. Cuddling your dog isn't just good for your pet, but for you too. Cuddling can have multiple psychological benefits for both you and your furry friend. It reduces levels of Cortisol, the hormone that is responsible for stress, anxiety, depression and worst-case scenario, a breakdown.

Could be the Best Antidote to Loneliness

In fact, one study found that nursing home residents reported less loneliness when visited by dogs alone than when they spent time with dogs and other people.

CAUTION: It's important to realize that owning a pet isn't for everyone. Pets do come with additional work and responsibility, which can bring its own stress. However, for most people, the benefits of having a pet far outweigh the drawbacks. Having a furry best friend can reduce stress in your life and bring you support when times get tough.

RECAP

As most of you (my readers) know, I do the research and write these articles mostly for my own benefit. I want to learn new things and re-learn a few of the things I have forgotten over the years. I also want to keep my brain from dying. So, this recap of things you can do to reduce stress and calm the mind are related to me. I generally live a fairly stress-free life, but occasionally bad things happen that I have little or no control over which cause me stress.

Let's take a look at 8 things we can do to relax and calm our minds:

#1 Breathing Exercises. I have never tried any of these breathing exercises but next time I become stressed out, I might give them a try.

#2 Meditation. I occasionally meditate without knowing I'm meditating. As I mentioned earlier, sometimes I will stop at the big park (Patsy T. Mink Central

O‘ahu Regional Park) in Waipio and sit on a bench to read my book or just watch the people walk by. I find this very relaxing.



Patsy T. Mink Central O‘ahu Regional Park

When I used to work part-time at the old Gold Bond Building on Ala Moana Boulevard, sometimes I would go to the Kaka‘ako Waterfront Park and sit near the ocean to watch the waves, people, and try to figure out the meaning of life. The ocean is a great place for meditation.



Kaka‘ako Waterfront Park

#3 Exercise. I have been getting a lot of exercise my whole life. Here is a short breakdown:

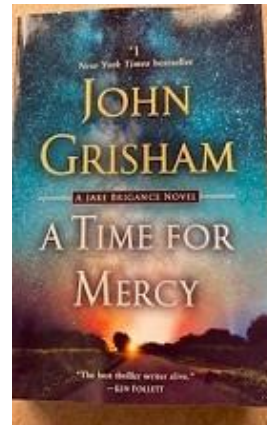
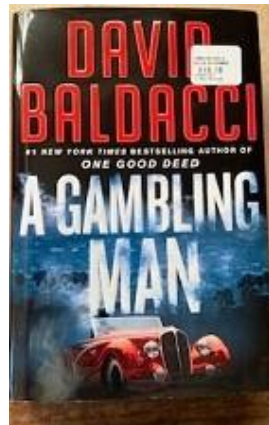
- **Young boy.** Working on my parent’s small farm – Hiking – Playing with my friends.
- **High School.** Basketball and football.
- **University of Utah.** Basketball.

- **Navy. Training - Basketball – Ping pong – Flag football.**
- **Tooele Army Depot. Basketball and Ping pong.**
- **Fort Shafter. Played basketball until I retired at age 70 – Walking with friends – Ping pong – Bowling.**
- **Retirement. Walking my dog. (More on this later)**

#4 Listen to Soothing Music. I don't listen to music all that much but when I do, I like the "Oldies but Goodies" and slow "Country and Western" music from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. I also like soothing "Classical Music". I can't stand loud Rock or Rap music!

#5 Hobbies. My favorite hobbies are:

Reading. I read the newspaper daily, Sports Illustrated weekly, and various hard cover books. I try to read 2 or 3 books a month. I like mysteries, detective, murder (David Baldacci), spy (Tom Clancy), and court room (John Grisham) books.



My last two books. Just finished A Gambling Man – Currently reading A Time for Mercy

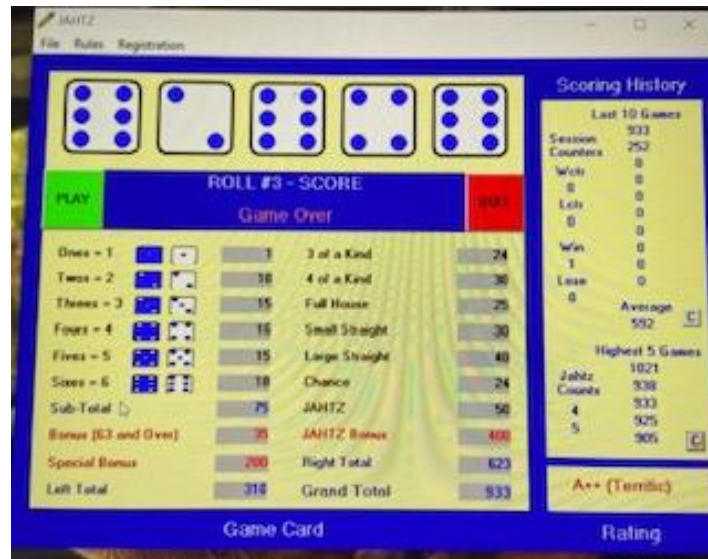
Writing. I have been researching and writing these articles (369 of them) since 2006.

Playing cards, board games, and Yahtzee. My Utah family (mother who died in 2017 at age 99, sister, and other family members) love to play games. I do too!

Maintaining my website bigdrifter.com Been doing this since 2005.

Watching Sports on TV. Watching television does little to reduce stress and calm your mind but I enjoy watching sports.

Playing games on my computer. I have programmed more than 20 games and I only play the best of these games. The most popular game is my version of Yahtzee called Jahtz – I play it every day.



JATHZ

Fishing. I love to fish but have not been doing much of it in my old age.



Yes, that's me Fly Fishing on the Provo River in Utah

#6 Church and Prayer. I don't go to church very often, but I do believe in God and the power of prayer.

#7 Pets. I firmly believe that my dog Apache is keeping me alive. If all goes well, me and Apache will "kick the bucket" about the same time. Me in my late 80s

and Apache at age 10 or 11 or 12. No one else can handle him except my son, daughters, and our breeder. Apache loves my wife, but her health issues prevent her from being able to take care of him for an extended period of time.

I'm with Apache, day and night, every day. I spent a lot more time talking to him than I do my wife. A typical day goes something like this: We get up early – 4am on the days my wife has dialysis and around 6am on the other days. I get Apache fresh water and heat up his steak. (He gets a steak every morning) He also goes for a ride in the truck every morning. We go all over the island. He then keeps my wife company while I run errands. I usually have to do some yard work and Apache loves to help. At about 4pm, he lets me know it is time for our daily walk. This is Apache's favorite activity. After his walk and some cold water, it is time for his daily treat – a beef jerky. Me and Apache spent most of our time in the



Apache out Walking

outside patio. I have an easy chair, a TV, and a refrigerator there. Before going in the house for the night, Apache has his dry dog food and goes in the back to do his business. After my wife goes to sleep, I usually go on the computer for a couple of hours. Apache lays under the desk on top of my feet. When I go to bed, Apache will go lay by my wife's bed in the living room near the oxygen equipment. Sometime during the night, he will come in my bedroom and sleep on the bed with me.

Apache has a pretty good life, and he sure keeps me busy. Yes, pets do reduce stress, anxiety, and calm the mind. I think Apache is a big help in keeping me healthy at my advanced age. I absolutely need to have a dog!!

#8 Human Friends. During this COVID pandemic, I think it is important for your mental well-being to get out of the house once in a while to have lunch and drinks with your friends. We all need a little fun in our lives! Get vaccinated and try not to worry about things so much.

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