

# 5-MINUTE STRESS SOLUTIONS

By Jeffrey Brantley

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How does your day end? Do work worries and problems accompany you home and distract you from your family or peace of mind? Would you like to find a way to let go of the aftereffects of your job so you can better appreciate and enjoy your life beyond 9 to 5?

"It's easy to be caught in the momentum of a busy job, but the costs of this emotional hijacking are high," says Jeffrey Brantley, M.D., founder and director of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program at Duke University's Center for Integrative Medicine and author of *Five Good Minutes in the Evening*. "Worry and hurry can dominate your inner life; you may feel out of touch with loved ones; and a good night's sleep may be a distant memory. Fortunately, by consciously learning to be present and mindful, you can transform your inattention to attention and your stress into solutions."

## **How to begin**

Here are Dr. Brantley's instructions for taking five minutes to ease your transition from work to home. Begin by doing the following:

- Breathe mindfully for about a minute. Allow your body to breathe naturally while you pay attention to your breath moving in and out. Don't try to control your breathing or thoughts.
- Set your intention. Setting intention is a way of pointing yourself toward a goal that's important to you. Your intention could be to become more aware of where you are and what you're doing in the moment.
- Act wholeheartedly. As simple as it sounds, you may find it takes practice to be wholehearted, even for five minutes.

## **Take five**

When you're ready, try the following exercises. "As you do them, try not to become attached to achieving a specific outcome," Dr. Brantley advises.

- Wind down. Try to reorganize your end-of-the-day workload to reflect a slower pace and help you slow down before quitting time. Saving simple and pleasurable tasks for the end of the day can help.
- Write it out. If you arrive home strung out by the events of the day, take five minutes to jot down the thoughts or feelings distressing you. "You're writing only for yourself, so take this opportunity to be truthful and uncensored," says Dr. Brantley. "Write with the intention to set free any worrisome and upsetting thoughts."
- Feel gratitude. Restful sleep is promoted by feelings of well-being and ease. Unfortunately, your mind may habitually dwell on negative or worrisome topics just when it's time to go to bed. A simple practice of gratitude can shift your experience from worry to ease. Begin by breathing mindfully. Then recall and reflect on one good thing that happened or came your way that day. Feel the support and security you received.

- Take a mental holiday. On nights when stress and worries creep into bed with you, take five minutes to visualize a perfect vacation. Imagine a getaway that brings you limitless serenity and calm, such as spending time on a beach or in a forest. Notice what it is about this environment that makes it relaxing. Carry this calming imagery with you as you drift off to sleep.

“Practicing these exercises in the evening can help you connect with your life and your loved ones honestly, fully, and directly,” says Dr. Brantley. “A richer inner life, a more satisfying life outside of work, and the hope of deep, peaceful sleep can be the result.”