

# Stress Improvement Guidelines

- **Smiling** – Encourage patients to find more reasons to smile and laugh. Also, as clinicians we should smile more when appropriate – Smiling tends to relax the facial muscles (compared to frowning) and may improve your mood.<sup>18</sup>
- **Exercise** – A good exercise program can include walking, hiking, biking, swimming, yoga, tai chi, qigong or Pilates.
- **Engage in relaxing hobbies** – Hobbies such as in playing music, painting, writing, pottery, fishing, and gardening may be relaxing.
- **Pets** – Play with your pets may help control stress.
- **Massage** – Getting a massage or use self-massage to relax upper- and lower-body muscles.
- **Aromatherapy** – The smells of lavender, rose, vanilla, and lemongrass can put you in a relaxed mood.
- **Nature** – Go outside for a walk to get fresh air and natural light and to look off into the distance. For example, look at the clouds, distant trees, or out over the ocean or lake without squinting. Gazing into the distance tends to relax while prolonged close-up work may lead to stress.<sup>19,20</sup>
- **Relaxed breathing** – Diaphragmatic breathing features either breathing in through the nose and exhaling through the mouth, or breathing in and out through the nose. This technique used in many type of stress reduction and anxiety management programs.<sup>21</sup>
- **Try a stress reduction app** such as [Headspace \(www.headspace.com\)](http://www.headspace.com) or [Calm \(www.calm.com\)](http://www.calm.com)
- **Try self-meditation or self-relaxation** (also known as self-hypnosis). See Table 3 for self-guided relaxation technique.
- **Try a progressive muscle relaxation routine.** See Table 4 for a physical progressive relaxation routine by pioneering psychiatrist Edmund Jacobson, MD, PhD (1888-1983).<sup>22</sup>