

## 10 Strategies for Managing Distress

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Sometimes the best thing to do in a stressful moment is get through it as smoothly as possible and avoid doing things that make the matter worse. Here are 10 things you can do to help tolerate distress and avoid acting on problematic urges.

1. **Try putting your head in cool water** (10 to 20 °C). This triggers a natural response that slows down your heart rate and helps reduce anxiety. As an alternative, you could try placing a cold compress on your face. \*
2. **Go for a brisk walk or do another form of moderate to intense exercise**, ideally for 15 to 20 minutes. Research shows it can help increase one's sense of well-being. \*
3. **Practice paced breathing** by taking a normal inhale and pausing for a second, before taking a slightly longer exhale and pausing again for 2 to 4 seconds. Repeat for 5 to 15 breaths.
4. **Take a moment to identify your feelings**, as research suggests that naming our feelings can help us better manage them. For instance, instead of repeatedly telling yourself the situation sucks, you could say I'm feeling scared about some upcoming medical tests.
5. **Do something distracting**. This ideally includes getting out for your home for a bit (e.g. go for a walk or to an event), but can include things like binge-watching your favourite TV series.
6. **Do something nice for someone else**. This can include volunteering, helping a friend, or even simply smiling and holding the door for someone.
7. **Do something to safely evoke different emotions**. For instance, if you're feeling sad you could watch a funny movie.
8. **Do something to safely evoke different body sensations**. This could include holding an ice cube, sucking on a sour or spicy candy, or squeezing a stress ball.
9. **Focus your attention on one thing in the moment**. For instance, redirect your attention to what you're seeing or hearing, or practice counting your steps as you walk.
10. **Encourage yourself**. For example, practice cheerleading yourself by saying, "I can get through this", "I'm doing the best I can", or "This too shall pass".

*\*The first 2 exercises can quickly impact your heart rate, so check with a medical provider if you have any heart or other applicable medical conditions.*

*Modified from DBT Skills Training Handouts & Worksheets, Second Edition by Marsha M. Linehan, 2015.*