

# Relaxation and stress management techniques

Understanding your stress response can help you determine which **relaxation** and **stress management** techniques will be most effective for you (Segal et al., 2016).

Use this booklet to learn about a variety of techniques to help respond constructively to your body's stress response.

## TIME TO RELAX

Are you feeling angry, agitated or full of energy?

Try **relaxation techniques** to help calm you, such as deep breathing and mindful meditation.

## MANAGING STRESS

Are you feeling depressed, withdrawn or zoned-out? Try **stress management techniques** that are stimulating such as yoga and exercise.

# What is Stress?



- *Stress is a physical response to environmental demands or "stressors" that cause your body to engage the 'fight or flight' response. Stressors are different for every person - for the typical student, they might include deadlines, exams, relationships, money problems, and more.*
- *Under certain short-term conditions, stress can improve our mental and physical performance (positive stress). However, when stress becomes prolonged or chronic, it can become unhealthy (negative stress) (Benson and Casey, 2013).*
- *The signs of stress are different for every person but can include worry, rapid heart rate, muscle pain, sleep deprivation, anger, depression, and abuse of food and drugs (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2016).*

# Understanding Your Stress Response

Every person has a certain level of stress that will improve their performance and efficiency (Benson and Casey, 2013).

Beyond this optimal level, stress can negatively impact our overall wellness. This is when you can use short-term and long-term stress management techniques to constructively respond to stress.

If you're finding that your stress response is prolonged with no end in sight, please reach out for support!

## HELP!

Don't know where to begin? Come see us at the Wellness Education Centre - we're happy to help!  
[wec.uwo.ca](http://wec.uwo.ca)



Techniques and Resources	Method	Goal
<p><b>Deep Breathing</b> Related Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>What To Do When You Can't Study Anymore (But Have To)</i> WEC Publication available online at <a href="http://wec.uwo.ca">wec.uwo.ca</a></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on taking slow, deep breaths with air coming in from your nose, filling your lungs, and exhaling slowly from your mouth.</li> <li>• If you feel your mind wandering, gently refocus back on your breathing.</li> <li>• Try this technique for 10 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus your attention away from stressful thoughts</li> <li>• Increase oxygen exchange in your lungs</li> <li>• Slow your heartbeat</li> </ul>
<p><b>Body Scan/ Progressive Muscle Relaxation</b> Related Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mindfulness &amp; Metta-based Trauma Therapy (<a href="https://mmtt.ca/About.php">https://mmtt.ca/About.php</a>) <i>Body Scan Guided Meditation</i> videos</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin with deep breathing.</li> <li>• Focus your thoughts on one part of your body (e.g. your toes).</li> <li>• Imagine that body part becoming warm and relaxed – release any tension you feel.</li> <li>• Slowly move to all of your other body parts, progressively releasing tension in all of your muscles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps you find and release muscle tension</li> <li>• Become more aware of your body</li> </ul>
<p><b>Guided Imagery/ Visualization</b> Related Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mindfulness &amp; Metta-based Trauma Therapy: <i>Mountain, Tree, Sun, and Holding a Candle Imagery Guided Meditation</i> videos</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin with deep breathing</li> <li>• Focus your thoughts and imagine a calming image or place</li> <li>• Engage your senses (e.g., smell)</li> <li>• Practice for 10-20 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus your thoughts towards a safe, calming place</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mindful Meditation</b> Related Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Three Ways to Be Mindful</i> WEC Publication online at <a href="http://wec.uwo.ca">wec.uwo.ca</a></b></li> <li>• <b>Mindfulness &amp; Metta-based Trauma Therapy: <i>Mindful Awareness of Sight &amp; Sound Guided Meditation</i> Video</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a comfortable position, begin with deep breathing</li> <li>• Focus on all of your experiences in the moment (e.g. your senses and ideas)</li> <li>• If you lose focus, gently re-center yourself on the current moment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims to focus your thoughts on one task at a time and live in the moment</li> <li>• Release the need to multi-task</li> <li>• Relieve stress, pain, sleep problems and more</li> </ul>
<p><b>Yoga or Tai Chi</b> Related Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Living Well@Western Tai Chi class</b></li> <li>• <b>Yoga classes at Campus Recreation and the WEC</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you are new to yoga or tai chi, try taking a class or following along using a video or an app as a guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve body awareness</li> <li>• Exercise while engaging relaxation response</li> </ul>
<p><b>Massage Therapy</b> Related Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Available at <u>three places on campus</u>. Your health plan covers anywhere from 80% (SOGS) to 100% (USC) of the service.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional massages</li> <li>• Self-massage can be done throughout the day at work and home (e.g. massage your shoulders, neck and face)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release muscle tension</li> <li>• Relieve pain and stress</li> </ul>

## Finding Your Optimal Stress Level and Long-Term Management Techniques

Did you know that most of the stress we experience daily is positive stress? This is the day-to-day stress that helps improve our performance and efficiency at work, at school, and in our lives. Our goal is not to make life stress-free but to harness our positive stress and lower our long-term or chronic negative stress responses. Here are some ideas and techniques for long-term stress management that will help you find your optimal stress levels and reduce unhealthy stress responses in the future (Robinson et al., 2016).

Technique	Method	WEC Resources
<b>Practice your relaxation response</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice the techniques listed in the previous chart to determine which work best for you</li> <li>Set aside 10-20 minutes a day to exercise your relaxation responses</li> <li>Pro tip: Try practicing in the morning to start your day off in control of your relaxation response!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See techniques in the previous chart</li> <li>3 Ways To Be Mindful</li> <li>What To Do When You Can't Study Anymore (But Have To)</li> </ul>
<b>Physical activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate moderate-intensity physical activity into your daily life</li> <li>Start small and aim for 30 minutes per day</li> <li>Examples include yoga, tai chi, and repetitive exercises such as walking, running, swimming, bicycling, rowing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Top 10 Tips To Get Active</li> <li>Everything Is Awful And I'm Not Okay</li> </ul>
<b>Connect with yourself and others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect to a friend or family member who is a good listener</li> <li>Be kind to yourself</li> <li>Talking face-to-face can have an immediate calming effect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everything Is Awful And I'm Not Okay</li> <li>Connect With Yourself</li> <li>Connect With Others</li> </ul>
<b>Eat well</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eat mindfully by eating slowly, concentrating on your senses (e.g. taste, smell etc.)</li> <li>Reduce caffeine and sugar</li> <li>Reduce alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRESH Education Library</li> <li>Everything Is Awful And I'm Not Okay</li> </ul>
<b>Sleep well</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a regular sleep schedule and bedtime ritual to help you stay energized</li> <li>Being tired can also increase stress, so stay well rested</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Top 10 Tips To Sleep Well</li> <li>Everything Is Awful And I'm Not Okay</li> </ul>
<b>Be prepared</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove unnecessary stressors</li> <li>Alter your situation (e.g., can you manage your time better to reduce the stress of barely meeting deadlines?)</li> <li>Adapt (e.g., can you find an enjoyable challenge or a learning opportunity in the situation?)</li> <li>Accept the uncontrollable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extreme Makeover: Exam Edition</li> <li>So You're Anxious About Exams?</li> <li>Stressed About Exams?</li> <li>So You're Procrastinating?</li> </ul>
<b>Self-care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personally caring for your own wellness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-Care Toolkit for University Students</li> </ul>
<b>Stress Management Journal/Calendar</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep track of your progress</li> <li>Keep track of which techniques work best for you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See the calendar on the next page!</li> </ul>

# Stress Management Self-Help Calendar

<b>Technique</b>	<b>MON</b>	<b>TUES</b>	<b>WED</b>	<b>THURS</b>	<b>FRI</b>	<b>SAT</b>	<b>SUN</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<i>Practiced deep breathing for 5 minutes</i>								
<i>Engaged in physical activity for 30 minutes</i>								
<i>Talked face-to-face with a good listener</i>								
<i>Ate well</i>								
<i>Slept well</i>								
<i>Removed an unnecessary stressor</i>								
<i>Altered a stressful situation</i>								
<i>Adapted my perspective to a stressful situation</i>								
<i>Accepted the uncontrollable</i>								
<i>Practiced self-care</i>								

Adapted from Robinson et al., 2016b

## References

Benson, H. and Casey, A (Eds.) (2013) Stress Management: Approaches for preventing and reducing stress. Harvard Health Publications.

Mayo Clinic Staff (2016) Stress management: examine your stress reaction. Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-management/art-20044289>.

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Robinson, L., Segal, R., Segal, J., Smith, M (2016a) Relaxation techniques for Stress Relief. Helpguide.org: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm>.

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