

# The Best Ways to De-stress

If you read this space regularly, you know that in each issue of *Naples Health*, we outline one of the “Power 9” principles of the Blue Zones Project. That is, the nine behaviors that people who live the longest, healthiest lives tend to demonstrate. This time, we’re discussing down shifting.

What do we mean by down shifting? It’s the practice of building habits into your life that make it possible for you to de-stress. Stress leads to chronic inflammation, which is associated with every major age-related disease. “Managing stress is just as important as everything else we do to maintain our health,” says Deb Logan, Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida executive director. “And our own perceived stress levels have increased in the past 30 years.”

So how can we do this? Logan has suggestions.

“Whatever you do now to de-stress, do more of it,” she says, adding that habits to shed stress are very individual.

There are long-term and short-term strategies, Logan says, and we should practice both. A long-term down shift strategy may be planning a vacation, setting aside time to declutter your

house or making a plan with another single parent to trade off child care duties.

In addition, “People who live longer and better tend to prioritize spending time with friends and family,” Logan

beach on Friday or Saturday evening to watch the sunset and have a picnic dinner,” she says. “That’s something that most of us in Southwest Florida have access to. And it’s a peaceful place, especially if we can tune into the waves.”

As for short-term strategies, choose things you have easy access to and that you enjoy. Perhaps it is taking a bubble bath and reading a book. Exercise can also be a great de-stressor, so choose something you enjoy, such as taking a walk, swim or bike ride. Visit nature. Play with your grandkids or your pets.

“It’s important to take cellphone breaks,” Logan says. “Set guardrails for yourself. Turn off notifications, check your phone just a few times a day and not

after a certain time in the evening.”

Because of the amount of time we spend in the car, it’s critical to have an in-car de-stressor, too, Logan says. Perhaps it is a comedy podcast you can listen to, a CD of music that calms you or a breathing exercise you can remind yourself to do.

Take the time to step back from your routine and set up some down shifting practices for yourself. “If we do what we’ve always done,” she says, “we’ll get what we’ve always got.” **NH**



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says. Another longer-term plan she suggests is to set up one standing dinner a week for your extended family. “Or get your friends to meet up at the