

# 5M2T: DECOMPRESS

**O**ur schedules are loaded with activities, work, tasks around the house, homeschooling kids, errands, meetings, and so much more. With so much on our plates, taking time to decompress is just as important as the next task on our list. When we have so much to do, we often forget (or sacrifice) self-care (e.g. exercise, relaxing, eating right, showering). Taking time to take care of our needs is just as important as tending to responsibilities and other's needs. Below are a few tips on decompressing.

- **Schedule regular breaks to release some steam.** Take notice of internal cues that signify you're getting stressed (chest tightening, difficulty concentrating, tense muscles, etc.), and take a short wellness break to combat the stress. Go for a quick walk, strike up a conversation with a coworker, do some deep breathing/meditating—anything that constitutes a mental break!
- **Meditation.** Deep relaxation such as meditation, when practiced regularly, not only relieves stress and anxiety but also is shown to improve mood. Deep relaxation also may offer health benefits including lowering your blood pressure, relieving pain and strengthening your immune and cardiovascular systems.
- **Release the pressure (productively).** Exercise is one of the most effective (and free) stress relief strategies; if working out stress is your go-to, we recommend cardiovascular activities for maximum stress relief efficiency. Alternatively, you can channel the stress into your work, talk out your stressors with a close friend, or make dedicated time for activities you enjoy.
- **Compartmentalize.** Keeping work at work and home at home can be incredibly difficult; I recommend visualizing a physical barrier (such as the entrance gate to the base) where you can “leave” your work/home stresses whenever you pass it, and then pick them up again later. Working from home these days? A “fake commute” may be just the thing your brain needs to mentally separate work and home life – take a quick walk or drive around the block!
- **Have some fun.** Making time for fun is an important way to feel more relaxed. Laughing decreases pain, may help your heart and lungs, promotes muscle relaxation and can reduce anxiety.
- **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Take a step back from time to time and give yourself a sanity check. What's worrying you now may seem like a big deal, but what's the bigger picture? Will this issue still matter a day from now? A week? A month? If the obstacle is time-limited, or if it's totally out of your control, refocus your efforts on things more worth contemplating.
- **Pet a furry friend for 15 minutes.** Studies show the petting an animal for 15 minutes releases feel-good hormones—serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin—and lowers the stress hormone, cortisol.
- **Use creative visualization.** It's a fancy way of saying daydreaming, but you get the idea. Think of something or somewhere that makes you feel good and go there for a few minutes in your mind.

