

Stress

What is STRESS?

- American Medical Association definition: "Any interference that disturbs a person's mental or physical well-being."
- Stress is defined as a response to a demand that is placed upon you.
 - Managed stress can become useful and healthy (*viewing events as challenges*).
 - Unmanaged stress can become distressful and unhealthy (*viewing events as threats*).

Stress is a fairly universal experience for all of us. Regardless of how our personalities vary in terms of intensity, at one time or another, we will be confronted with a situation that we find stressful. Many people experience stress as they combine busy lives and the demands of study and work while trying to save time for friends and family. For some people stress becomes almost a way of life. We all experience episodic stress – preparing for a major exam, completing an important paper, perhaps preparing for an important interview. However, a continuous “state” of stress should not become a way of life.

The important thing to remember about stress is that certain forms (of stress) are normal and essential. As the body responds to various forms of physical or psychological stress, certain predictable changes occur. These include increased heart rate, blood pressure (systolic and diastolic), secretions of stimulatory hormones, increased voluntary muscle tension, and a change in stomach and intestinal secretions. These responses to stress will occur whether the stress is positive or negative in nature. In lay terms, it is known as the "fight or flight" mechanism.

While stress often is discussed in terms of negative impact, **stress can be beneficial**. A healthy level of stress is necessary for optimal performance. That extra burst of adrenaline that helps you finish your final paper, perform well in sports, or meet any challenge is positive stress. It is a short-term physiological tension and added mental alertness that subsides when the challenge has been met, enabling you to relax and carry on with typical functioning.

Properly channeled, mild to moderate amounts of stress can:

- increase productivity and creative solutions to problems
- serve to motivate and stimulate
- promote action toward change

However, **it is when stress interferes with our functioning**, rather than optimizing our functioning, **that we begin to experience harmful effects**. Consider the example of having a project deadline at school. This is a social stressor that necessitates adaptation. The resulting level of stress can be beneficial: it may cause an end to procrastination, faster work, a sense of accomplishment, etc. However, if adaptation is resisted then the stress can be harmful: leading to feelings of helplessness, failure experiences, etc.

If you cannot return to a relaxed state once the challenge has been met, then the stress becomes negative. Continual exposure lowers the body's ability to cope with additional forms of psychological or physiological stress, often leading to mental and physical exhaustion and illness.

Excessive, unhealthy stress can:

- impact health/immune system (lowering resistance to getting sick).
- reduce productivity
- impact relationships negatively

The onset of unhealthy stress is similar to blowing air into a balloon. ***If you blow and blow more air into the balloon without any controlled outlet, eventually the balloon explodes in an unpredictable and destructive fashion. However, if you blow air in, stopping periodically to let some air out, and blow more air in, you can repeat the process indefinitely without any negative consequences.*** Managing stress is a similar process. Learning to recognize the physical and psychological warning signs and to intervene with healthy coping skills is an important life skill.

The sources of change, *stressors*, can come from one of four basic areas:

- **Environmental stressors** (e.g., weather, pollution, noise, season changes)
- **Social stressors** (e.g., job interviews, academic pressures, daily responsibilities and decisions, family demands, others' expectations of you)
- **Physiological stressors** (e.g., illness, injuries, poor nutrition, sleep disturbances)
- **Cognitive stressors**, i.e. your thoughts. (e.g., need to be "perfect", interpretation of others' reactions, expectations we place on ourselves)

The **first step** to handling stress is to recognize *how vulnerable* you are to stressful reactions. The **second step** is to determine *how you experience* stress.

Stress can be experienced in four ways:

- **Physical symptoms:** headaches, stomachaches, sleep problems, hypertension, etc.
- **Emotional symptoms:** fear, anxiety, tension, anger, irritation, sadness, etc.
- **Social/Behavioral symptoms:** withdrawing from others, increased irritation with others, etc.
- **Mental/Cognitive symptoms:** irrational thoughts - "*I can't do anything right*", "*I'm a loser*", etc.

The **third step** is to devise healthy strategies to manage your stress. There are several resources you can access: Self-help books, various websites, your own imagination, a counselor or psychologist, etc.

One approach is to emulate people who are resistant naturally to stress. Some people weather devastating experiences with uncanny serenity. By studying them, researchers have discovered that stress-resistant people share distinctive habits of mind:

- They tend to focus on immediate issues rather than global ones.
- They share an optimistic "explanatory style."
 - They assume their troubles are temporary ("*I'm tired today*") rather than permanent ("*I'm washed up*") and specific ("*I have a bad habit*") rather than universal ("*I'm a bad person*").
 - They credit themselves when things go right, while externalizing their failures ("*That was a tough audience,*" not "*I gave an awful speech*").

COMMON STRESSORS IN COLLEGE LIFE:

- Academics
 - greater academic demands/increased workload
 - competition for grades
 - lower than expected grades
 - academic probation
 - change in major
 - outstanding personal achievement
 - first year/semester in college
 - first generation college student
 - serious conflict with professor
 - time management difficulties
- Being on one's own in a new environment with new responsibilities (making decisions on a higher level)
- Exposure to new people, ideas, and temptations
- Changes in family relations and one's social life; balancing roles
- Striving to live up to family expectations
- Substance abuse/alcohol use
- Romantic Relationships
 - new love interest
 - serious argument with significant other
 - long-distance romantic relationship
 - dating
 - unrequited love
- Roommate Conflicts (live with people who may have different values, beliefs, schedules, & habits)
- Finances
 - increased financial responsibilities (expenses of books, food, and entertainment)
 - credit card and/or loan debt
- Preparing for life after graduation

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO STRESS?

(From N A S Database, 'Stress Management for the Health of It')

Stress affects us on many levels. The following is a list of stress symptoms that are the most typical reactions to stress.

1. Check all stress symptoms that apply to you.
2. Circle the stress symptoms that occur most frequently.

Physical

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> headaches | <input type="checkbox"/> digestive upsets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accident-prone | <input type="checkbox"/> weight change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fatigue/ lack of energy | <input type="checkbox"/> changes in eating patterns |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teeth grinding | <input type="checkbox"/> recurring colds and minor illness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> changes in sleep patterns (difficulty falling asleep;
waking up tired/not well rested) | <input type="checkbox"/> neck and shoulders tighten up/ache |
| <input type="checkbox"/> restlessness | <input type="checkbox"/> pounding heart/ elevated heart rate |

Mental/Cognitive

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> forgetfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> negative attitude |
| <input type="checkbox"/> confusion | <input type="checkbox"/> negative, irrational thoughts such as "I can't do
anything right", "I'm a loser", etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dull senses | <input type="checkbox"/> more disorganized than normal for you |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lack of interest in activities | <input type="checkbox"/> increased difficulty in task completion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> poor concentration | <input type="checkbox"/> persistent time pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> no new ideas | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> low productivity | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> boredom | |

Emotional

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> mood swings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> irritability | <input type="checkbox"/> nervous laugh |
| <input type="checkbox"/> increased generalized frustration and anger | <input type="checkbox"/> bad temper/ shorter temper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> the "blues" | <input type="checkbox"/> worrying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> depression | <input type="checkbox"/> crying spells |
| <input type="checkbox"/> powerlessness | <input type="checkbox"/> easily discouraged |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feeling overwhelmed | <input type="checkbox"/> apathy |

Social/Behavioral

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> isolation from others | <input type="checkbox"/> lashing out |
| <input type="checkbox"/> resentment toward others | <input type="checkbox"/> using / manipulating people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nagging others | <input type="checkbox"/> clamming up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> loneliness | <input type="checkbox"/> increased alcohol, drug, tobacco use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fewer contacts with friends | <input type="checkbox"/> abuse of alcohol (or other substances) |

Now...study your list.

Which of your stress reactions cause you the most concern? Did any patterns surface?

Can you name one effective way of coping with each of your stress reactions?

After you recognize the stress reactions and patterns and your best coping mechanisms, you can create a stress management program to address the stressors in your life.

<p align="center"><u>My Stress Symptoms that Concern Me:</u></p>	<p align="center"><u>Effective Way(s) to Cope with these Stress Symptoms:</u></p>
<p align="center">Example:</p> <p>Isolation from others; easily discouraged; negative attitude; fatigue</p>	<p align="center">Example:</p> <p>I used to enjoy hanging out with friends and watching t.v. or playing the Wii. My suitemates play the Wii a lot and usually invite me, though I turn them down most times. I'll play the next time they invite me and I'll more than likely enjoy it. It will give me a chance to have some fun and get my mind clear from schoolwork.</p>

Ways to Manage Stress Effectively

- Schedule a realistic day - add balance to life; don't overdo studies or leisure. Study each subject regularly for moderate periods of time, but also take "time outs". Avoid the tendency to schedule back-to-back stuff (classes, appointments); allow time between appointments for a breathing spell. Allow time in your schedule for the unexpected – often this means scheduling fewer tasks each day that you reasonably expect to finish without pressure.
- Learn to accept what you cannot change. If the problem is beyond your control at this time, try to accept it until you can change it.
- Remove yourself from the source of stress. Participate in leisure activities, such as hobbies, exercise, sports, reading, social events, and campus activities.
- Create order out of chaos. Organize your room & workspace/desk so that you always know exactly where things are. Put things away where they belong so you won't have the stress of losing them. Create a soothing atmosphere.
- Know and accept what kind of person you are (your strengths and weaknesses)
- Become more aware of the kinds of things that cause you stress in your daily life. Advance knowledge and understanding can help prevent and reduce harmful impacts.
- Take personal responsibility for your pace of life, the choice of major life changes that are under your control, and for the way you consciously and unconsciously choose to respond to the stressors in your life.
- Take control. Set realistic goals for yourself. Rank them with the highest priority on tasks you must do.
- Don't sweat the small stuff...always ask yourself if the issue at hand is worth getting upset about. If it isn't affecting your goal achievement, it may not be worth worrying about - you cannot control some things.
- Expand your support network - Reinforce healthy friendships. Surround yourself with encouraging people.
- Make friends with non-worriers (associating with chronic worrywarts gets you into the habit of worrying more).
- Communicate. Share concerns with close friends & family. Try to solve conflicts before they escalate.
- Talk out your worries (ask for help). It helps to share worries with someone you trust and respect. Sometimes another person can help you see a different side to your problem and possible new solution(s).
- Do something for others. Sometimes when you are under stress, you concentrate too much on yourself and your situation. Volunteering can help you take your mind off your problems while helping someone else at the same time.
- Engage in a Relaxation Activity each day for 20 minutes (read something just for fun; do arts and crafts or other hobbies; write in a journal; listen to music or go dancing; practice yoga and/or meditation; prayer; take a hot bath)
- Drop a class or reduce your work hours.
- Don't take on any new or extra responsibilities & postpone any major changes (i.e., starting a new job, moving, etc.).
- Use humor and positive thinking
- For finances, management is key. If you have a credit card, don't buy something unless you can afford to pay it off.
- Listen to Music - take a few minutes out of the day to lie down and listen to your favorite music (even if people wouldn't consider it calming music). Music has an effect on a variety of areas in the brain and can be quite relaxing.
- Get up 15 minutes earlier in the morning. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful.
- For every one thing that goes wrong, there are probably 10 or 50 or 100 blessings. Count 'em!
- Don't rely on your memory: Write down appointment times, when library books are due, etc.
- If an especially unpleasant task faces you, do it early in the day & get it over with (the rest of the day will be free of anxiety).
- Do 1 thing at a time. When busy with a project, concentrate on doing that project & forget about everything else you have to do.
- Eliminate destructive self-talk: "I'm too inadequate to. . .," "I'm too dumb to. . .," etc.
- Ask questions. Taking a few moments to repeat back directions or what someone expects of you can save hours.
- Say "No!" Saying "no" to extra projects, social activities, & invitations you know you don't have the time or energy for takes practice, self-respect, & a belief that everyone, everyday, needs quiet time to relax & be alone.
- Every day, do something you really enjoy.
- Allow yourself time - everyday - for privacy, quiet, and introspection. Learn to live one day at a time.
- Turn off your cell phone. Want to meditate, sleep, or read without interruption? Disconnect yourself temporarily.
- Wear earplugs. If you need to find quiet at home, pop in some earplugs.
- 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
- When the stress of having to get a task done gets in the way of getting the task done, diversion - a voluntary change in activity and/or environment - may be just what you need.

- When feeling stressed, most people tend to breathe short, shallow breaths. When you breathe like this, stale air is not expelled, oxidation of the tissues is incomplete, and muscle tension frequently results. Check your breathing throughout the day, and before, during, and after high-pressure situations. If you find your stomach muscles knotted & your breathing is shallow, relax all your muscles & take several deep, slow breaths.
- Try the following yoga technique whenever you feel the 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 the tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.
- Inoculate yourself against a feared event. Example: before speaking in public, take time to go over every part of the experience in your mind. Imagine what you'll wear, what the audience will look like, how you'll present your talk, what the questions will be & how you'll answer them, etc. Visualize the experience the way you would have it be. You'll likely find that when the time comes to make the actual presentation, it will be "old hat" & much of your anxiety will have fled.
- Avoid self-medication. Although there are many chemicals, including alcohol, that can mask stress symptoms, they don't help you adjust to the stress itself. Many are habit-forming, so the decision to use them should be made by your doctor. The ability to handle stress comes from within you, not from the outside.
- Become more flexible. Some things are worth not doing perfectly and some issues are fine to compromise upon.
- Have a forgiving view of events and people. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world.
- **More Effective Time Management**: Organization is the key to developing effective time management skills - make use of date books, calendars, planners, & anything else you need. The first step is to understand how you use your time. Keep a daily log for a week of everything you do (eat, sleep, study, go out) and when you do it. Once you have figured out how you spend your time, you'll be able to plan how you *want* to use your time. The following tips have been proven helpful in making a weekly schedule for some people.
 - Identify fixed commitments, such as classes, meetings, and activities, and attend them!
 - Set aside time for: Personal Maintenance (eating, sleeping, exercising); Recreation; Social Activities
 - Schedule/block out regular study times on your schedule (the rule of thumb is 2-3 hrs of study per 1 hr in class).
 - Keep up with course work – schedule reward times for using study time effectively.
 - Use your experience to set realistic goals for what you can accomplish in a given amount of time. Try not to be discouraged by what you aren't able to accomplish. Think of making schedules as practicing a skill.
 - Know what time(s) of day you study best. Use these times for tasks that involve a lot of concentration. Use your "down times" for work that is less intense.
 - Schedule quiet time for thinking and planning (and schedule time for yourself).
 - Keep your schedule flexible! (allow 2 hours of unscheduled time in a 24-hour period)
 - Say "no" more often. Do not overbook your life or let others overbook it for you.

Take Care of Your Physical Needs:

- **Physical Exercise** - Add a physical workout to your schedule at least every other day. Physical activity is a great stress reliever - it provides immediate stress relief as well as long-term stress management. It's healthy, and doesn't have to be terribly time consuming in order to be effective. You can jog, power walk, use machines, swim or any other form of exercise. Just 20-30 minutes of walking a day, for example, can give you more energy, help you put things in perspective, improve your sleep, sharpen your mental productivity, and boost your self-confidence.
- **Eat Right/Proper Nutrition** - Good nutrition and healthy eating habits can help you through your stressful times. Eating well will increase your physical, mental, & emotional stamina. Fueling yourself with nutrient dense foods can boost your immune system, help you maintain a healthy weight and help you feel better about yourself. Eat well-balanced meals (more whole grains, nuts, fruits and vegetables). Substitute fruits for desserts. Avoid caffeine (it may aggravate anxiety, insomnia, nervousness and trembling). Reduce refined sugars. Don't be afraid to have a little comfort food now and then. Don't skip meals either – make time for breakfast before your morning class. Reduce use of alcohol & drugs. These substances may add to headaches, swelling, decrease coping mechanisms, and add to depression.
- **Sleep, Sleep, Sleep** - Get at least 7 hours of sleep nightly, and avoid rapid changes to your sleep schedule. Set regular sleep times and avoid naps. Sleep deprivation occurs frequently on college campuses. Set yourself a goal such as, "I will have my work completed by 11PM and I will go to bed by 12." If you can meet this goal, you'll be surprised to find yourself more refreshed than ever. Although we all need varying amounts of sleep, if we do not get enough sleep, everything from our immune system to our ability to learn and remember information will be affected negatively. Sleep is as important as nutrition & exercise when preparing for peak performance. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.

Unhealthy Behaviors for Managing Stress

- Procrastination
- Smoking
- Overeating/Undereating
- Becoming Irritable with Others
- Withdrawing from Others
- Not attending class
- Isolating yourself from your support system
- Not using humor/laughter
- Not asking for help/assistance
- Never giving yourself a break
- Overwhelming your schedule
- Worrying about things you can't control
- Setting impossibly high standards for yourself
- Avoiding responsibilities
- Repressing negative feelings
- Comparing yourself with others
- Escape Techniques:
 - Drugs/Alcohol
 - Over-the-counter medications
 - Recklessness (driving, etc.)
 - Self-Injury

HOW TO STAY STRESSED: A TONGUE-N-CHEEK APPROACH

[adapted from DeAnza College and Stanford University Health Center]

Apparently, some students enjoy stress. Are these benefits appealing? **Stress helps you seem important.** Anyone as stressed as you must be working very hard and, therefore, is probably doing something very crucial. **It helps you to maintain personal distance and avoid intimacy.** Anyone as busy as you cannot be expected to form emotional attachments to anyone. And let's face it, you are not much fun to be around anyway. **It helps you avoid responsibilities.** Obviously, you are too stressed to be given any more work. This gets you off the hook for all the mundane chores; let someone else take care of them. **It helps you avoid success.** Why risk being "successful" when by staying stressed you can avoid all of that? Stress can keep your performance level low enough that success will not ever be a threat. **Stress also lets you keep your directive style.** "Just do what I say!" is generally permissible under crisis conditions. If you maintain a permanently stressed crisis atmosphere, you can justify telling folks what to do all the time.

Advice for folks who do not already have enough stress in your life: here are a few more clinically proven methods to stay stressed or to increase your stress level.

- Never exercise. Exercise wastes a lot of time that could be spent worrying. Eat, drink and smoke anything. If cigarette smoke cannot cleanse your system, a balanced diet is not likely to do it either.
- Gain weight. Work hard at staying at least 25 pounds over your recommended weight. Take plenty of stimulants. The old standards of caffeine, nicotine, sugar, and cola will continue to do the job just fine.
- Avoid soft, sensitive "woo-woo" practices. Ignore the evidence suggesting that prayer, meditation, yoga, deep breathing, and/or mental imaging help to reduce stress. The work ethic is good for everyone, always!
- Get rid of your social support system. Let the few friends who are willing to tolerate you know that you concern yourself with friendships only if you have time, and you never have time. If a few people persist in trying to actively care about you, avoid them.
- Personalize all criticism. Anyone who criticizes any aspect of your work, family, dog, room, house, or car is mounting a personal attack. Do not take time to listen, be offended, and then return the attack!
- Throw out your sense of humor. Staying stressed is no laughing matter, & shouldn't be treated as one.
- Males and females alike - be macho – or at least stoic! Never, never ever ask for help, and if you want it done right, do it yourself!
- Become a workaholic. Put work before everything else, and be sure to take work home evenings and weekends. Keep reminding yourself that vacations and time off are for sissies.
- Discard good time management skills and work/study boundaries. Schedule in more activities every day than you can possibly get done and then worry about it all whenever you get a chance.
- Procrastinate. Putting things off to the last second always produces a marvelous amount of stress.
- Worry about things you cannot control. Worry about the stock market, earthquakes, the approaching ice age, you know, all the big issues.
- Become not only a perfectionist, but set impossibly high standards... And either beat yourself up, or feel guilty, depressed, discouraged, and/or inadequate when you do not meet them."

Skills to Tolerate Stress

Emotions can be painful, and if you sometimes suffer from intense and overwhelming sadness or anger, it's important to learn how to experience your emotions skillfully. Otherwise, when you're deep in emotion you may engage in impulsive behaviors that make things worse (such as overeating, binge drinking, or cutting yourself) and will keep you from your goals. Distress Tolerance skills are designed to help you bear pain skillfully (Linehan 1993). This doesn't mean to get rid of pain, as unfortunately, pain is inevitable. The truth of the statement, "Pain is inevitable", illustrates that all of us are subject to bruised knees, bumped heads, and broken hearts. The following skills will help you tolerate your pain or change the source of the pain and buffer yourself against it, so you become more emotionally resilient.

Crisis Survival Strategies: Crisis skills are concrete, tangible activities you can engage in when you find yourself in crisis and it isn't possible at that moment to change things for the better. These skills can help you survive bad situations without making them worse. These are strategies for getting your whole self engaged in skillful responses to situations. One of the best crisis survival strategies to use is *distractions*.

DISTRACTION

Get Active - Find things to do that can preoccupy you, or require your full attention and so pull your mind out of distressing thoughts and keep you from dwelling on how bad things are.

- Work out with weights/Exercise
- Attend a religious service
- Play computer games/board games
- Clean your room (or home)
- Make a to-do list
- Read a book
- Plan for the future
- Participate in campus activities
- Attend an athletic event
- Organize your room
- Do your homework
- Write about how you would like your life to be

Give of Yourself

- Do volunteer work (hospital, church, etc.)
- Write a note of appreciation or encouragement
- Send a thank-you note to someone
- Visit someone who is sick
- Say prayers for the well-being of others
- Make a card from scratch and send it

Create Opposite Emotions - It's important to choose activities that create emotions other than those that you're feeling. **So if you're sad, do things that make you feel upbeat or happy.**

- Read emotional books or stories that trigger different emotions
- Listen to emotional music such as anthems, hymnals, fight songs, or anything uplifting
- Watch inspirational and emotional movies
- Read joke books
- Read funny greeting cards
- Read inspirational literature
- Read how-to books
- Read religious and spiritual literature

Energize Your Thinking - Use other thoughts to crowd your short-term memory. This can derail obsessing and negative thinking related to distress, anger, or depression. For example, if you're having steady thoughts about something that went wrong (a breakup, failing a test, etc.) and these thoughts are feeding into emotional dysregulation, think about something that really engrosses your attention. Try to think about things that really take up your brain space as it were. Think about pleasant times, do mental exercises—whatever works.

- Count to 10, 50, or 100
- Count tiles in a floor or a ceiling
- Read a suspenseful novel or mystery
- Work crossword or jigsaw puzzles
- Memorize and recite prayers, poetry, or songs
- Memorize facts about topics that interest you
- Look at a piece of art - try to understand the artist's conception
- Write out your solution to a political/social problem
- Try to remember every detail of a beautiful day you had

SELF-SOOTHING

When you feel distressed, find a way to soothe yourself. Don't wait for others to soothe you, although you may want to think about people you can call on to soothe you later. The more things you can think of to do and practice in any given moment the better, since it is unrealistic to expect that others always will be available when you need them. To Self-Soothe you will want to use activities that engage in one or more of the five senses (Linehan 1993).

Vision - Focus on using your sense of sight to see beauty, peaceful scenes, & art. Create order in your living & work space to reduce any visual chaos or stress.

- Organize your room to reduce visual chaos
- Buy/Look at beautiful painting, print, or poster
- Look at nature (trees, plants, rivers, ponds)
- Look at photo books or magazines
- Look at a fountain
- Watch a sunrise/sunset; watch a thunderstorm

Hearing - With the emphasis on soothing, you want to find sounds that relax you, calm you, or reassure you. Heavy metal may be great for distraction, but for self-soothing you want chamber music or ballads.

- Listen to classical music or mellow music
- Buy a "noise" machine with nature sounds
- Sing to yourself or Hum a tune
- Listen to relaxation or meditation tapes
- Listen to affirmation tapes
- Listen to books on CD
- Turn on a fan, air purifier (for white noise)
- Call a friend
- Call a toll-free line to hear a human voice
- Read out loud

Online Relaxation Exercises (most of these you can download!)

Arizona State University	http://vcc.asu.edu/relax/index.shtml
George Washington University (free IPOD downloads)	http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/PodCast/
Georgia Southern University	http://students.georgiasouthern.edu/counseling/relax/index.htm
Hobart and William Smith Colleges	http://www.hws.edu/studentlife/counseling_relax.aspx
Keene State College (click on topics & tools)	http://www.keene.edu/counseling/
Marquette University ("Other Resources")	http://www.marquette.edu/counseling/anxiety.shtml
UCLA	http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22&oTopID=22
UNC - Chapel Hill	http://campushealth.unc.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=462&Itemid=95
Univ. of Missouri	http://www.umssystem.edu/ums/curators/wellness/mindfulness/guided.htm
Univ. of Texas: MindBody Lab	http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html
Univ. of Texas: Diaphragmatic Breathing	http://cmhc.utexas.edu/stressrecess/Level_Two/breathing.html
Univ. of Texas: Progressive Muscle Relaxation	http://cmhc.utexas.edu/stressrecess/Level_Two/progressive.html

OTHER CRISIS SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Meaning: Find or create some purpose, meaning, or value in the pain. If you must endure this stress (and/or pain), what lesson(s) might you learn from it? Focus on whatever positive aspects of a painful situation you can find. Repeat them over and over in your mind. Make lemonade out of lemons.

Prayer: Open your heart to a supreme being, greater wisdom, God. Ask for strength to bear the pain in this moment. Turn things over to God or a higher being.

Encouragement (Positive Self-Talk): Cheerlead yourself. Repeat over and over: "I can stand it," "It won't last forever," "I will make it out of this," "I'm doing the best I can do."

Thinking of PROS and CONS: Make a list of the pros and cons of *tolerating* the distress. Make another list of the pros and cons of *not tolerating* the distress — that is, of coping by destructive behavior (such as hurting yourself, abusing alcohol or drugs, or doing something else impulsive). Focus on long-term goals, the light at the end of the tunnel. Remember times when pain has ended. Think of the positive consequences of tolerating the distress. Imagine in your mind how good you will feel if you achieve your goals, if you don't act impulsively. Think of all of the negative consequences of not tolerating your current distress. Remember what has happened in the past when you have acted impulsively to escape the moment (the eventual goal is to face the fact that accepting reality and tolerating distress lead to better outcomes than do rejecting reality and refusing to tolerate distress).

Self-Talk: How Self-Talk Affects Stress

Most people carry on a silent conversation with themselves during much of the day. These internal dialogues actually can direct your thoughts and behaviors. Understanding what self-talk is and how it affects you is the first step in learning how to rewrite your own self-talk “script” and talk your way to a less stressful way of life.

Positive or Negative?

Self-talk is very much like a self-fulfilling prophecy — something you think about so much you actually make it come true. When your self-talk is positive, you are giving yourself permission to succeed, and chances are, you will. When your self-talk is negative, you’re giving up on yourself and chances are you won’t even try to succeed. Often your self-talk reflects the values & behaviors you learned as a child, and the self-esteem you have as an adult.

Thoughts and Behaviors

Self-talk can direct your thoughts and behaviors. If you think, “I know I can do the job,” you’ll be more willing to apply and have a much better chance of success. If you say to yourself, “I’ll never get hired for that position,” you probably won’t even apply, guaranteeing that you won’t get the job.

Stress Response

Negative self-talk can cause or increase your distress and can make effects such as headaches or stomach pain much worse. Self-talk also can encourage you to behave in destructive ways which further stress your body. Fortunately, positive self-talk can have the opposite effect, leading to lower stress levels.

How to Rewrite Your Script: The exercise below will help you learn to listen to your own self-talk.

The table below contains three columns:

- Column 1: Several Things I Would Like to Happen;
- Column 2: My Self-Talk (Regarding the Things in Column 1); and
- Column 3: A Thought Opposite of the Thought in Column 2.

In Column 1, write several things you would like to happen. Then, close your eyes & listen to how you respond to each item; write your self-talk in Column 2. In Column 3, write down a thought opposite of the thought in Column 2.

Look over your list. If Column 2 is more positive than Column 3, you’re already on your way to thinking positively.

If Column 2 is more negative, look at Column 3 for a more helpful, healthier response.

Several Things I Would Like to Happen	My Self-Talk (Regarding the Things in Column 1)	A Thought Opposite of the Thought in Column 2
<i>“I’d like to pass my test”</i>	<i>“I’m never going to understand the class material; I just can’t do it”</i>	<i>I understand some of the material right now – maybe I can ask for a tutor to help with the material I don’t understand well. It might take me longer to understand the material, but extra work has paid off for me before, so I probably can do this.</i>
<i>“I’d like to lose 10 pounds”</i>	<i>“I can do it. I’ve done it before”</i>	<i>I’ll never be able to lose weight; I’m a total loser.</i>

Practice choosing positive self-talk. You’ll feel happier, more confident, and less stressed.

Self-Talk: What to Say to Yourself When You Are Anxious

If you say to yourself, *"I'm going to fail"* (prediction), *"I'm too nervous and disorganized for this kind of job"* (self evaluation), *"I know he wants to get rid of me"* (interpretation), then your physiological response will probably be sweating, tremors, and a knot in your stomach. Noticing the physical reactions, you then might think, *"I'm panicking, I can't do this anymore, I've got to go home."* These self statements in turn increase the physiological symptoms and the tendency to make poor decisions. The feedback loop from thoughts to physical reactions to behavioral choices to more negative thoughts can continue unbroken into a state of chronic stress. Your thoughts don't have to have to intensify fear. Instead, they can act as tranquilizers for a tense stomach, calming you and pushing away panic. The feedback loop can work for you as well as against you. Stress coping thoughts tell your body there is no need for arousal – it can relax.

In the middle of any stressful situation, you can begin saying to yourself a series of fear conquering statements, such as, *"Stay calm...I've dealt with this before...Relax now...He/she can't really hurt me."* The more attention you give to your coping monologue, the quicker will come relief from physiological arousal and the "fight or flight" reaction. Make your own list of stress coping thoughts, and memorize them.

Coping Statements: A coping statement is a specific thought or self-statement designed to help you deal with or manage a potentially difficult task/situation. Negative catastrophic thoughts can either make you anxious or make whatever you are feeling worse. It's the "thinking" part of the anxiety and it gears you up to start avoiding even before you begin. Meichenbaum & Cameron's stress inoculation program suggested the following categories for stress coping statements:

1. Preparation (Stage of Preparing for a Stressor)

I can develop a plan to deal with it.

I can manage this situation.

No negative self-statements; just think rationally.

Don't worry. Worry won't help anything.

I'm going to be alright.

I've succeeded with this before.

Remember that avoiding feared situations only makes my fears worse. I have to approach what I fear to learn to cope with anxiety.

What exactly do I have to do?

I know I can do each one of these tasks.

It's easier once you get started.

I'll jump in and be all right.

Tomorrow I'll be through it.

Don't let negative thoughts creep in.

2. Confronting the Stressful Situation (Stage of Confronting and Handling a Stressor)

Stay organized.

Take it step by step, don't rush.

I can do this. I'm doing it now.

I can only do my best.

I can get help if I need it.

If I don't think about fear I won't be afraid.

One step at a time. I can meet this challenge.

This anxiety is what my doctor/therapist said I would feel. It's a reminder to use this situation as a way to learn and cope with anxiety.

I can handle the situation.

If I get tense, I'll take a breather and relax.

Any tension I feel is a signal to use my coping exercises.

It's OK to make mistakes.

Don't think about fear, just about what I have to do.

3. Coping with Fear (Stage of Coping with the Feeling of being Overwhelmed)

Relax now!

Just breathe deeply.

There's an end to it.

I've survived this and worse before.

Being active will lessen the fear.

I was supposed to expect my fear to rise.

I can always call _____.

Don't run away.

Let me label my fear from 0 to 10 and watch it change.

My anxiety won't hurt me.

Keep the focus on the present; what is it I have to do?

When fear comes, just pause.

I feel my fears rising and I accept it as a fact.

I can do what I have to do in spite of anxiety.

If I stay here, in time my anxiety certainly will decrease.

Keep my mind on right now, on the task at hand.

This is an opportunity for me to learn to cope with my fears.

I can keep this within limits I can handle.

It's not the worst thing that can happen.

I am only afraid because I decided to be. I can decide not to be.

4. Reinforcing Success (Reinforcing Self-Statements)

I did it!

I did all right. I did well.

Next time I won't have to worry as much.

I made more out of the fear than it was worth.

It worked; I was able to do it.

I'm really pleased with the progress I'm making - I *can* learn to overcome my fears!

It's possible not to be scared. All I have to do is stop thinking I'm scared.

My negative thoughts – that's a large part of the problem. When I control my negative thoughts and anticipations, I control my fear.

It wasn't as bad as I expected.

It's getting better each time I use the procedure.

I am able to relax away anxiety.

This experience will help me practice again in the future.

I've got to tell _____ about this.

Some of these stress coping thoughts may work for you, but your best ones will probably be those you write yourself. Memorize a number of them for each of the four stages of coping: preparation for stress, facing the challenge, feeling the rising fear, and self congratulation. Make the coping statements meaningful to *you*, and change them if they begin to lose their power. Keep the list handy: scotch tape some of the most useful stress coping thoughts on your night stand, over the kitchen sink, on the inside flap of your book bag. Let them become second nature.

A note of caution: some people are afraid to tempt fate by congratulating themselves for any achievement. They harbor the superstition that self praise causes disaster. What this really means is that something else, such as fate or luck, is also given credit for their successes. Taking credit for coping means that you are responsible for how things turn out, and you have power to limit painful emotions.

Coping "In Vivo"

The final step in the training is applying coping skills in real life situations. When encountering stress, body tension is used as a cue to relax away tightness. At the same time, stress coping thoughts flow in a constant stream as you prepare for and confront the situation, limit the fear, and praise yourself for meeting the challenge.

It is expected that using coping skills in vivo will be more difficult than relaxing away stress in the imagined scenes. Some setbacks are inevitable. Practice.

Adapted from "The Clinical Potential of Modifying What Clients Say to Themselves" by D. Meichenbaum and R. Cameron. In M. J. Mahoney and C. E. Thoresen, *Self-Control: Power to the Person*. Copyright © 1974 by Wadsworth, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

More Information about Self-Talk

Your “self-talk” (the things you say to yourself) determines your self-esteem level, how well you operate in every area of your life, your confidence level, etc. This is where the real battles of your life are fought. If you can shape your “self-talk” to be positive, encouraging, and uplifting, you can transform your life. Below are positive self-affirmations taken from the book What to Say When You Talk to Yourself. Repeat these sayings to yourself a minimum of 5 times a day for best results - consider them “medicine for the soul.”

- I can do anything I believe I can do! I have talent, skills, and ability.
- I set goals and I reach them. I know what I want out of life. I go after it and I get it.
- People like me, and I feel good about myself. I have a sense of pride in who I am and I believe in myself.
- I have a lot of energy – I am very alive! I enjoy life and I can tell it and so can others. I keep myself up, looking ahead, and liking it.
- I know that I can accomplish anything I choose, and I refuse to let anything negative hold me back or stand in my way.
- Roadblocks don't bother me. They just mean that I am alive and running, and I'm not going to stand still for anything.
- I never demand perfection of myself, but I expect the very best of what I have to give and that's what I get!
- I never give myself excuses. I get things done on time & in the right way. Today I have inner strength to do more than ever.
- I am an exceptional human being.
- Nothing seems to stop me. I have a lot of determination. I turn problems into advantages. I find possibilities in things that other people never give a chance.
- I am not afraid of anything or anyone. I have strength, power, conviction, and confidence! I like challenges and I meet them head on, face to face – today especially!
- I have a clear picture in my mind of what I want. I can see it in front of me. I know what I want and I know how to get it. I know that it's all up to me and I know I can do it.
- I trust myself. I've got what it takes – plenty of it – and I know how to use it. Today, more than ever, TODAY I am unstoppable! I've got myself together and I'm getting more together every day. And today – look out world, here I come!
- Limitations? I don't even recognize them as limitations. There is no challenge I can't conquer; there is no wall I can't climb over. There is no problem I can't defeat or turn around and make it work for me.
- I am honest and sincere. I like to deal with people and they like me. I think well; I think clearly. I am organized; I am in control of myself and everything about me.
- I call my shots and no one has to call them for me. I never blame anyone else for the circumstances of my life. I accept my failings and move past them as easily as I accept the rewards for my victories.

Examples of Realistic Self-Talk

- This too shall pass and my life will be better.
- I am a worthy and good person.
- I am doing the best I can right now.
- Like everyone else, I am a fallible person and at times I will make mistakes (and I can learn from them).
- Look at how much I have accomplished, and I am still progressing.
- There are no failures, only different degrees of success.
- Be honest and true to myself.
- It is okay to let myself be distressed for a while.
- I am not helpless. I can and will take the steps needed to get through this crisis.
- I will remain engaged and involved instead of isolating and withdrawing during this situation.
- This is an opportunity, instead of a threat. I'll use this experience to learn something new, to change my direction, or to try a new approach.
- One step at a time.
- I can stay calm when talking to difficult people.
- I know I will be okay no matter what happens.
- He/She is responsible for their reaction to me.
- This difficult/painful situation will be over soon.
- I can stand anything for a while.
- In the long run who will remember, or care?
- Is this really important enough to become upset about?
- I don't really need to prove myself in this situation.
- Others are not perfect, and I won't put pressure on myself by expecting them to be.
- I cannot control the behaviors of others, I can only control my own behaviors.
- I am not responsible to make other people okay.
- I will respond appropriately, and not be reactive.
- I feel better when I don't make assumptions about the thoughts or behaviors of others.
- I will enjoy myself, even when life is hard.
- I will enjoy myself while catching up on all I want to accomplish.
- Don't sweat the small stuff – it's all small stuff.
- My past does not control my future.
- I choose to be a happy person.
- I am respectful to others and deserve to be respected in return.
- There is less stress in being optimistic and choosing to be in control.
- I am willing to do whatever is necessary to make tomorrow better

References

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- Misra, R., & McKean, M. (Wntr 2000). College students' academic stress and its relation to their anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction. *American Journal of Health Studies*.
- Spradlin, S. E. (2003). *Don't let your emotions run your life: How dialectical behavior therapy can put you in control*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Website Resources

- Half of Us** <http://www.halfofus.com/>
- ULifeline** <http://www.ulifeline.org>
- Reducing Test Anxiety: A Guide for Praxis Test Takers** <http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/PRAXIS/pdf/01361anxiety.pdf>
- Stress (Kansas State University)** <http://www.k-state.edu/counseling/topics/stress/drstress.html>
- Stress Management (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)** http://www.counselingcenter.uiuc.edu/?page_id=194
- <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/top10stress.htm>
- <http://www.uhs.uga.edu/stress/>
- <http://www.uhs.uga.edu/stress/wellnesslifestyle.html>
- <http://www.geneseo.edu/CMS/display.php?page=3774&dpt=health>
- <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/stress.html>
- <http://www-psych.stanford.edu/~pinto/stress.html>