



Southbank
Institute of Technology
Education for aspiring minds

Managing your Studies

Stress Management and Relaxation



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Remember that there are always various ways we can deal with and manage stress.



WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is an everyday fact of life - you can't avoid it.

It can be defined as the interaction between your coping skills and the demands of your environment. Don't be mistaken, **not all stress is bad**. In fact, stress is not only desirable, but also essential to life. If you are **understressed**, you could be bored and lack interest and enthusiasm for the things you need to do.

If you are **overstressed**, you could have feelings of anxiety, confusion or panic.

The **optimum level of stress** is when you feel confident, alert, well and enthusiastic about the tasks ahead.

Stress researcher Richard Lazarus has argued that stress begins with your appraisal of a situation. You first ask how dangerous or difficult the situation is and what resources you have to help you cope.

Some people decide that an event is dangerous or difficult and that they can't cope.

Your thoughts can become a stressor if:

- You see things as a threat (you tell yourself that this is stressful)
- You have an expectation that something will be difficult from past experience (recalling your failures NOT your successes and coping strategies)
- You imagine the consequences of not handling situations well (practising failure is a real trap).

There will always be situations that are potentially stressful or that are just plain stressful, but remember that there are always various ways that we can deal with and manage stress.

Some thoughts about change and stress in your life

- Recognise the amount of change in your life.
- Think about the meaning of recent changes in your life and try to identify some of the feelings you experience.
- Think about ways that you can best adjust to each change.
- Take time in making decisions.
- Try to anticipate life changes and plan for them (this is at times impossible, because sometimes life can change without warning).
- Be kind and patient with yourself. It is not uncommon at times to feel overwhelmed by stress. It takes a while to put coping strategies into place.
- Realise what you can control and what you can't control in your life.
- Try to find some relaxation methods that work for you, and that are healthy ways of coping (e.g. drowning your sorrows in a drinking binge are not really effective ways of dealing with stress).

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STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

Following are some suggestions for dealing with stress.

- Remember that YOU are in control of your life. You are responsible for the feelings you have; the things that you say, and the way you act. You cannot place blame on anyone else.
- You are responsible for only your stress. Do not take on other people's worries and stress!
- Decide not to take on too much responsibility.
- Learn to delegate tasks and to say "NO" when you do not have the time.
- Schedule in some time for yourself everyday – this does not have to be hours, but even 10 or 15 minutes is better than none at all.
- Schedule in some time for exercise everyday – again you will already reap the benefits after only 20 minutes.
- Reduce sugar intake – your body will not experience as much fatigue from sugar highs and lows.
- Follow a well balanced diet – a body looked after well will be able to respond and cope better with stressful situations.
- Take care of small tasks as they come – don't let them pile up until they are unmanageable.
- Try and get enough sleep.
- Time management – yes I know - BORING! But a very useful tool, especially when it comes to studying and doing assignments. Planning enough time for each task (and including some fun activities as well), will ensure that things won't pile up on you.

- Communication is a key factor in any relationship. Try and communicate clearly, honestly and regularly with parents and friends and avoid stressful fights.
- Be clear about your boundaries with friends, what you're prepared to do for them and what you are not. Taking on other people's problems on top of your own is a health hazard!
- If there are particular situations you have concerns about, eg. job interviews, prepare for them ahead of time – anticipate what sort of questions may be asked, practice with someone you trust, ask someone who is in the 'know' e.g. CareerHub at Southbank institute of Technology.

The following are some examples of different methods of managing stress, but your best stress management technique is the one that makes you feel better. Each person is different, and what works for one person might not work for another. All you can do is give them a go and find out for yourself:

- Meditation
- Breathing exercises
- Massage
- Progressive relaxation
- Yoga
- Writing in a journal
- Visualisation – use your imagination to create pictures and stories that make you feel good.
- Laughter and humour – get a funny video out or call a friend who tells great jokes.
- Dance naked in the living room or danced clothed with a hair brush as your microphone and sing to an imaginary audience.

- Go to the park and have a swing or go on the slide or see saw.
- Soak your feet in a bucket full of warm bubbly water, whilst watching TV or reading a good book.
- There's nothing like a good book or video to escape from reality for a little while.
- Music can affect your mood – some quiets you, some makes you happier, some helps you cry and some will help getting you pumped up.
- Take a break from what you are doing if you're getting stressed by it – you may come back with a clearer head and thus able to tackle the problem better.
- Take a long relaxing bath.
- If you have a pet, take time out to play or care for it (Research has shown that those who own cats and dogs are less stressed than those who don't own a pet).
- Go for a walk in the park, around the block, anywhere really.
- Take up a hobby – something you have always wanted to do.
- Daydream – make up your own dreams.
- When angry – punch a few pillows or scream out loud.
- Do some 'doodling' or finger paint or some colouring in crayons, paints, pencils and/or felt tips.

DEEP BREATHING

This exercise often works because people who are stressed may take shallow breaths. You can try this at any time.

This exercise can be practised in a variety of poses, however, the following is recommended:

- Lie down on a blanket or rug on the floor.
- Bend your knees and move your feet about eight inches apart, with your toes turned slightly outwards.
- Make sure your spine is straight.

Now you are ready to begin:

- Scan your body for tension.
- Place one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your chest.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into your abdomen to push up your hand as much as feels comfortable. Your chest should only move only a little and only with your abdomen.
- When you are at ease with the previous step, smile gently and inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, making a quiet, relaxing, whooshing sound as you gently blow out.
Your mouth, tongue and jaw will be relaxed. Take long, slow deep breaths that raise and lower your abdomen. Focus on the sound and feeling of breathing, as you become more and more relaxed.
- Continue deep breathing for about five or ten minutes at a time, once or twice a day, for a couple of weeks.
Then, if you like, extend this period to twenty minutes.
- At the end of each deep breathing session, take a little time to once more scan your body for tension. Compare the tension you feel at the conclusion of the exercise with that which you experienced when you began.

- When you become at ease with breathing into your abdomen, practise it at any time during the day when you feel like it and you are sitting down or standing still. Concentrate on your abdomen moving up and down, the air moving in and out of your lungs, and the feeling of relaxation that deep breathing gives you.
- When you have learned to relax yourself during deep breathing, practise it whenever you feel yourself getting tense and stressed.

VISUALISATION

Everybody visualises – daydreams, memories and inner talk are visualisation. You can create your visualisation and consciously use them to reduce stress and relax.

There are different types of visualisation you can use; sometimes it is finding the type that works for you.

You can:

- imagine beautiful scenes that relax you. (e.g. imagine yourself being at the beach; involve all your senses, smell the water, feel the warmth, hear the waves); or
- design for yourself a scene that is soothing
- concentrate on the colours of the rainbow, concentrate on each colour in turn and then visualise a peaceful scene. The colours of the rainbow are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet.

To begin:

- Lie down close your eyes.
- Imagine the scene fully; experience the sights, sounds, smell, textures and colour.
- Feel at home, peaceful and serene.
- If you have a concern or worry, let your attention gently focus on the item that preoccupies you, keep an open mind, and quietly listen to the thoughts that flow through it.

- If you are stuck, call on your inner voice or guide, listen to yourself and your inner wisdom.
- When you are ready, end your visualisation and gently bring your attention back to the room.
- Write down any ideas or thoughts that came up for you. Consider them, and see if you have gained any insight.

Need Further Assistance?

If you continue to experience difficulty in managing your stress and are not obtaining the results you would like, talk with a Southbank Institute of Technology counsellor about further strategies.

Southbank Institute of Technology Counselling Service

To make an appointment, contact the following number:

Phone: 3244 5095

studentsupport.services@deta.qld.gov.au

Sources

This information was acquired from the following website: www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/stdyhlp.html (2002) Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Cook Counselling Centre).

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