

## 7 Steps to Reducing Stress through Art

If you are over the age of 30, living in America, you are probably stressed out. Women, in particular, are living with high levels of stress. They report higher stress level than men in the workplace. They are balancing relationships, driving children to multiple activities and caring for aging parents. If you are in this group, you may have financial concerns, on top of your overwhelming commitments.



I know a woman that I'll call Jill. Recently, she got a promotion, which made her happy. She worked hard and deserved the increased responsibility and salary. However, she still has to shuttle her kids between school and sports activities. Her husband has a rigid work schedule that rarely allows him to deal with the kids during the week. In order to juggle the new job and the kids, she has to bring work home. Her husband pitches in with the cooking, but with everyone's schedule being different, they often eat on the run and never seem to sit down to a well-balanced, home-cooked meal, except on weekends. One of the kids is has started high school. Even weekends are squeezed with sporting events and events. Jill and her husband have started trying to save for their kids' college, but with a mortgage, the

high property taxes in Austin, and trying to set aside money for retirement, Jill feels that money is always an issue.

On top of all these things, her parents are getting older and her father has started having serious health issues. Her mother requires more of her time to help with her father. She feels as if she's being pulled in too many directions. Work, kids, husband, finances, parents: all of them need her attention, and she feels that she's neglecting everyone, so in her darkest moments, her stress is overlaid with guilt.

Jill is not atypical. You may identify with some, or all, of her story. What can she do?

Women tend to internalize stress more than men. With no release, stress builds up over time. Chronic stress leads to body aches, headaches, and joint / muscle pains, which decreases productivity, which results in more stress. How many times have you felt so bad that you wished you could stop and take a nap to nurse your pains, but couldn't because you were under a tight deadline? Have you ever had a headache that hurt so bad you couldn't open your eyes or thought you were going to throw up? Did you leave work or just pop some ibuprofen and hope for the best?



Pain may be the least of our worries. Women report that high stress levels lead to gastrointestinal problems. They are experiencing heartburn and developing reflux. They can even get irritable bowel syndrome. Unchecked, stress has also been linked to increased risk for heart disease and stroke. Some studies are showing that chronic stress can even contribute to the onset of dementia.

In addition to the list of health problems, chronic stress wears on relationships, exacerbates fatigue, disrupts sleeping patterns, and can cause weight gain. People recognize these issues and try various solutions to varying effects.

## **Eight popular treatments for stress**

- Talking with friends and family
- Relaxation exercises, such as yoga, deep breathing, medication, and prayer
- Physical exercise
- Changing your diet to exclude processed, high fat, high sodium foods in favor of more whole and fresh foods
- Avoiding alcohol, caffeine, and smoking
- Doing activities that you enjoy
- Therapy
- Medication



Some of these solutions are easier to implement than others. Talking is great if you have trusting, positive relationships. For some, talking can actually lead to worse outcomes if you choose to talk to someone who uses your vulnerability against you. Relaxation and physical exercise are great, but it is hard to find the time and space in which to start. Changing your diet is easier said than done, right? How many times have you been told to eat less of this and more of that? Significant diet changes take a lot of incremental effort over a long

period of time, with the understanding that there will be times you'll eat a whole bag of potato chips. It's okay. We've all done it. I don't know how many times I've given up alcohol and caffeine. I think the key here is moderation. Know your tolerances and when to stop. If drinking coffee after noon prevents you from sleeping, try substituting tea or some other lower caffeine option for that pick-me-up. Doing activities that you enjoy is one of the best on the list. I'll talk more about that one later. In severe cases, or if you are

flush with cash, therapy and medication are options. Just be careful with the medication. There is a lot of evidence starting to build around the side effects associated with drugs targeting anxiety and depression.

### **But did you know this?**

*Research shows that creating art improves medical outcomes and reduces stress and depression levels.*

A lot of people believe that they can't tap into the stress reducing effects of an art practice. Wrong! Research also shows that making creative art, whether visual art, music, or



*Palacios, TX by David Borden*

something else, has a regenerative, soul-filling, relaxing effect REGARDLESS OF SKILL LEVEL. Yes. That's right. You may feel that you have no talent (Which isn't true, but we'll leave that argument to another day.) so, you are hopeless. It doesn't matter if you're a professional or can barely draw a circle, creating art will make you feel better.

In fact, I think if you don't have a lot of practice as an artist, you may even derive a higher return on your art investment because you are doing it solely for the stress relief and not trying to create a product for sale, which, I'll admit, as a working artist, can be stressful. I've worked with many "non-professional" artists over the

years, and I can attest to the fact that practicing art has done wonders for their confidence and well-being.

## **7 Reasons Why Art Will Conquer your Stress**

You may wonder how creating art helps you to feel better. In a nutshell, engaging in activities that stimulate your mind, releases hormones and other chemicals that naturally make you feel better. Have you ever "been in the zone" when you were playing a game or exercising? This is that state in which you lose all track of time. The old cliché is true: "time flies when we're having fun." Creating art allows you to find that space. And what's more, the effects are long lasting, especially if you work with a teacher or other expert to develop a practice that's right for you.

Below are seven reasons why creating art increases your sense of well-being:

- It leads to the feeling of “flow” or “being in the zone.” These states release all sorts of natural chemicals that help you relax and feel peaceful.
- Spending time in nature and studying how the world looks, so you can represent it in art allows you to gain valuable new perspectives.
- Art allows you to find peace by helping you to escape your routine. Novel experiences contribute to brain and emotional health.
- Though art can be practiced in groups, it has a solitary component. The artist has ample opportunities to spend time with her own thoughts. Solitude (not loneliness) is extremely important to human development and happiness. Spending small amounts of time in serene isolation works wonders on your mood.
- If you take the chance and make art, even though you believe you have no talent, you’ll soon realize that you have more potential than you thought. And it sure feels good to see that you can create instead of just consume art.
- An art practice helps you to more readily tap into your creative side. You’ll find over time, as you continue, that you will be able to find more creative solutions to everyday problems at work and at home. This skill alone will make your life a lot less stressful.
- Perhaps one of the most rewarding aspects of pursuing art for personal fulfillment, is how it will lead you to seeing the fullness and abundance in the world around you. You may already have a robust spiritual practice that centers you and provides a feeling of abundance and gratitude. However, by adding art to the mix, you’ll expand that feeling even more.

## **Start Your Personal Path to Less Stress**

Now that you know how valuable it is to develop your own relaxing art practice, how do you get started? One way is to visit the art store, grab whatever supplies that look like fun and get started. There are lots of pre-packaged kits of markers, paints, brushes, and pencils. Get some paper or cheap, student quality canvas boards and have at it. Don’t put any expectations or constraints on yourself. Just have fun.

If you want a more structured approach or a guide who will take the time to get to know you and help you create a custom plan, then you can find a local artist who specializes in art and mindfulness. Though your city may have many artists eager to give you art lessons, these will most likely be expensive one-on-one sessions or skills-heavy classes.



*Coast at Palacios, TX by David Borden*

Few working artists specialize in art for the person who simply wants to improve their well-being and state of mind.

If you are interested in...

- Connecting with nature
- Meeting like-minded people
- Dedicating time to self-care
- Receiving professional guidance on how to best use your time

... then you may want to kickstart your relaxing art practice by signing up for one of my weekend retreats to the Texas coast or in my native Austin, Texas.

## **The Myth that Retreats Cost more than Vacations**

One myth about art retreats, and retreats in general, is that they cost more than standard vacations. People believe that with hotel costs, plus the fee for the retreat, they will end up paying more. I'd like to counter that argument.

- Often a retreat is more economical than a regular vacation because you don't eat at a lot of restaurants. In the case of one of my retreats, if you stay in a B&B, breakfast is included in your room cost. Lunch will be light, usually fruit and a sandwich. At least that's what I pack for myself. I will indulge in dinner out, but in the towns that I like to visit, dinner won't cost much.
- You have fewer incidental costs because you're not "seeing the sights." Museum fees, parking fees, show tickets, etc. To put it in perspective, one ticket to see a 2 hour show in a big city will cost more than my two or three-day retreat fee.
- Research shows that retreats have a longer-lasting, positive effect on mood than vacations. In other words, retreats have a higher Return on Investment, which, in essence, is better than a lower cost.



*Picture yourself here... photo by David Borden*

## **Final Note**

We spend a lot of time consuming information on social media. But is this good for us? A recent study found that social media, such as Facebook, actually contributes to increased stress levels and depression. Stop consuming. Start creating, regardless of your skill level. It will do you a world of good.

Learn more about how you can join a ScribbleFire Art Retreat  
at <https://scribblefire.com/learn-the-secrets-to-happiness/>

Join my mailing list to receive updates about retreats and classes and learn about how to start and sustain your own relaxing art practice. Just send an email to

[david@scribblefire.com](mailto:david@scribblefire.com)

I won't SPAM you or sell or share your contact information with anyone. You can unsubscribe at any time.

*"[David] Your art touches people."* – Sara Byrd

## About the Author



David Borden is an award-winning artist, writer, and educator. Once, long ago, he sold everything and moved to Morocco for five years. He is often described as unconventional, irreverent, and indomitable. He is well acquainted with stress, depression, and grief. His first graphic novel, *And Yet We Rise*, was featured on Fox7 News. The story is about coping with the short, but profound life of his oldest daughter, who passed away just shy of her fifteenth birthday. She taught him to laugh loudly, face every day with courage, and dare to dream. He lives with his wife and daughter in Austin, Texas. He's the faithful pet of a very demanding cat.

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