

How Can I handle my *stress*?

How does stress affect me?

Stress happens when our resources and the demands of a situation aren't in balance. This can result in:

Physical Responses

- * Over or under sleeping
- * Over or under eating
- * Agitation
- * Feeling sluggish
- * Digestive upset
- * Muscle tension, headache

Cognitive Responses

- * Short attention span or distractibility
- * Poor concentration
- * Poor memory
- * Slowed thinking
- * Indecisiveness
- * "Mental paralysis"
- * Avoidance

Emotional Responses

- * Feeling overwhelmed
- * Experiencing self-doubt
- * Feeling discouraged

How can I cope with my stress?

Anticipate stressful situations and plan ahead

- * Reduce or eliminate "optional" activities or responsibilities.
- * Make a plan: set priorities, deadlines, timelines to reach your goals.
- * Build in unscheduled time for the unexpected or for catching up.

Change your "mind set" or attitude

- * Ask yourself: "Are things really that bad? What's the worst that can happen?"
- * Keep your perspective.
- * Stop catastrophic thinking.
- * Determine what is the *most important thing to do right now?*

Change your behaviour

- * List your accomplishments each day and savour what you did.
- * Guard your health: eat well, sleep enough, exercise appropriately.
- * Be aware of your normal coping methods and reduce unhealthy ones.
- * Break big tasks into small manageable steps.

Change your situation

A relatively small change in environment may have positive results:

- * Reduce e-distractions.
- * Study somewhere else.
- * Eat regular meals.
- * Use earplugs.

Consider: What would it cost you to make changes in:

- * Your course major?
- * Your relationships?
- * Your course load?
- * Your lifestyle?
- * Your short and long term goals?

Relaxation Techniques

1. Calming Breath Exercise: 5 In – 5 Hold – 5 Out

This calming breath exercise will help you achieve a deep state of relaxation quickly. A note of caution: avoid taking excessively deep breaths repeatedly and stop the exercise if you feel faint.

1. Sit, stand, or lie down — up to you. If sitting, ensure both feet on planted on the floor.
2. Breathing from the abdomen, inhale slowly through the nose to the count of 5. 1...2...3...4...5 as you inhale, imagine a balloon in your belly beginning to fill slowly with air. You may wish to put a hand on your belly to feel this sensation.
3. Pause and hold your breath for 5 counts.
4. Exhale slowly, through the mouth, to a count of 5. Feel the “balloon” in your belly deflating slowly. Exhale fully. Repeat 5-10 times or more.

2. Muscle Relaxation Exercise

These soothing exercises only take a few minutes. Lying down may be pleasant, but not necessary.

- * Center yourself with a *Calming Breath Exercise* (see above)
- * Mentally scan your body: observe areas of tension (e.g. jaw, neck, shoulders)
- * For 3 counts— strongly tighten each of the following 14 muscle groups, one group at a time. Then abruptly release each muscle group, and rest for 3 counts.

Tighten, Release, and then Rest:

right foot, right leg, left foot, left leg,
buttocks, abdomen, chest, back,
shoulders, neck, lower jaw,
nose, eyes, forehead

- * Pay attention to the contrasting sensations of “tighten” and “release”.
- * If you experience cramping or discomfort—stop.
- * Scan you body: are there still areas of tension? Imagine your breath “washing this tension away”.
- * Do this exercise when you notice yourself beginning to become anxious or tense. Practice is great!

What are YOUR stress busters? Use them daily!