

FEELING STRESS?



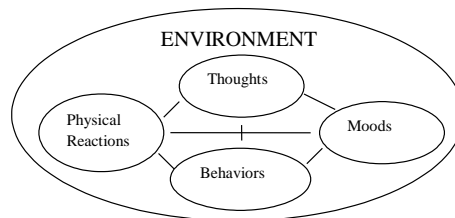
**Strategies for
Stress Management**

OVERVIEW FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress adds challenge and opportunity in your life. Stress or anxiety informs you that you may need to prepare for something important (e.g., study for an exam). However, too much stress can seriously affect your physical and mental well-being. Recurrent physical and psychological stress can diminish self-esteem, decrease interpersonal and academic effectiveness and create a cycle of self-blame and self-doubt. It is important for your health to find the optimal level of stress that you can learn to manage effectively.

1) The best way to cope with unhealthy stress is to recognize when your stress levels are increasing. While we often think of stress as the result of external events, the events themselves are not necessarily stressful. It is the way each individual interprets and reacts to an event that produces stress. For example, public speaking may be seen as routine for some people, while others may see it as stressful.

Stress “signals” fall into four categories: thoughts (cognitive), moods (emotions), behavior (actions), and physical reactions (bodily responses). See the Stress Symptom Checklist that follows to assess your level of stress.



(Source: Greenberger & Padesky (1995). *Mind Over Mood*. New York: The Guilford Press.)

2) Sources of stress may be associated with negative as well as positive events such as falling in love, preparing to study abroad, or buying a car. A critical step in coping with stress is recognizing the stressors in your life. These stressors may include the **environment** (e.g., noise, traffic, commuting problems, crowded or disorganized classroom or living conditions), **academic** (e.g., deadlines, exams, presentations, assignments, competition, conflict or disagreements with professors or classmates), **occupational** (e.g., concerns about selecting a major; conflicting demands of work, school and home; conflicts with colleagues; working too many hours), **financial** (e.g., bills, debt, inadequate income, change in financial state), **social** (e.g., loss of relationship; too many demands on your time; not expressing your feelings, needs, or concerns; relationship problems; interpersonal conflict; and lack of social support), **physiological** (e.g., lack of exercise; poor nutrition; sleep disturbances; and illness), and **changes** (e.g., moving/transitioning; beginning or ending of anything; and loss of a job or familiar surroundings). After you have identified your level of stress and the sources of your stress, you may apply stress management strategies that you have learned.

3) This booklet provides a list of POSITIVE STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH STRESS, RELAXATION AND STRESS MANAGEMENT USING ABDOMINAL BREATHING, and 52 PROVEN STRESS REDUCERS. Remember, new skills require practice to be effective.

4) For assistance, consider UNCW campus resources such as the Counseling Center, Health Promotion Services, Student Health Center, CROSSROADS, University Learning Services, and Campus Recreation. It is better to seek help before your stress builds to excessive levels. For seeking help, sooner is better than later and later is better than never.

STRESS SYMPTOM CHECKLIST

Check each symptom that you have experienced to any significant degree during the last month and then total the number of items checked.

Physical Signs of Stress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stomach pain; nervous stomach; ulcers ○ Cramps; bloating; diarrhea; constipation ○ Appetite change; weight change ○ Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) ○ Stiff or sore joints ○ Muscle tightness, cramps, spasms ○ Neck, shoulder, chest, or back pain ○ Migraines; tension headaches; tightness, pressure in head ○ Frequent colds or illness; persistent fever ○ Sore throat, cough ○ Fever blisters ○ High blood pressure ○ Rapidly beating heart, even at rest ○ Shortness of breath ○ Nervous tick or twitch ○ Skin conditions: rashes; hives; skin irritation. ○ Fatigue, lack of energy ○ Cold hands and feet 	Behavioral Signs of Stress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Excessive TV watching or video games ○ Use of alcohol, cigarettes, or recreational drugs ○ Over-eating or under-eating ○ Losing temper easily; arguing more ○ Lying ○ Tardiness, inability to attend classes ○ Compulsive behaviors – checking, cleaning, counting, organizing ○ Hyperactivity – feeling you can’t slow down ○ Increased nervous habits, e.g. nail biting, hair twisting ○ Sexual problems ○ Sleep problems – too much, too little, interrupted, unsatisfying ○ Isolating self ○ Increased recklessness; risk taking ○ Grinding teeth
Emotional/Psychological Signs of Stress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feeling overloaded or overwhelmed ○ Feeling “out of control” ○ Frequent worrying or obsessing ○ Anxiety ○ Unexplained/irrational fears ○ Frequent or recurring nightmares ○ Frequent irritability; easily frustrated ○ Feeling angry and resentful ○ Mood swings ○ Depression ○ Crying spells ○ Frequent guilt ○ Boredom ○ Apathy; dissatisfaction; less interest in activities that are usually enjoyable ○ Loneliness ○ Feeling inadequate, powerless, hopeless 	Cognitive Signs of Stress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Difficulty making decisions; impulsivity; indecisiveness ○ Confusion; disorientation; “spaciness” ○ Difficulty concentrating, attending ○ Difficulty remembering information, details, recent events ○ Repetitive thoughts ○ Poor judgment ○ Frequently misunderstanding what others tell you ○ Thoughts of escaping, running away ○ Racing thoughts

Number of Items Checked

0-7

8-14

15-21

22+

Stress Level

Low

Moderate

High

Very High

(Adapted from: Bourne, Edmund. The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook.)

POSITIVE STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH STRESS

Consider these suggestions for managing your stress.

<p>Basic Self Care & Lifestyle Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat well balanced meals with adequate nutrition, vitamins, and minerals • Reduce refined sugars • Avoid fasting or binging • Maintain appropriate weight • Exercise regularly – cardiovascular, strength training, stretching • Practice good sleep hygiene • Take “downtime” • Take mini-breaks during the day • Make time for yourself, love yourself • Engage in recreational activities • Practice effective time management • Protect yourself from accidents (don’t drink and drive; use seat belts; don’t smoke in bed, etc.) • Protect yourself against STD’s and unwanted pregnancy • If you’re sick, seek medical help • Allow injuries to heal • Avoid excessive caffeine • Avoid excessive alcohol consumption • Reward yourself in healthy ways 	<p>Interpersonal Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop fulfilling, high-quality relationships • Invest time and energy into your significant relationships, help others • Learn and/or use communication skills • Assert your needs and boundaries in your relationships • Say “no” more often when too much to do • Get in touch, hug someone, stroke a pet <p>Emotional Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in activities that are nurturing • Express/release your feelings • Find the humor in things/laugh more often • Practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, visualization exercises, meditation, yoga <p>Cognitive Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter negative thoughts • Try to put things in perspective • Distract yourself from negative preoccupations • Establish goals and priorities • Try to accept your limits • Try to accept what you cannot change • Be willing to tolerate ambiguity and setbacks • Take a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to problems • Recognize and correct harmful traits
<p>Philosophical/Spiritual Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine your life goals: develop consistent, meaningful, realistic goals • Clarify your values • Identify your personal gifts and strengths • Contemplate what gives your life meaning and purpose • Develop a positive philosophy of life • Increase prayer, faith, spiritual commitment 	

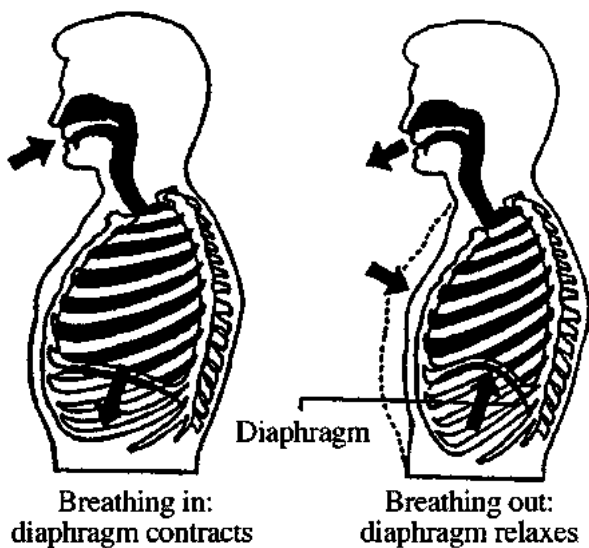
RELAXATION AND STRESS MANAGEMENT USING ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Observe your breathing by placing one hand on your chest and your other hand on your abdomen. Which is moving more, your abdomen or your chest? Abdominal breathing, where your abdomen is moving more than your chest, allows you to breathe most efficiently.

Deep abdominal breathing is the natural way of breathing. The easiest way to observe this is by lying on your back and focusing your attention on breathing more fully. You will probably observe that your abdomen is moving more than your chest. You may also observe that you feel more relaxed as you continue this abdominal breathing.

How We Breathe

Your torso is divided into an upper (or chest) area containing the lungs and heart and a lower (or abdominal) area. The chest and abdomen are separated by the diaphragm, the primary muscle for breathing, which stretches across the midsection. When we breathe in, the diaphragm contracts downward and the ribs move out so that the volume of the chest increases and the lungs fill with air. When we breathe out, the diaphragm relaxes upward and the ribs close in, reducing the size of the chest and pushing the air out of the lungs.



Stress and Breathing

Our bodies may respond to stress with rapid, shallow breathing. Under stress, people may hold their breath or experience shallow breathing from habit or due to tension. You can observe this now by tensing your abdominal muscles and trying to breathe deeply. It cannot be done. When you hold in your stomach, you prevent the diaphragm from making a full downward contraction. Breathing only with the chest contributes to shoulder and neck tension. The problem of shallow breathing is worsened by 1) tight clothing around the waist that prevents the natural expansion of the stomach during inhaling, 2) thinking that you must keep your stomach in, and 3) poor posture, such as hunching over a desk.

During times of stress, focusing on your breathing and achieving a more natural abdominal breathing pattern can help you to relax and to break the cycle of escalating thoughts or feelings of stress. Wear clothing that is comfortable, maintain good posture, and relax allowing yourself to engage in a pattern of abdominal breathing. If abdominal breathing feels awkward at first, it may be easier for you to try it while lying on your back. Through the practice of abdominal breathing, it will become more natural to you. Abdominal breathing is another technique to help you relax and manage your stress or anxiety.

(Adapted from: Marguerite Ponder, C.B.T. and David R. Steinman, Ph.D.,
Austin Neurological Clinic, Austin, Texas)

52 Proven Stress Reducers

1. Get up fifteen minutes earlier in the morning. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful.
2. Prepare for the morning the evening before. Put out the clothes you plan to wear, pack up your books and notes, etc.
3. Don't rely on your memory. Write down appointment times, when library books are due, etc. ("The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory." - Old Chinese Proverb)
4. Lying is stressful. If you know doing something is going to lead you to be dishonest, then avoid doing it altogether.
5. Make duplicates of all keys. Carry a duplicate car key in your wallet, apart from your key ring.
6. Practice preventive maintenance. Your car, appliances, home, and relationships will be less likely to break down/fall apart if you address problems as they arise.
7. Be prepared to wait. A paperback book can make waiting in line almost pleasant.
8. Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.
9. Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank drop below one-quarter full; keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of home staples; don't wait until you're down to your last bus token or postage stamp to buy more; etc.
10. Don't put up with things that work improperly. If your alarm clock, wallet, shoelaces, windshield wipers-whatever-are a constant aggravation, get them fixed or get new ones.
11. Allow an extra 15 minutes to get to appointments.
12. Limit the amount of caffeine in your diet.
13. Always establish contingency plans, "just in case." ("If for some reason either of us is delayed, here's what we'll do..." kind of thing. Or, "If we get split up in the shopping center, here's where we'll meet..")
14. Relax your standards. The world will not end if you don't clean your apartment this weekend.
15. For every one thing that goes wrong, there are probably 10, 50, or 100 things that go right. Count them!
16. Ask questions. Taking a few moments to repeat back directions, what someone expects of you, etc., can save hours.
17. Say "no." Saying "no" to extra projects, social activities, and invitations you don't have the time or energy for takes practice, self-respect, and a belief that everyone, everyday, needs quiet time to relax and be alone.
18. Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep, or read without interruption? Allow yourself to temporarily disconnect. Turn off your home phone, cell phone, pager, etc.
19. Turn "needs" into preferences. Our basic physical needs translate into food, water, and keeping warm. Everything else is a preference. Don't get attached to preferences.
20. Simplify, simplify, simplify...
21. Make friends with non-worriers. If you *want* anxiety and worry, associate with chronic worrywarts.
22. Get up and stretch periodically when you sit for extended periods while studying or at work.
23. Buy a set of earplugs. If you need to find quiet at home, pop in some earplugs.
24. Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind yourself to go to bed, or schedule it in your planner.
25. Create order out of chaos. Organize your home and workspace so you always know where things are. And when you're finished using something, return it to its place - you'll be less stressed when you *haven't* lost something.
26. During stressful situations, people tend to breathe in short, shallow breaths. This limits your body's oxygen supply and delivery and can easily increase muscle tension. Check your breathing throughout the day-particularly before, during, and after high- pressure situations. If you find your stomach muscles are knotted and your breathing is shallow, relax all your muscles and take several deep, slow breaths from your abdomen. Note, how when you're relaxed, both your abdomen and chest expand when you breathe.
27. Writing your thoughts and feelings down (in a journal or on paper to be thrown away) can help you clarify things and can give you a renewed perspective.
28. Try the following yoga technique whenever you need to relax. Inhale deeply through your nose to the count of eight. Then, with lips puckered, exhale very slowly through your mouth to the count of 16, or for as long as you can. Concentrate on the long sighing sound and feel tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.

52 Proven Stress Reducers (Continued)

29. Inoculate yourself against a feared event. Example: before speaking in public, take time to review every part of the experience in your mind. Imagine what you'll wear, what the audience will look like, how you will present, what the questions will be and how you will answer them, etc. Visualize the experience the way you would like it to be. You'll likely find that when you give the actual presentation, you will be familiar with the material, and you will be less anxious.

30. When stress of having to get a task done interrupts actually getting it done, a diversion may be just what you need (a voluntary change in activity and/or environment).

31. Talk it out. Discussing your problems with a trusted friend can help clear your mind of confusion so you can concentrate on problem-solving.

32. One of the easiest ways to avoid unnecessary stress is to select an environment (work, home, leisure) that is in line with your personal needs and desires. If you dislike desk jobs, avoid accepting a job that requires deskwork. If you dislike gossip, avoid socializing with people who love gossip, etc.

33. Learn to live one day at a time.

34. Every day, do something you really love and enjoy.

35. Add an ounce of love to everything you do.

36. Take a hot bath or shower (or a cool one in summertime) to relieve tension.

37. Do something for somebody else - but avoid taking on others' problems.

38. Focus on understanding rather than on being understood; on loving rather than on being loved.

39. Do something that will improve your appearance. Looking better can help you feel better.

40. Schedule a realistic day. Avoid the tendency to schedule back-to-back appointments; allow time between appointments for a breathing spell.

41. Become more flexible. Some things are worth not doing perfectly, and some issues are worth compromising on.

42. Eliminate destructive self-talk: "I can't do this," "I should have," etc. Exchange it for: "My goal is to complete "X" by completing these steps..."

43. Use your weekend as time for a change of pace. If your weekdays are scheduled and predictable, build in time for action and spontaneity into your weekends. If your weekdays are fast-paced and full of people and deadlines, seek peace and solitude during days off. Feel as if you aren't accomplishing anything at work? Tackle a job that you can finish to your satisfaction on a weekend.

44. "Worry about the pennies, and the dollars will take care of themselves." That's another way of saying: take care of the todays as best you can, and the yesterdays and the tomorrows will take care of themselves.

45. Do one thing at a time. When you are with someone, be with that person and with no one and nothing else. When you are busy with a project, concentrate on doing that project and put aside other things you have to do.

46. Allow yourself time, every day, for privacy, quiet, and introspection.

47. If you are faced with an unpleasant task, do it early in the day to get it over with; you will no longer have anxiety surrounding that task.

48. Learn to delegate responsibility to capable others.

49. Don't forget to take a lunch break. Try to get away from your desk or work area in body and mind, even if it's just for 15 or 20 minutes.

50. Forget about counting to 10. Count to 1,000 before saying anything that could make matters worse.

51. Have a forgiving view of events and people. Accept what you do and do not have control over.

52. Have an optimistic view of the world. Believe that most people are doing the best they can.

BONUS: At the end of the day, write down 5 things for which you are thankful - it might be your English professor, your dog Charlie, or the clouds in the sky. Guarantee you feel less stressed about your day afterward.

SMILE!! ☺

Adapted from: The National Headache Foundation,
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