

# 28 FRESH WAYS TO RELAX

This summer calls for innovative and easy tips to hit reset, find calm, and have fun. These restorative rituals and mini meditations will have you feeling happy and optimistic in no time.

by SHARLENE BREAKEY photographs by BRYAN GARDNER



TAKE A BREAK to stop and recenter during an overflowing day. “The science is straightforward: Spending a moment being mindful and breathing makes you more productive, more optimistic, and happier,” says Olav Krigolson, PhD, a neuroscientist at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. So we went digging for inspiration, asking experts, influencers, and readers how they steal their little moments of solace. We unearthed a gold mine of soothing strategies—drawn from the worlds of cooking, science, education, nature, and more—that can bring calm and restore a sense of order to our lives.

## COME TO YOUR SENSES

Between clients, I try to engage all my senses. I might step outside to see the clouds or art hanging in a gallery window, and to smell a flower or the crisp air after a rainfall. I'll hug a soft velvet pillow while taking deep, slow breaths and tune in to the birds chirping outside my office.

LORI GOTTLIEB, A PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND THE AUTHOR OF *MAYBE YOU SHOULD TALK TO SOMEONE*

## DO COOKING KARAOKE

A staple of my daily routine is to sing while I cook dinner, and it's especially healing when I've had a tough day. I plug in my speaker, find anything from Lizzo to Earth, Wind & Fire, and start singing—loudly! My kitchen performance makes me come alive and channel my inner Mariah or Beyoncé.

DAYNA ISOM JOHNSON, AN ETSY TREND EXPERT AND JUDGE ON NBC'S *MAKING IT*

## DRAW IT OUT

Recently, while visiting family (which is always a little stressful), I started playing around with my nephew's paint sticks. Moving my hands and watching how the colors overlaid one another helped put my mind at ease.

REBECCA ATWOOD, A DESIGNER AND ARTIST IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

## TIDY YOUR TOTE

Nothing calms me like dumping out my purse on the kitchen counter, reorganizing everything, and putting it all back in perfect, pristine order. Anytime I feel overwhelmed, I just open my freshly organized purse and get a little shot of hope. It feels like a microcosm of life: If I can reclaim control of my purse, I can do anything!

CATHY GUISEWITE, CREATOR OF THE CATHY CARTOON STRIP AND AUTHOR OF *FIFTY THINGS THAT AREN'T MY FAULT*

## JUST VEG

I go to the local farmers market and nerd out looking at beautiful produce. I especially love it when a new season takes over and beautifully blossoming sugar snap peas, tender asparagus, and ramps replace winter root vegetables, or when a vendor hands me a slice of apple to taste when fall arrives.

It makes me feel connected to the seasons and my community—the farmers, my neighbors, and other chefs buying for their restaurants.

MELISSA KING, A *TOP CHEF* WINNER

## GET BORED, THEN BLISSED

When I'm feeling overloaded, I'll take a jog without music or podcasts. The first 15 minutes with no distraction is torture, but after that, my mind goes into a meditative, problem-solving fugue state. The clomping of my sneakers and rhythm of my breath lull me mentally, and I start to work on problems or come up with unexpected notions.

MANOUSH ZOMORODI, CREATOR AND HOST OF THE PODCAST *ZIGZAG* AND AUTHOR OF *BORED AND BRILLIANT*

## CLICK ON THAT ADORABLE VIDEO

Seeing a cute animal activates the amygdala, the emotional system, in a positive way and gives bursts of dopamine that boost our spirits. So when a bunny video pops up in your email or social media feed, enjoy it. Maybe share it with someone else and watch a couple more. Far from hurting your productivity, those breaks act as an unanticipated hug and will make you more focused.

OLAV KRIGOLSON, PH.D. A NEUROSCIENTIST AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

## DIVE IN—LITERALLY OR VIRTUALLY

You know that feeling of deep calm that sweeps over you when you step up to the edge of the Atlantic, a lake, or even a pool? Water has an immediate calming effect. Do whatever works: Taking a long swim or blissing out in a flotation-therapy device will have the most impact, but you can also just listen to the sounds of a babbling creek, stare at a fountain outside during lunchtime, or watch a live feed from an aquarium. Even looking at a photo of the sea can do the trick.

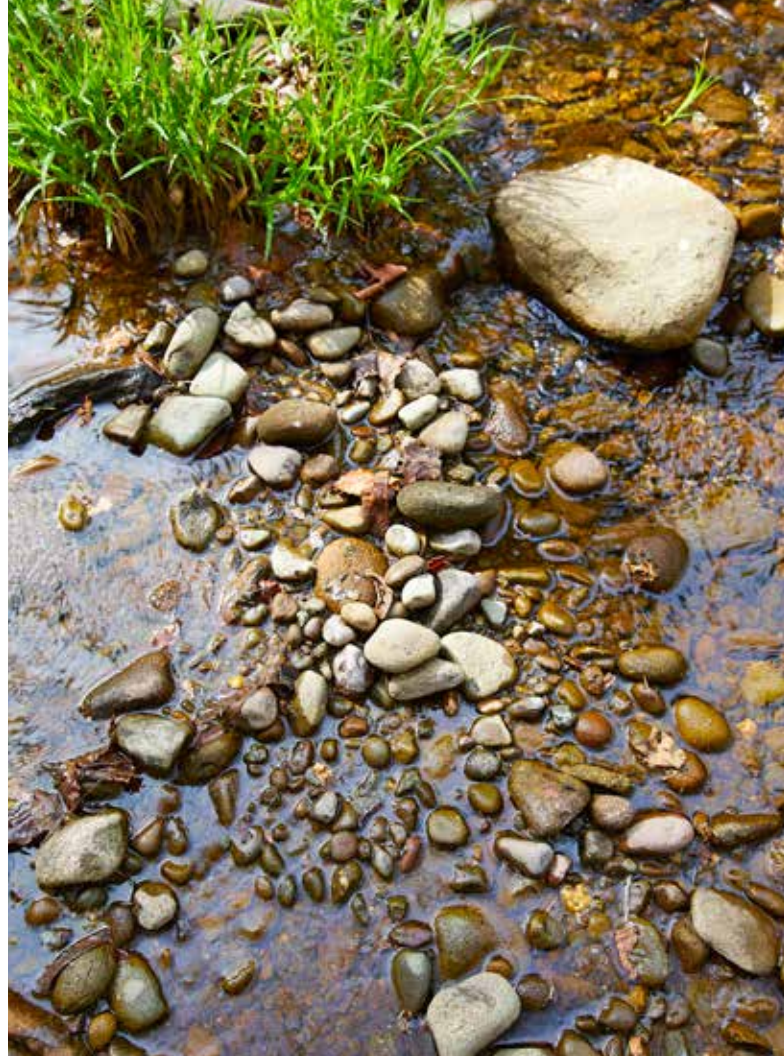
WALLACE J. NICHOLS, PH.D. A MARINE BIOLOGIST AND THE AUTHOR OF *BLUE MIND*

## LEAVE ROOM FOR A VIEW

Our house looks out over a mountain. It's so easy to take it for granted that, when we moved in, a neighbor advised me to notice how different the view is every day. Years later, I still step out my front door before everyone else is up, breathe in the warm or crisp air, and study how some new shadow or slant of the sun changes the landscape. It's an awesome way to start the day.

DEANA HEISLER, A FUNDRAISER FOR CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF CENTRAL COLORADO





### TAKE THE PLUNGE

When I'm on the ice, my adrenaline is pumping and my blood is flowing from the competition, so it's hard to come down. We do eight-minute cold plunges in the locker room, which cool the body, stop inflammation, and bring us to a more restful state. In the off-season, I still like to take a cold shower when I'm anxious and need to hit my reset button.

HILARY KNIGHT, A FORWARD ON THE UNITED STATES WOMEN'S NATIONAL HOCKEY TEAM

### DO BUSYWORK

No way can I ever slow down enough to meditate in the midst of managing brides and vendors. But I get baby resets if I tackle some small household thing that keeps my hands occupied while giving my mind a rest from the computer. Especially in challenging times, a mundane task, like cooking an easy dinner for myself or (my favorite) folding a pile of laundry, doesn't feel like a chore. It quiets my mind.

JACQUELINE HALLGARTH, A WEDDING PLANNER AND THE OWNER OF JACQUELINE HALLGARTH EVENTS

### BLAZE A (CLEAN) PATH

When I'm wound up from a long day of wrangling teenagers, I like to vacuum. I don't know if it's the rhythmic movement, the white noise, or the path it makes on the rug, but my anxiety melts away as I complete the task.

LARA PROZINSKI, A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH AND JOURNALISM TEACHER IN DEVILS LAKE, NORTH DAKOTA

### CRAFT A CANDLE

I make beeswax candles this time of year to put away for winter. You just buy sheets of beeswax and candlewicks, cut them to the size you want, fold the wax over the wick, and roll them until they're the thickness of your candlestick. These kinds of seasonal tasks are simple and tactile and bring you back into your body.

JULIA WATKINS, AUTHOR OF SIMPLY LIVING WELL

### MAKE THE CALL

I take five minutes to call a friend. Yes, call! I expect they likely won't answer, so I'm ready with a fun voicemail message, like "Nothing's wrong—you just popped into my mind." I think of it as a little love note, and when I'm feeling alone or stressed, spending that minute thinking about my friends reminds me that I too am loved, and it helps my brain.

SHASTA NELSON, AUTHOR OF THE BUSINESS OF FRIENDSHIP

### HAVE TEATIME

When I need a break from the computer, I get out a tray and other tea things and sit in my "parlor" as if I were in *Downton Abbey*. I make a ritual of preparing a cup using really good loose tea. That break has made late afternoon the most productive part of my day.

BETH HOWARD, A JOURNALIST AND ANTIQUES DEALER IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

### PICK A PAGE

I've read every book on my shelves already, so if I choose a random one and read an arbitrary page or two, it transports me to when I first read it and reminds me of the joy it brought me. I just picked one up this morning, and suddenly I was walking through a park headed to rehearse *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

ALISON MCGONIGAL MILLER, BAKERY TEAM LEADER AT WHOLE FOODS MARKET IN NEW JERSEY



### TUNE IN, TUNE OUT

One day, when I was desperate for some background music that wasn't depressing, I stumbled on the "French Cooking Music" channel while browsing Pandora. Right away, I thought of Julia Child, who always settles me down, and it's been my escape music ever since. The vibe is relaxed, there are no sad lyrics (that I understand), and the touches of accordion teleport me to Europe.

REMY KOTHE, A POLITICAL ACTIVIST AND GRADUATE STUDENT AT THE ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

### CUDDLE KITTIES

I foster kittens who have lost their moms and need someone to do the simplest thing to keep them alive: provide food, warmth, and stability. When I care for them, all the nonsense falls away, and I'm tasked with making sure the little guys take in enough formula to get to the next feeding. It reminds me to keep it simple. All of it.

ANNE JORGENSEN GREEN, SPECIAL ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL AND DIRECTOR OF LEGAL SERVICES AT NORTH DAKOTA WORKFORCE SAFETY & INSURANCE

### DON'T HUG A TREE—STARE AT THE BRANCHES

Brain-wave tests show that looking at complex, repetitive patterns called fractals has the same effect as meditating. In a forest, you'll find fractal patterns everywhere: in the branching of ferns and trees, in gnarled roots, in intersecting streams and waterfalls, in fluffy clouds. It's called effortless looking, and it happens subconsciously. Those fractal patterns pour into our brain and relax us completely. There are even fractals in some artwork, like the splatter paintings of Jackson Pollock.

RICHARD TAYLOR, PH.D., HEAD OF THE PHYSICS DEPARTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

**WATCH THE POT**  
On my busiest days, I'll make myself one promise: to watch the kettle boil. Doing nothing but concentrating on the boil is an easy way to weave in a pause. For that brief time, I'll be consumed with all the intricate and changing noises, the light of the flame, the vibration, the bubbles, the steam.

ALI ROFF FARRAR, AUTHOR OF THE WELLFULNESS PROJECT AND A COFOUNDER OF THE REMEDY RETREATS, A YOGA AND MINDFULNESS COMPANY

### BE A GAMER

At the end of a stressful day (I work on a locked inpatient unit), I play *Super Mario Bros.* on my kid's Nintendo. It takes me back to my youth, when playing with my neighbors was the happiest time in my life.

MAURY DOJNY, A PSYCHIATRIC CLINICIAN IN FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT



### TAKE A FOREST BATH

We invite people to slow down, to notice all that is present. To tune in to a leaf skipping along, a branch swaying, a bird hopping, or even the motion of wind on your cheek. Concentrating so deeply in nature makes you feel still. Focused. Happier.

CHRISTY THOMSON, DIRECTOR OF WILD COMMUNION, A NATURE RETREAT

### BE PUZZLED

Doing crosswords—I spend 15 minutes with an app or the paper every day—is incredibly calming. Sure, it can be frustrating, but I’ve found that having a hard problem I know can eventually be solved is mentally comforting. Plus, it consumes all your focus, and being that absorbed gives a reset.

ADRIENNE RAPHEL, AUTHOR OF *THINKING INSIDE THE BOX*

### WAKE WITH THE DAWN

Whenever possible, I walk through dew-covered grass, when half the world is falling back asleep, to notice the details that exist only while the sun is slowly getting to its feet. Look closely and gently at things, because they are surely looking at you, waiting to see whether you settle your eyes on the ordinary and mundane and call it miraculous.

ELLA FRANCES SANDERS, AUTHOR OF *EATING THE SUN: SMALL MUSINGS ON A VAST UNIVERSE*

### GET SOME GUIDANCE

High school students need to learn how to handle anxiety, so I teach them “square breathing.” Imagine a square with a dot in the middle. Exhale and move the dot to one side of the square, then inhale and move the dot to the next side of the square, and repeat. I watch their shoulders relax and their breathing slow, and then they stand up, smile, and go on their way.

KRISTA PROMNITZ, ASSISTANT HEAD OF UPPER SCHOOL AND DEAN OF STUDENT SERVICES AT PINE CREST SCHOOL IN FT. LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

### PLANT YOURSELF

Sometimes I snip bits from the succulent plants in my backyard and create arrangements for friends. It’s always soothing to garden, but even more so when my brain is filled with warm thoughts about giving to friends.

KATHERINE RAVICH, A STAY-AT-HOME MOM IN PACIFIC PALISADES, CALIFORNIA

### HIT THE RIGHT NOTE

Every couple of hours, I take a short break with my guitar—a relaxing time-out for anyone who plays. But sometimes I try an instrument I’m not familiar with because I’ve found that it gives me empathy. Being so far outside my comfort zone helps me return to work with a new perspective and clearer intentions.

JEFF BREAKEY, A SOUND ENGINEER AND PRODUCER AND THE OWNER OF GOOD WOLF MUSIC

### FIND YOUR MEDITATION STYLE

“If I had to recommend one way to press pause, it would be to download a meditation app and commit to 15 minutes a day,” says Spring Washam, author of *A Fierce Heart* and founder of a center that brings mindfulness practices to a diverse community in Oakland, California. “You can put in earbuds and do it almost anywhere.” Best of all, there’s an app for everyone.

#### FOR FAMILIES

##### **MyLife Meditation**

With different features for adults and kids, this app uses cute animations to help you tune in to your emotions, then suggests guided exercises to target feelings from sadness to happiness and more. (Free; iOS and Android)

#### FOR INDEPENDENT TYPES

##### **Insight Timer**

Like Spotify for mindfulness experts, this app aggregates thousands of meditations, so you have your choice of voices, lengths, and topics. (Free; iOS and Android)

#### FOR SKEPTICS

##### **Ten Percent Happier**

No whispery, new age voices here. In a hearty baritone, *ABC News* anchor Dan Harris offers no-nonsense daily meditations. (\$99 per year with a 1-week free trial; iOS and Android)

#### FOR INSOMNIACS

##### **Calm**

This app has it all, but we really love its sleep section. Soothing narrators read fiction and nonfiction bedtime stories for kids and adults. (\$70 per year with a 1-week free trial; iOS and Android)

#### FOR CREATIVES

##### **Happy Not Perfect**

Gorgeous videos and photos accompany breathing exercises and irreverent meditations. (\$12 per month; iOS and Android)