

# Stress less

TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF WITH THESE SIMPLE DAILY RITUALS

Do you regularly feel frazzled? It seems you're not alone. Eight in 10 Australian women say stress is a constant in their lives, taking both a mental and physical toll, yet almost half of us are too busy to tackle it, according to a new national survey. Try our line-up of fuss-free daily strategies to help you decompress, with minimal effort required.

## FIRST THING...

### *Get bowled over*

People who start the day with cereal have lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol than those who rarely eat it, finds a UK study. According to lead author Professor Andy Smith, "the increase of brain tryptophan following the intake of carbohydrate-rich food may produce an increased capacity to cope with stress." Regular breakfast eaters may also be more organised and, in turn, less flustered, adds Smith.

## MID-MORNING...

### *Repeat a calming phrase*

Silently repeating a soothing phrase like 'one', 'rama' or 'om shanti', which means peace, can instantly defuse stress. Known as mantras, these words and phrases "serve to train attention and interrupt the stress response," explains US research scientist Dr Jill Bormann. "You can use them anytime, anywhere, with eyes open or closed, in any position."

## AT LUNCH...

### *Go for a stroll*

The stress-busting benefits of exercise kick in with as little as 20 minutes of activity a week, say UK experts – easily achievable with a daily walk around the block. The more time people devote to exercise and the higher the intensity, the less likely they are to report psychological distress, the study showed.

## IN THE AFTERNOON...

### *Snack on an orange*

As well as strengthening immunity, the vitamin C in oranges is a potent tension tamer, helping to blunt spikes in blood pressure and return cortisol levels to normal after stressful situations, according to German research. Other vitamin C-rich fruit includes strawberries, papaya, kiwi fruit and cranberries.

## AT NIGHT...

### *Curl up with a book*

Just six minutes of reading slows the heart rate and eases tension, say UK scientists. "When we speak of someone as being 'lost in a book' we are literally describing their temporary absence from the real world," says research director Dr David Lewis. "It is this element of escapism that makes reading such a powerful antidote to stress and anxiety."

