

Stress Management

A Practical Guide

**Carleton University Health and
Counselling Services**

In a fast-paced society, stress is a part of life. However, contrary to popular belief, stress is not always bad. We need some stress to stimulate us. Some level of stress is beneficial (called eustress). It helps us set and achieve goals, as well as perform at a higher level. However, there are times when stress becomes overwhelming. This type of stress (called distress) paralyzes rather than stimulates. It contributes to decreased health and well-being. In fact, stress has been linked to 11 of the top 15 causes of death in Canada. It is estimated that stress is a factor in up to 70% of visits to physicians. Therefore, an important part of healthy living is to bring stress to beneficial levels. In order to help you learn more about managing stress, we have assembled this guide on stress and stress management. Read on to find out more on how stress is produced and some practical ways to bring stress back to a functional level, where it can work for you, rather than against you.

2 TYPES OF STRESS

EUSTRESS: Stress that helps a person perform at a higher level and achieve their goals.

DISTRESS: Stress that is overwhelming and hinders performance and overall well-being.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Although stress has been defined in many ways, the definition of stress that will be used for the purposes of this guide is:

Stress is the body's physical response to a perceived demand or threat

This definition is useful because it points out a few important features about stress:

- There are two main components to stress: a mental component (perception) and a physical component (the body's response). Therefore, stress management will include both altering perception as well as managing the physical stress response.
- For stress to occur, there **must** be a perception of a demand or a threat. Often this is an event or situation where a person feels that they don't have the resources available to deal with it effectively.

HOW DOES THE BODY RESPOND TO STRESS?

Since stress is the body's response to a perceived demand or threat, what then is the *body's* response? This response is called "fight or flight" response and it has been with us for thousands of years. In pre-historic times, a threat was often something that could endanger the life of a human, such as a fire or unwanted encounter with a sabre-toothed tiger. When faced with this type of threat, the human had two options for survival: attack the beast (fight) or escape as fast as possible (flight). Although these were two different ways of addressing that situation, they both required the same physical response, which was to prepare the body for some intense physical activity.

A body preparing for the "flight or fight" response needs to access energy, absorb and circulate oxygen through the body, and get the most power out of muscles. This is accomplished through the release of stress hormones; namely adrenaline and cortisol. Together, these hormones have several important physiological effects including: increasing the heart rate, increasing breathing rate (respiration), increasing muscle tension, increasing blood pressure, increasing the secretion of insulin to liberate energy and increasing blood flow to the brain, lungs, heart and muscles.

Since the body prefers to stay in equilibrium, if blood flow is increased in one area then it must be decreased in another. Therefore, adrenaline and cortisol also have the effect of decreasing blood flow to the digestive tract, kidneys and skin. Other effects of these stress hormones is a decrease in libido, an increase in the ability of blood to clot, a decrease in growth and tissue repair, and an increase in immune function. Although the immune system becomes stronger in times of stress, this response lasts for a brief period of time. Studies show that during chronic stress, immune function actually decreases, which leaves the body more vulnerable to infection.

STRESS AND HEALTH

Stress has been linked to many diseases and conditions, mainly because of the effects of stress hormones on the body. They include:

Heart disease
Hypertension
Gastro-Intestinal problems
Respiratory problems
Diabetes
Back Problems
Headaches
Rheumatoid arthritis
Cancer
Dermatological disorders
Mental health problems
Child and spousal abuse
Suicide
Homicide
Alcohol and drug use and abuse
Tobacco use
Violence and aggressive behaviour
Accidents
Insomnia
Sexual Problems

Fortunately for the prehistoric human, once the sabre-toothed tiger was dead (or 6 kilometres away), he or she was able to sit down on a rock somewhere and relax. With the threat gone, adrenalin and cortisol would stop being secreted and the caveperson's body would return to its prestressed state.

The sabre-toothed tiger is long gone, but the "fight or flight" response is still with us. Today's threat and demands last much longer than what the caveperson was accustomed to. Going to school, getting a job, paying bills and raising a family are only a few examples of some demands that can elicit the stress response. The fight or flight response is non-specific, meaning that the body responds the same way regardless of the demand or threat.

SIGNS OF STRESS

The signs of stress often go unnoticed. One reason for this is that they can also be signs of physical illness. For example, chest pain can be a sign of stress, but it can also be a sign of serious heart problems. Often, individuals and health care professionals look for physical causes and signs and symptoms before exploring the psychological causes. Signs and symptoms of serious health problems should be examined for physical causes, but don't discount the possibility that stress may be involved.

SOURCES OF STRESS

Just about anything can contribute to stress. The most important thing to remember is that if something is perceived as a demand or threat, then it can elicit a stress response. An event or situation that leads to stress is called a "stressor." The following is a list of some of the most common kinds of stressors. Clearly this is not a list of all stressors, but rather a general overview of them.

Physical environment: Bright lights, noise, heat, cold, traffic . . .

Social/relationship: Rudeness or aggressiveness in others, conflicts with friends/family/neighbours, not spending time with important people, lack of social support, loneliness . . .

Financial: Taxes, bills, unplanned expenses, "making ends meet" . . .

Organizational: Red tape, rules, regulations, deadlines, work or school culture . . .

Life Events: Death of a family member, loss of a job, illness, starting university, work promotion, birth of a child, marriage, winning the lottery . . .

Lifestyle choices: Sleep, caffeine, alcohol, drugs, time management, nutrition . . .

Physiological: Poor health, physical illness, pregnancy, injury . . .

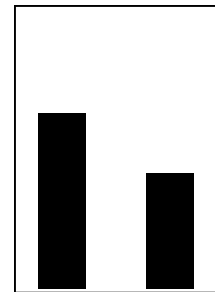
SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

<u>Physical Signs</u>	<u>Behavioural Signs</u>	<u>Mental Signs</u>	<u>Emotional Signs</u>
Increased heart rate	Increased smoking, drinking,	Difficulty Concentrating	Anxiety
Dry mouth	drug use	Decreased memory	Anger
Muscle aches, stiffness or	Yelling	Indecisiveness	Irritability
pain (especially in the neck,	Swearing	Mind going blank or mind	Impatience
shoulders and lower back)	Aggression	racing	Short Temper
High blood pressure	Changes in eating habits	Confusion	Frustration
Chest pains	(increase or decrease)	Loss of sense of humour	Worry
Frequent colds or flu	Changes in sleeping habits	Decreased libido	Fear
Exacerbation of existing ill-	(increase or decrease)	Inattentiveness	
ness (asthma, skin rashes	Nervousness (nail biting,	Bad Dreams	
etc.)	fidgiting, pacing etc.)		
Headaches			
Indigestion			
Constipation			
Stomach cramps			
Sweating			
Nausea			
Trembling			
Fatigue			
Weight gain or loss			

Demands as a source of stress

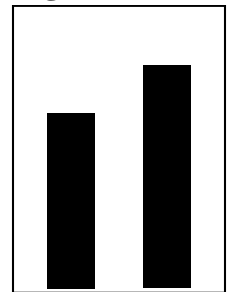
Not all demands (or threats) elicit the stress response. For a demand to be evaluated as stress-producing, a person must perceive that the resources s/he has are significantly less than what s/he needs. Resources include time, money, energy, intelligence, patience, support from others etc. It is important to reiterate that stress is a response to the evaluation of the gap between what resources a person **perceives** he or she has and the resources he or she **perceives** are needed. Therefore, if a person actually has adequate resources, but doesn't perceive that these resources are satisfactory, the stress response will still be elicited. An example of this is a person who always experiences stress before an exam or test, even though s/he always does well. This person may perceive that s/he has not prepared enough (even though s/he studied more hours than most) or perceive that s/he is not intelligent enough (even though there is no rational reason to believe this is true). It doesn't matter what the reality is, if the perception is that the resources are lacking, the person will experience stress.

Demand that leads to distress ("bad" stress)



Perceived resources needed
Perceived resources available

Demand that leads to eustress ("good" stress)



Perceived resources needed
Perceived resources available

Ways of thinking as sources of stress

People often attribute the cause of their stress to outside sources such as heavy traffic, difficult people at work or a mounting VISA bill. But a traffic jam can be stressful to one person and not stressful to another. So what is the difference between these two people? The answer again is PERCEPTION. In general, the way we view a situation or event contributes more to the generation of a stress response than the situation itself. Therefore, the way we think can greatly affect the chance that we will experience stress. This is because it affects the way information is processed, which affects the way we perceive a situation or event. There are some ways of thinking that distort perceptions and make it more likely for a person to see that s/he lacks resources. Below is a list of some ways of thinking that distort perceptions. If you recognize yourself in any of these, making efforts to change them will help you manage stress.

Negative thinking/self talk

This happens when negative thoughts and/or statements dominate. Negative words such as don't, couldn't, shouldn't, not, no, can't or won't are very common in the vocabulary of negative thinkers.

Discounting the positives and maximizing the negatives

This happens when an individual gives more weight to the negative aspects of a situation and gives very little attention (if any) to the positive elements.

Overgeneralizing

This happens when a small negative event influences the way other events are perceived. Example: A bad experience with a self-involved partner results in a person believing that all boyfriends or girlfriends are selfish.

Pessimism

Pessimism is the overestimation of the likelihood of a negative outcome to a situation or event. One example is a student who asks "Why should I even get a degree? It won't help me with anything," or "This course is useless. I'm not learning anything."

Over-analysing

This occurs when a person continues to examine a situation or event until he or she is so lost in details that there is no longer a realistic perspective.

Self criticism/self blame

This happens when a person believes that he or she is not good enough, or is responsible for bad things that happen.

Rigid (black and white) thinking

This type of thinking is characterized by extremes such as all/nothing, every/none, and good/bad. There seems to be no place for anything between these extremes. Words like *always*, *never*, *all* and *none* are common with this type of thinking.

Exaggerating

This happens when facts or events are believed to be more relevant or important than they actually are.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is the belief that there can be no inconsistencies or irregularities. Everything must be perfect and must proceed exactly as planned.

Demanding

This means regularly using words such as “should” or “must” to describe what you expect from others. For example, some students believe their marks should put them at the top of the class.

Awfulizing/Catastrophizing

These happen when we work up a situation mentally to the point where it has the most dire conclusion imaginable, or is seen as terrible or awful. One example is a person who has a headache and worries that s/he has brain cancer. Another is thinking that someone has stolen your keys if you can't find them, rather than thinking that you have misplaced them.

As part of an overall stress management approach, a person should identify if one (or more) of these personality traits is contributing to stress. Ways of thinking are not easy to modify, but if they are responsible for stress and ill health, the efforts should be worthwhile.

Health and Counselling Services have professionals who can help people identify and modify stress producing ways of thinking. There are also a variety of books and websites that can help, some of which are listed in this booklet.

A 5 STEP GUIDE TO MANAGING STRESS

It should be clear by now that stress management is an extremely important skill to develop. The following step-by-step guide can help you structure your approach to stress management.

Step 1: Identify if you are stressed

If you are going to work on stress, then it is important to start at the very beginning and identify if you are actually experiencing stress. Sometimes this is easy to do. Other times it is difficult.

The first things you should look for are signs and symptoms of stress. Although there are hundreds of signs and symptoms of stress, each person does not experience them all. In reality, people tend to have their own specific reactions to stress — something like a stress fingerprint (or a “stressprint”). For one person, the signs might be difficulty sleeping, terrible back pain and lack of motivation. For another person, they might be sleeping too much, forgetting things and nail biting. Generally speaking, a person's reaction to stress remains relatively stable over situations and time.

In order to identify if you are stressed it is important to get to know your own stressprint. If you have difficulty recognizing when you are stressed you might want to ask for the opinion of a close friend or family member. They often can provide great insight into how you react to stress.

Many symptoms of stress are also symptoms of physical illness, and some of them — such as chest pains — can be serious. In search of a physical explanation, many people see a physician for stress related symptoms. It is a good idea to see a health care professional for serious symptoms, or for ongoing ones that seriously affect your quality of life. If you do visit a health care professional and suspect that your symptoms may be stress related then you should clearly let your physician know that stress may be a factor.

Step 2: Identify the stressor(s)

Now that it is clear that you are stressed, the next step is to look for the cause. Again, this can range from being easy to being a stressful challenge in itself. The following are some tips for putting your finger on what is contributing to your stress.

- Stress is usually related to change, so looking at changes in your life is a good place to start.
- You can narrow down the stress related changes by looking at when the symptoms started. If you started having problems sleeping two weeks ago, then it is important to look at what changed two weeks ago (or around then).
- Close friends and family members who know you well might be able to shed some light on what is causing you stress. Ask them for their opinion if you can't seem to pinpoint your stressor(s) yourself.

Step 3: Identify the reason for the stressor(s)

This step is challenging because you may need to do some deep introspection, which is not always fun. Sometimes you may be able to identify within seconds the reason why an event or situation is stress producing. In a case where you can easily identify why an event is stressful, you can move on to Step 4. If it is not easy to pinpoint, then you will have to

spend some time on self-reflection in Step 3.

A good question to ask yourself is “How is this event or situation threatening or demanding for me?” Many times the answer to this question is that the event or situation doesn’t coincide with your beliefs, values, expectations, needs, wants, desires etc. For example, if you value honesty and feel that you are being lied to, then this disparity may be the root of your stress. The ways of thinking that were outlined before could also be the root cause of the stressor. Friends and family can also be helpful in identifying the reason for the stressor.

Step 4: Select an appropriate stress management strategy and apply it

This is a creative and fun step. There are plenty of stress management strategies, so where do you start? In order to help you narrow it down we have outlined a 3 level approach. Strategies in Level 1 are aimed at eliminating the stressor, which will eliminate the stress. Therefore, this strategy should be the first approach. If you are unable to eliminate the stressor, then your stress management approach will be to manage the signs and symptoms of stress when they appear (Level 2) while you are taking steps to build long-term stress management skills (Level 3).

Level 1. If you can do something about the stressor . . . Do it

This is perhaps the best and most effective way to reduce stress. The aim is to attack the cause of your stress and preferably eliminate it, or at least reduce it to make it manageable. For example, if you always rush in the morning because you are late and this stresses you out, you can set your alarm 15 or 20 minutes earlier to give yourself more time, or you can prepare some things the night before to make your morning easier. If your classroom or the room where you work is too cold and you find it difficult to concentrate then you can turn up the heat or talk to someone who can. It may sound simple, but often the simplest answer is the best.

Sometimes eliminating the stressor seems difficult. In this case shortening your exposure to the stressor or reducing the intensity of the stressor can help bring stress down to manageable levels. These two approaches are more difficult to achieve because the stressor still remains.

Level 2. Manage the signs and symptoms of stress

If the stressor cannot be eliminated or reduced to manageable levels within a short period of time, then dealing with stress will more likely take some time. While you are taking measures to reduce stress in the long term (see level 3) you will need to deal with the symptoms of stress when they surface. The “fight or flight” response stimulates the body, and to reverse this you will need to do something to relax. Below are some of the most practiced relaxation techniques. Use them when you feel stressed, but don’t forget to work on the stressors or else you’ll spend your life doing relaxation exercises.

Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises are one of the easiest and most effective instant relaxation exercises. When a person is stressed they tend to breath by the chest rather than by the abdomen. Chest breathing leads to fast and shallow breaths, which can make you feel tense. Breathing exercises help shift breathing back to the abdomen, for a more relaxed feeling. To determine if you are breathing by the chest, put one hand over your belly button and one hand on your chest and observe the movement of each hand while you breath. If you are breathing abdominally, the hand that is resting on your belly button will move up and down while the hand on your chest will move only a little.

Besides shifting breathing back to the abdomen, breathing exercises help slow down a system that is stimulated by stress hormones. The box on the right and below outlines 2 breathing exercises you can use when you are stressed, anxious, angry or nervous. Practice them a few times a day, even when you aren’t stressed as a way to relax and unwind.

Breath Control

1. Holding your right nostril shut with the edge of your right thumb, inhale through the left nostril and hold your breath for a further count of 8.
2. Release your thumb from the right nostril and exhale to a count of 8, keeping your index finger on the left nostril. Then begin inhaling through the right nostril, reversing the sequence. Repeat the two rounds five times.

Breathing Exercises

The Relaxing Breath

1. Sit or lie comfortably with your back straight, and place your tongue in what is called the yogic position: Touch the tip of your tongue to the back of your upper front teeth and slide it up until it rests on the ridge of tissue between your teeth and palate. Keep your tongue there for the duration of the exercise.
 2. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your belly button.
 3. Exhale completely through the mouth, making an audible whoosh sound.
 4. Close your mouth lightly. Inhale through your nose quietly, counting to 4. Make sure that the hand on your belly button is the one that moves up. This will ensure that you are breathing from the abdomen.
 5. Hold your breath until the count of 7.
 6. Exhale through your mouth to the count of 8. If you have difficulty exhaling with your tongue in place, try pursing your lips. Again, make sure that the hand on the belly button is the one moving.
 7. Repeat steps 3 through 5 three more times, for a total of 4 cycles. Breathe normally and observe how your body feels.
- The key to doing this exercise is keeping the ratio of 4-7-8.

Progressive Relaxation

Progressive relaxation is a great overall tension relieving exercise. It is best done in a comfortable place where you won't be disturbed. It is also useful to help you fall asleep at night if you are having trouble doing so. The general principle behind progressive relaxation is to progressively relax muscles until your entire body is relaxed. There are several different ways of doing this. The method outlined below is just one of those.

1. Find a comfortable position (preferably lying down) and take a few deep breaths.
2. Contract the muscles in your toes until they are very tense and keep them like that for a few seconds. Notice how this feels.
3. Relax these muscles and notice how relaxed muscles feel. Concentrate on this sensation of muscle relaxation for about 5 seconds.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 for a second time, this time spending more time concentrating on the feelings of relaxation. You may find that your toes become warm, comfortable and almost numb — as if they were floating and not part of your body any more. This is the sensation that you will try to achieve with all muscles in your body.
5. Take that relaxed sensation that you feel in your toes and move it up to the balls of your feet. Put all your thoughts and energy into creating that warm, comfortable and numb feeling in that part of your body.
6. When the balls of your feet are relaxed, transfer that feeling into the arch of your feet and your heels; once again focusing all of your energy into making that particular part of your body relax.
7. Continue moving that wonderful relaxing sensation up your body until you have covered every body part. One suggested sequence is: toes, balls of feet, arches and heels, ankles, calves, knees, thighs, buttocks, hips and groin, lower back, spine and upper back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, upper arms and elbows, lower arms, hands and fingers, neck, back of the head and scalp, forehead, around the eyes, cheeks and nose, mouth, and finally chin and jaw.
8. Once you have covered your entire body, start again from the toes and quickly redo the procedure. If you come to any body part that is not very relaxed, spend a few moments in that area and concentrate on relaxing it.
9. Once you have finished, remain in that relaxed state for a while. Picture yourself floating on a cloud, sitting in a hot tub, or in any other place that brings you feelings of relaxation and well-being.
10. Slowly come out of your relaxed state. You may want to set a soft alarm which will mark the time for you.

Meditation

Mediation is the process of turning attention inward and increasing awareness. It is done by eliminating outside stimuli, which hinder contact with the inner self. The first step in meditation is to get into a comfortable position in a location where you won't be disturbed. You can meditate in just about any position, but most people prefer to lay down or sit. Being comfortable is the most important aspect. With your eyes either opened or closed, take a minute to relax. You can do this by simply focusing on your breath. Don't change your breathing rate but rather concentrate on its rhythm and the movement of the air in and out of your mouth and nostrils. Now choose something to focus on (a focal point) and centre all your energy and attention on it. This focal point could be your breath, a point on the wall, a word or phrase, a colour, or an image. Continue to focus on this point for the length of time in which you want to meditate. As you concentrate, become aware of the basic elements of your focal point. For example, if you are focusing on your breath, pay attention to the feelings of your lungs expanding and contracting. Notice the point at which inhalation ends and exhalation begins. Become aware of all the intricacies of breathing. If you are focusing on a sound such as "OM," notice what effect it has on your ears. What is the pitch and intensity? Do any qualities of the sound change or vary?

At first you may find that other thoughts enter your mind. Don't worry — this is normal. When it happens don't try to stop it or wonder why it is happening. Instead visualize your thoughts as boxes with wings and watch them enter your mind and then fly out. When you first start meditating it is best to do it for a short period of time (about 5 minutes). As you become more experienced you can increase the amount of time you spend in the meditative state. Meditation does not need to be structured. You can meditate just about anywhere and any time, but you may want to eventually choose a time and place where you will meditate regularly. If you want to get more involved in meditation, there are many books, videos and classes that can be helpful.

Other things to keep in mind:

- Everyone has their own style, so don't get caught up on the particulars of meditation. What's important is that you focus on your focal point, eliminate all other stimuli and increase awareness.
- If you are using a word or phrase as your focal point, try saying it to yourself as you inhale and again as you exhale.
- Take short pauses during the day to meditate, especially when you feel stressed.

Visualization

Visualization is a stress reducing technique where you use your imagination to visualize situations that make you feel good. These feelings will bring on the relaxation response. In essence, visualization is like daydreaming. You don't need anything but an open mind to do it. Like meditation and breathing exercises, it can be done just about anywhere and any time.

The first step in visualization is to close your eyes. Although you can visualize with your eyes open, the visual stimulation of what you are seeing can make it difficult to conjure up images. Now that your eyes are closed, just let your mind wander to a place that makes you feel good. This could be a relaxing environment such as a secluded beach, a pristine mountain pasture or an enchanted forest—whatever works for you. The key is to mentally take yourself to a POSITIVE place. Experience what you visualize — feel the breeze in your hair, listen to the sounds of the forest or the smell of the sea.

Besides relaxation, visualization can be used to foresee positive outcomes to situations. For instance, you are preparing

to give a presentation and you feel stressed. Take a breath and visualize yourself in front of the class delivering the material perfectly. Everything turns out great. This type of visualization is like a mental rehearsal. Again, the thoughts must be positive and everything must turn out well. If you come across any problems in your visualization, solve them in your mind. This will help you be prepared for any problems that may arise.

Massage

During stress the body responds with increased muscle tension. Massage is a great way to release that tension and return muscles to a relaxed state. Although it is preferable for one person to give another person a massage, you can give one to yourself on other parts of your body that you can reach, such as your neck and shoulders. You don't need to be a massage therapist to give a massage. There are no real set rules and everyone develops their own style, so don't be afraid to experiment. However, there are a couple basic moves. Follow the procedure to the right a few times until you are comfortable with the basic techniques, and then let your imagination take over.

Exercise

Believe it or not, exercise is a great way to relax when you feel stressed. Some of the same physiological processes that take place when you are stressed happen when you exercise. For instance, during both stress and exercise your respiration and heart rate increase, your muscles tense and your blood pressure goes up. This occurs because exercise stimulates the release of adrenalin. During times of stress you have plenty of adrenaline coursing through your veins, so why not use it. By exercising you can use the stress hormones to your advantage. When you finish your body slows down and relaxes. Research demonstrates that regular exercise can relieve stress and anxiety.

Probably the best short term exercise approach to stress management is to do some form of aerobic exercise such as swimming, bicycling or running. It is this type of exercise that releases more adrenaline. Anything that gets your heart rate up is good. For tips on physical activity see the section on Stress Proofing.

Two less aerobically challenging types of exercise that are particularly useful in stress management are Yoga and Tai Chi. Both of these emphasize body and breath awareness. In that sense they are somewhat like meditation. **Check Carleton's Athletics programs at www.carleton.ca/athletics**

MASSAGE GUIDELINES

- Warm your hands by rubbing them together vigorously. Pour a bit of oil into one hand and warm it up.
- 'Connect' with your partner by gently placing your hands on either side of the spine in the small of your partner's back. Rest them there for a few seconds.
- Spread the oil around the back using a gentle stroking motion with the whole surface of your hands. Stroke from the base of the spine, up towards the head and back down the sides of the back, using your fingers and thumbs to press into the back. This basic stroke is known as effleurage.
- Continue effleurage for about one or two minutes. Gradually increase pressure, particularly along the sides of the spine (about 1/2-1 inch either side).
- Knead the flesh around the neck and shoulders using thumb and forefingers in a gentle pinching motion. This is known as petrissage. Be careful not to pinch too hard. Start gently and gradually, then get firmer. This technique works best on fleshy areas (i.e. muscle).
- Use thumbs and/or forefingers in small circular motions (frictions) around the neck and shoulders. This method works well for removing tension in knotted muscle tissue, such as the upper trapezius.
- Once finished around the neck and shoulders, effleurage this area and include the upper arms.
- Starting at the lower back, use both hands to 'pull' the flesh at the sides of the torso towards the spine in a smooth motion. Slowly progress towards the head and when you reach the neck, sweep your hands back to the lower back and repeat three or four times.
- Locate the spine at the base of the back. Using small circular motions with your thumb or forefingers massage either side of the spine (about 1/2—1 inch either side), gradually working your way up towards the neck.
- Finish the massage with gentle effleurage. Repeat about 6-8 times, lightening the stroke slightly each time. On the last stroke very gently remove your hands on the downside in a feathering motion.

Some important pointers:

- The person receiving the massage must have confidence in the person giving the massage.
- Slow is better. Therapeutic massage is a relaxing experience and should be savoured. Your motions should be unhurried and rhythmic. Try to make your movements flow smoothly from one into another and use effleurage both locally and on the whole back as a transitional phase.
- Be firm. Do not hesitate to apply a fair amount of pressure, particularly in fleshier areas. This should alleviate any problems of ticklishness. It is best to start off gently and slowly increase pressure so that the person can let you know if you are pressing too hard.

Humour

Research reveals that humour can be effective in managing stress and anxiety. Laughing can lower levels of stress hormones and increase the activity of the immune system. One way to manage stress is to find the humour in a situation. Of course this is not an appropriate strategy in tragic situations, such as the death of a loved one. However, in many situations that cause you stress, you will find that you will be laughing about it later. Why not laugh about it now? Do things that make you laugh like going to see a funny movie, reading comics, telling jokes or spending time with someone who has a great sense of humour.

Sex

Sex can be a great way to relax. It releases tension and takes your mind off problems for a while. Studies demonstrate that satisfying sexual relationships are associated with increased feelings of health and well-being. Human contact is linked to boosting the immune system. It is important to note that having sex to reduce stress does not mean going out and having a few drinks and meeting someone new and taking them home. Instead, stress reducing sex is best with a committed partner with whom you feel comfortable and have a connection.

Hot bath, Jacuzzi, hot tub or sauna

Heat increases circulation of blood to the tissues, including the muscles, which can help you relax.

Hobby

Doing something you enjoy takes your mind off stress producing thoughts and can help you relax.

Level #3. Long-term stress management strategies

The third level of stress management strategies are called long-term strategies. These are so called because they are not things that can be changed overnight. Many of these strategies aim to modify ways of thinking (perception) that contribute to stress. Other strategies build skills that help avoid or manage stress provoking situations.

Become a positive thinker

Evidence is building to demonstrate a link between the way we think and the effect it has on our body. The term “mind-body” connection often surfaces when people talk about this link. In fact, the stress response is evidence, in itself, that thoughts can precipitate a physical response. Just thinking about standing in front of a large group of people can get your heart racing and your blood pressure up. It is also becoming clear that a positive state of mind can have positive effects on health and well-being. Keeping a positive attitude and looking for the best in people and in situations is an excellent stress management strategy.

Positive thinkers tend to expect the best — they are usually optimists. When bad things happen to optimists they consider it to be an anomaly; something out of the norm. Pessimists, on the other hand, expect bad things to happen, so when they do these people consider this normal. It is the good things that pessimists view as anomalies.

If you review the list of stress-provoking ways of thinking outlined in this section titled Sources of Stress, you might notice a trend. Many of these are a result of thoughts that are predominantly negative (negative thinking, pessimism, awfulizing, self-criticism, catastrophizing and maximizing the negatives). It is logical to conclude that moving towards positive thinking is an excellent stress management strategy. And it's true, positive thinkers and optimists report greater health and sense of well-being than those who continuously take a negative perspective. Changing habits, including patterns of thinking, takes effort and dedication. Make a commitment to work towards becoming a positive thinker. Here are a few ways you can do that.

End negative talk

Before you even open your mouth, think about what you are going to say. If you notice that you are going to take a negative perspective, stop. Look for clues of negative thinking, which include words with negative connotations such as: can't, don't, shouldn't, couldn't, won't, no, not and never. When these words appear, make a special effort to stop yourself in mid speech or thought and find a positive way of saying the same thing.

Think about things in a positive way

It seems to be much easier to speak from a negative perspective, so thinking positively may take some extra effort at first. However, soon it will become a habit. One way to speak positively is to talk about what you like, rather than what you don't like. You can also speak about what you want or prefer, rather than what you don't want. Look at problems as opportunities. Some students complain about an assignment, paper or test, but each of these is an opportunity to learn, practice and improve skills. If you identify a problem, think of a solution. Think of what your mother probably said “If you have nothing good to say, don't say anything!” It may sound a bit silly to do this exercise but the point is to start actively changing your thinking so that it will eventually be automatic to think and speak positively.

Practice positive language everyday

There are numerous opportunities throughout the day to practice positive thinking. Examples include: what you think about a movie, book, class or a co-worker; your opinion on an issue that is in the news; and general thoughts about life, love, school, faith, weather, traffic or even human behaviour. Use these opportunities to practice positive language and self-talk.

Avoid being influenced by others

There are some people who tend to draw out negativity in others. The friend who responds with numerous things that are wrong when asked "How are you?" is one of them. So is the person who is always gossiping about others. Often, it is too easy to get drawn into their vortex of negativity. Resist the temptation and be a model for positivity. Go even further and challenge the perspective of the negative person. Tell the gossip friend that you prefer to talk about another person's good qualities and encourage him or her to do the same thing.

Dispute irrational beliefs

Remember that in order for a situation or event to be evaluated as a demand, you must perceive that you lack adequate resources to address it. Perceptions vary from individual to individual. Our perceptions (the meanings or interpretations we give to information we receive from our senses) are shaped by many factors, including past experiences, influences from important people in our life, our attitudes, our values and our beliefs. The beliefs we hold filter the information we receive and greatly influence our perceptions. Some beliefs help manage stress while others contribute to it. Managing stress, therefore, can be accomplished by modifying irrational beliefs.

An irrational belief is one that keeps us from growing emotionally and that is out of sync with the way the world really is. Sometimes, irrational beliefs are so deeply ingrained that an individual may believe that this is how the world really is. Therefore, changing them may be difficult and require much energy. However, the effort is well worth it.

Several strategies have been developed to help people modify irrational beliefs. One that has been found to be very helpful is rooted in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. This approach is based on the idea that our thoughts affect our feelings, which in turn

affect our behaviour. By changing thoughts, our feelings and behaviours are also changed.

With respect to stress management, the first step in this process is to identify the belief(s) associated with stress. For example, Melissa has just received a B on her final paper. She believes this mark is terrible, and that she will never get into law school because she is not smart enough. She has always wanted to go to law school, so this is causing her stress.

The next step is to ask "What is the evidence for this belief?" Melissa knows that law school is very competitive and that good marks are very important. Therefore, it seems reasonable to think that smart people get into law school.

Next, Melissa has to ask herself, "Is there any falseness to this belief? If so, what?" Does Melissa know for sure that people who get a B on a paper have never been admitted to law school? No! Is it realistic for her to believe that she is not smart enough? No! (Melissa has always done well in her courses. Smart people tend to do well in their courses, so it would be logical for Melissa to believe that she is smart).

After looking critically at both sides of the situation, Melissa can ask herself how each perspective is affecting her. Believing that she is not smart and won't get into law school has led to the negative emotions and feelings associated with stress. Having a more balanced assessment of the situation would ease those negative feelings and lead to a more effective outcome. Melissa will feel better about herself and will likely not be stressed about her future or the next paper she has to write if she stops holding this belief.

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE LANGUAGE

<u>Negative Language</u>	<u>Positive Language</u>
I don't feel like eating chicken tonight	I would prefer to have a pasta dish tonight
That movie was terrible!!! I hated it!!!	The costumes and the cinematography were great. The story could have been developed more.
He is such an idiot.	That guy would be more pleasant if he were less angry (had better social skills, didn't insult people . . .)

EXAMPLES OF STRESS-PRODUCING IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

- No one cares about anyone else
- I am worthless
- I have so many problems, I might as well give up now
- It is better to avoid life's difficulties rather than face them
- Other people's opinions of me are very important, even more important than my own
- There is only one way to do things
- I must be perfect in everything I do. There is no room for mistakes.
- Good looking people have it easier in life and always get what they want.
- You have to have a lot of money to be happy
- Asking for help is a sign of weakness
- If I say "no" to another person's requests, he or she will not like me
- I must be in control
- I have no control over my emotions
- I am not talented, creative, funny or fun to be with
- I must be liked by everyone

See problems as opportunities

Another way of thinking that contributes to stress is to see everything as a problem. If you view something as a problem, you will certainly react to it in a negative way. Looking at problems as opportunities is a great way to change your perception of the situation and take a positive approach. When looking at something as an opportunity you turn your attention to the benefits you will reap while addressing this challenge. Therefore, you should ask yourself, "How will I be better off after this?" or "What can I learn in this process?" All answers to these questions need to be positive. Some of the ways you can benefit include:

- Building self-confidence
- Learning to set priorities
- Acquiring knowledge or practical skills
- Developing/building upon skills
- Meeting new people
- Helping somebody out
- Expressing creativity
- And more . . .the possibilities are endless

Relabel emotions

Often we react to stress with strong emotions that we call anger, frustration, sadness or fear (there are many more). The way we label and experience emotions can greatly affect the way we experience stress.

Some emotions are more productive than others. The less productive emotions can contribute to stress. Productive emotions leave room for problem solving, change and growth. For instance, anger is an emotion that can make people do irrational things. Sometimes anger results in loss of friendships, unkind words, emotional abuse, violence and even death. These anger reactions are not conducive to health and wellness. On the other hand, disappointment can make people ask "Why did things not turn out the way I expected them to? What went wrong? What could have made things go better?" So, instead of being angry that something happened, be disappointed that something else didn't happen.

Relabelling anger as disappointment can help you take a different perspective and, therefore, approach a situation from another angle. Alternative labeling of emotions include: relabelling rage and feelings of worthlessness with annoyance or concern; intense guilt with regret; shame with irritation; and anxiety with concern. Try relabeling when your emotional response doesn't allow you to deal with the situation or learn from it.

Build skills

A great way to manage stress that doesn't have to do with changing perceptions or language is to build skills. Not only does this help manage stress, but it also helps you grow as a person and keeps your mind active. There is not enough space in this booklet to provide specific information on the skills mentioned here. Fortunately, you can consult some other resources such as books or websites, or you can meet with professionals at Health and Counselling Services. Here are a few beneficial life skills that you may want to build upon.

Time Management

Have you ever felt that there were not enough hours in a day? Many people feel that way at one time or another. For some people there is a chronic feeling of being overwhelmed. Reducing stress could be just one time management book away.

There are a variety of ways to manage time, and each way is as unique as the person yearning for more free time. The main point of time management is to prioritize things in your life. Spend time doing the things that are important. Organizational skills can also be of benefit. If saying no to people is difficult and you keep getting in over your head, see the section later on assertive communication.

STRATEGY FOR DISPELLING IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

1. What is the belief that you wish to explore that contributes to your stress?
2. What is the evidence of the trueness of this belief?
3. What is the evidence of the falseness of this belief?
4. What feelings and emotions will result if you modify the belief to bring it in line with reality?

LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO DISPUTING IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

Another way to modify stress-producing ways of thinking is to begin to use language that does not elicit stress. The words we use reflect the way we think about something. By changing the language you use, you can change the way you approach a situation. Some suggestions include:

Replace "I should, I must, I have to, I've got to"

With "I want, I choose to"

Replace "one, we, you, they"

With "I, my"

Replace "can't, won't"

With "I can, but choose not to"

Replace "every, all"

With "some, many, most"

Replace "is"

With "I think, I believe, it looks to me"

Replace "let me"

With "I would like to"

Replace "you make me feel"

With "When you . . . I allow myself to feel . . ."

Negotiation

When two people (or two groups of people) get together who want different things, the confrontation can be stress-producing. Unless you live alone on a deserted island, you will most likely encounter conflict with others arising from differences of interests or opinions. If this happens to you more often than you wish, you may need to build your negotiation skills. This will involve being clear. Eventually discussions will take place and hopefully both parties will agree on a solution.

Problem Solving

Problems create stress when you are unable to effectively address them. It may be difficult to believe, but many people lack problem solving skills. The problem solving process consists of identifying and defining the problem, listing factors that contribute to it, brainstorming alternative approaches to the situation, examining the alternatives, deciding on a suitable course of action, carrying through with the decision, and evaluating. One of the most prominent reasons why people fail with problem solving is that they are not creative with alternatives or open to them. When solving a problem, it is important not to discount any ideas; rather give each one a chance. If you approach ideas with the thought that they will fail — they probably will.

Communication

Many stressful situations evolve from interactions with others. This could happen between you and your family members, your partner, your children or even strangers on the bus. Becoming an effective communicator is a great way to prevent stress-provoking situations that involve others.

Effective communication is an art that requires practice and patience. Good communication is clear, brief and to the point. It also involves both verbal and nonverbal aspects. The verbal part of communication are the words you use. It is important to choose words that clearly and undeniably let the other know what you want. If you talk too much, contradict yourself, run off on tangents or are not logical, then your message will probably not be effectively communicated to the other.

The nonverbal part of communication is everything else besides the words you use. Some experts believe that up to 70% of communication is nonverbal. Therefore, how you say things and how you look when you are saying things communicates as much to others as what you are saying. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to things like posture, eye contact and tone of voice when speaking with others. Here are a few tips:

- Use a volume of speech appropriate for the circumstances, not too loud nor too soft
- Use a lively intonation of voice
- Speak clearly and fluently without the “ahs” and “uhms” that indicate uncertainty
- Use appropriate facial expressions. Avoid unnecessary smiles, grimaces, lip biting and so on
- Keep arms, hands and legs relaxed. Keep a relaxed posture, avoid being too stiff
- Use appropriate hand gestures
- Maintain eye contact, but don't stare. Avoid looking away or at the floor or ceiling

Some people find it difficult to communicate their needs to others. They just can't seem to be assertive enough, especially when being asked for or to do something that they don't particularly want to do. Assertive communication lets others know what you want (or don't want) without taking advantage of, or hurting, the other person. The following tips can help you build a more assertive communication style.

- Usually start off by saying “no” if you want to refuse a request.
- Respond quickly and without hesitation (shows you know what you want).
- Be polite, but firm. Use a firm voice.
- Avoid apologizing and long explanations.
- Use “I” instead of “it” (“I am not able to do that right now” rather than “It's really busy right now”).
- Be direct and to the point.
- Anticipate feelings in close relationships and acknowledge the other's feelings.

Be careful to avoid the following roadblocks to communication during a discussion or debate.

Ordering, commanding: “You must . . .,” “You have to . . .,” “You will . . .”

Warning, threatening: “If you don't, then . . .,” “You better, or . . .”

Moralizing, preaching: “You should . . .,” “You ought to . . .,” “It is your responsibility . . .”

Advising, giving solutions: “What I would do is . . .,” “Why don't you . . .,” “Let me suggest . . .”

Persuading with logic, arguing: “Here is why you were wrong . . .,” “The facts are . . .,” “Yes, but . . .”

Judging, criticizing, blaming: “You are not thinking maturely . . .,” “You are lazy . . .”

Name-calling, ridiculing: “Crybaby!,” “Okay, Mr. Smarty . . .”

Analyzing, diagnosing: “This is what's wrong with you . . .,” “You're just tired . . .,” “You don't really mean that”

Diverting, sarcasm, withdrawal: “Why don't you try running the world!,” Remaining silent: turning away

Talk things out with someone

Sometimes you can get a clearer perspective on a situation if you talk this out with someone else. Friends, co-workers and family members can often see what you don't see, and they can provide some feedback that can be helpful to re-organize perceptions about stressful situations. Be sure to speak with someone who you feel comfortable talking to and whose opinion you value. Be open to the feedback that people give, because sometimes it may not be what you want to hear. Use good communication skills to describe the problem, and listen to what others have to say.

Some issues may be too delicate to discuss with someone you know. In this case it may be worthwhile to talk things out with a professional such as a counsellor, a psychiatrist, a psychotherapist or a nurse. Consulting one of these professionals may also be useful if you have tried many stress management techniques with little success.

Health and Counselling Services have mental health professionals and counsellors who can offer help. Call 613-520-6674 to book an appointment with a counsellor.

Step 5: Evaluate

Now that you have done your best to manage stress it is time to evaluate and see if your stress has been routed to positive levels. To do this go back to step one and see if you are stressed. Ask yourself if you are still experiencing the symptoms of stress. If the answer is "no" then you can pat yourself on the back. But be prepared because this certainly won't be the last time that you will experience stress.

If the answer to the "Am I still stressed?" question is "yes" then you should go through the stress management steps again. Perhaps you didn't accurately identify the stressor or why it was a stressor. Perhaps you selected an ineffective stress management strategy. Remember, stress management is complex and takes some time to master. Each stress producing situation is unique and requires a unique approach.

STRESS PROOFING

Stress management is not just about dealing with stress when it arises. It is also about following a healthy lifestyle that protects against stress or makes you more prepared to deal with stress when it does occur. The following are a few great ways to stress proof your life.

Eat Well

Following the principles of good nutrition on a daily basis is a great way to protect against stress by providing your body with all the nutrients it needs. Eating well means eating a wide variety of foods that are low in fat and high in fibre. This translates into a diet that focuses on fruits, vegetables and grain products, but also includes some of your favourite foods in moderation. Remember, there are no "bad" foods, just better choices to be made. For nutritional advice, call 613-520-6674 and ask for an appointment with a Dietitian.

Be physically active

Regular physical activity is part of a healthy lifestyle and has many benefits including maintaining a healthy weight, reducing the risk of disease and reducing stress. A comprehensive exercise program should include both aerobic and weight resistance exercises. If you already exercise regularly — keep it up. If you don't, the following information may be useful to get you started. Remember that exercise is any activity that challenges your muscles and your heart. It can range from walking to mountain climbing to organized sports. You don't have to run marathons or swim for miles to exercise. The key is to get active.

- Before starting an exercise program it is wise to check with a physician to be sure that exercise won't be risky for you. This is especially important if you are overweight, have previously had injuries, or if you have led a sedentary lifestyle for the past while.
- The best form of exercise is an activity that you enjoy doing. Find something you like and stick to it. Getting an exercise partner and scheduling exercise on a calendar are two great ways to keep motivated.
- Aerobic exercise is exercise that gets your heart rate up. Some examples include jogging, biking, swimming, and fast walking. To get the most out of aerobic exercise you should exercise at least 30 minutes most days of the week (5-6 days per week). Aim to get your heart rate up to 65-68% of its maximum. Your maximum heart rate is approximately equal to 220 minus your age.
- Always warm up with stretching or light heart pumping activities for a few minutes. This will help reduce the risk of injury. Also, take 5-10 minutes at the end of an exercise session to cool down.
- Resistance exercises such as weight training help to strengthen and tone muscles. Safety and form are very important with weight training. Before starting you should consult a qualified person. Most gyms have trainers who can help you out.

To find out more about exercise and healthy eating check Health and Counselling Services Resource Centre or www.carleton.ca/health/health_topics or www.carleton.ca/athletics

Get a good night's sleep

Evidence is building that sleep is as important to health as eating well and participating in regular physical activity. Getting a good night's sleep helps your body and mind recuperate from the pressures of everyday life. It is clear that sleep affects our mood and our energy levels. It's not surprising, then, that catching the required amount of Zs each night will help stress-proof your life. Good sleep hygiene includes maintaining a regular sleep schedule (even on the weekends!), keeping your bedroom quiet and at the right temperature, avoiding caffeine after 6 p.m. (or even better, no caffeine after 12 noon), and doing relaxing activities late at night. **Info available at Health and Counselling Resource Centre or www.carleton.ca/health/health_topics**

Eliminate/avoid or reduce drugs, cigarettes and alcohol

Some people deal with stress by increasing the amount of drugs, cigarettes or alcohol that they consume. Although they may think this is an appropriate response, it is actually detrimental to stress management and can possibly contribute to increased levels of stress. Increasing the use of substances that help people "escape" or "forget" does not get to the heart of the stressor. A person may wake up the next morning with a hangover, an empty wallet and some vague memories, but the issues leading to stress are still there—nothing has changed.

As a part of a healthy lifestyle choose to eliminate cigarettes and drugs and enjoy alcohol in moderation.

Info available at Health and Counselling Resource Centre or www.carleton.ca/health/health_topics

Establish and maintain healthy relationships

Supportive relationships are a great way to buffer against stress. Often it is the people around you who are the greatest resources in times of stress. Studies show that people who have supportive and healthy relationships report lower levels of physical and mental illness. They also report less anxiety and loneliness, greater happiness and appear to live longer. Make cultivating healthy relationships part of your stress-proofing approach.

Info available at Health and Counselling Resource Centre or www.Carleton.ca/health/health_assessments

Keep a positive attitude

It is becoming clear that a positive state of mind can have positive effects on health and well-being. Keeping a positive attitude and looking for the best in situations and in people can go a long way to stress-proofing your life. Whenever you can, accentuate the positives and eliminate the negatives.

Build skills

Part of growing, developing and maturing is to become more skillful in life matters. Therefore, building skills is a lifelong endeavour. Building skills will inevitably lead to reduced stress by increasing the resources that are available to you both to avoid stress as well as to manage it. Some of the skills that everyone can continue to improve are communication skills, negotiation skills, time management skills, problem solving skills, organizational skills and decision making skills.

Be creative

Being creative is a way of self-expression that has been found to be beneficial in reducing stress and anxiety. It provides an outlet for energy and a form of expression for feelings and emotions. As a final part of your stress proofing strategy, take the opportunity to be creative any chance you get. Creativity can take many forms, from dancing to singing to arts to crafts. Find something that you like to do and do it.

TIPS FOR MAKING CHANGES

Let's face it, stress management is all about making changes, usually to respond to change. If you are stressed now and nothing changes, then you will surely continue to experience stress. The following are some tips on making changes.

Make changes slowly

People who try to make changes too quickly often fail. You need time to adapt to change and to find a new equilibrium. Don't underestimate the significance of small changes. Small weekly changes add up after a year. Therefore, when you decide to make some changes, choose to do them slowly and pace yourself.

Change the easier things first

One sure-fire way to sabotage your efforts for successful change is to try to attack the difficult things first. If you take on too much you will likely lose motivation. Taking on too much is one common reason why New Year's resolutions fail. Start by changing the small and easier things first. As you succeed with those, you will build confidence and look forward to taking on more challenging changes.

Don't get discouraged by setbacks

Sometimes changes don't immediately lead to desired outcomes, or they prove to be more difficult than expected. It is important not to get discouraged by setbacks. Instead, see if you can learn from them. Ask yourself what happened and what could be changed next time, then get yourself up, dust yourself off and apply what you have learned.

Find out how others have done it

A lot of people have succeeded with making stress reducing changes. These people are a great source of information and encouragement. Instead of re-inventing the wheel and making all the mistakes that others have made, learn from the people who have succeeded. Ask others what worked well and what didn't work. Ask them how they would have done things differently. You can save yourself a lot of time and energy by learning from other people and applying what they have learned.

THE FINAL WORD

So there it is, an overall look at stress management. It is everything you need to know about stress to get you started. There is more detailed information in books, videos and on the internet to help you master your approach to stress management. If you feel that stress is overwhelming for you and you don't know how to begin, please call or visit Health and Counselling Services.

Stress Resources on the Internet

Help Guide

www.helpguide.org

Canadian Mental Health Association

www.cmha.ca

Mayoclinic Stress Tools

www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/sr99999

Health and Counselling Services



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