



## COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

### Staying Mentally Fit

*You're only as young as the last time you changed your mind. ~Timothy Leary*

Many of us experience stress on a daily basis. There are too many papers to write, too many things to do, too many difficult people to deal with; the list is endless. Some stress is positive and actually helps our memory and cognitive abilities. That type of stress is called eustress, and it is the type of stress that motivates us to get things done, to strive to become better people, and to help the people we care about or love. Eustress also occurs if our perception of the circumstances we are in, or the problems we are facing, is that there is a solution and we can figure out a way to deal or cope. If, however, we are facing circumstances that overwhelm us, if we feel as if we have no control over the situation, or if we can't clearly see a solution in order to calm ourselves down, we experience negative stress or distress. The problem with distress is that it negatively impacts our cognitive skills and our memory, in addition to compromising our health.

In this day and age, we all experience periods of distress. For some of us, this can be chronic rather than short-term. Either way, whether we experience chronic or acute distress, it's important to take time to reduce, mitigate, and triage distress by using tools that research has shown improves our cognitive processes:

1. **Do math in your head** before punching the numbers into the calculator and test your accuracy.
2. **Make associations:** when you hear a word, spell it out in your head and come up with words that start or end with the same letter.
3. **Stretch:** move your body throughout the day, and practice bi-lateral movements (lift your left leg up and put your right elbow on it, touch your right hand to your left toes, etc.)
4. **Practice hand-eye coordination:** draw something, assemble a puzzle, paint something, etc.
5. **Use your senses:** take a moment to identify what you see, smell, hear, taste, and touch/feel.

There are many games designed to improve mental fitness as well. Some are free, some you can download as apps for your phone or on your computer for a fee, some are on websites where you can join. See below for links to various options.

Whether you play games, or try some of the exercises above, take time to attend to your mental fitness today!

<https://www.verywell.com/top-websites-and-games-for-brain-exercise-2224140>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/groupthink/2013/12/03/5-powerful-exercises-to-increase-your-mental-strength/#417898784cda>

<http://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/7-ways-to-keep-your-memory-sharp-at-any-age>

<http://www.everydayhealth.com/longevity/mental-fitness/brain-exercises-for-memory.aspx>

<https://sharpbrains.com/blog/2008/11/17/top-15-brain-teasers-and-games-for-mental-exercise/>

<https://www.ahealthiermichigan.org/2014/10/07/7-brain-games-to-keep-your-mind-sharp/>

*By Sarah Myers, JD, LMFT, LAC  
Clinical Director, Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program  
July 2017  
© Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program, 2017*

Your Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program provides free and confidential services for judges, lawyers, and law students. If you need resources for ANY issue that is compromising your ability to be a productive member of the legal community, or if there is someone you are concerned about, contact COLAP at (303) 986-3345. For more information about COLAP, please visit [www.coloradolap.org](http://www.coloradolap.org).