

Strategies for Reducing Stress

1. *Plan your time, use a schedule and refer to it often.* Planning ahead gives you the relief of not having to remember it all, and allows you to visualize your upcoming tasks. Time management is the single most important factor in managing academic priorities and anxiety when you're facing an overwhelming amount of work.
2. *Think small. Break down larger tasks into smaller chunks.* Develop a sense of progress by setting specific, realistic goals for each study session. Break down large tasks into small ones, and then start on the first one. To consolidate information, it is best to engage with smaller amounts of material on a more consistent basis. Instead of saving 50 pages of reading for one 5 hour session, break it down, plan ahead, and read 10 pages per day.
3. *Eliminate time wasters and distractions.* We all have a set of tried and true methods for procrastinating when we're under pressure. Surfing online, watching TV, cleaning our rooms, reorganizing our book shelves, etc. It is important to identify the various ways you waste time, write them down and develop strategies to deal with them. Use web-blockers, work off-line, and choose environments that are distraction free.
4. *Manage your expectations* of yourself and avoid perfectionism. Try not to let fear and self-criticism get in the way – when you notice unhelpful, negative or intrusive thoughts, re-frame these thoughts into more realistic and compassionate ones. Remember that development is a process, and that this is only one aspect, and a short time in your long life. We are our own worst critics, and we suffer the most by judging and limiting ourselves.
5. *Develop routines.* Our bodies crave structure and stability, and routines help to reduce anxiety. Having consistent schedules around sleep, meals, self-care and study tasks will help to keep your brain functioning at its best, bolster concentration and memory, and build momentum to prevent procrastination.
6. *Take time out for yourself,* and don't feel guilty about it! Building in breaks is not only good for your memory and concentration, it can also give you a reward after doing some work.
7. *Build community around your academic work.* Learning is not meant to be done in isolation. Form study groups, talk about the material with instructors, TAs, friends, classmates.
8. *Ask for help, and use the resources available at the university.* Your incidental fees are paying for them, so make sure use them – check out what's available at your college or faculty and through the Student Life services: studentlife.utoronto.ca.

Healthy Stress Management Strategies

BE AWARE OF WHAT TRIGGERS STRESS AND HOW YOUR BODY RESPONDS

- Don't ignore the signs
- Constantly engage in stress-relieving activities to keep stress from building and becoming a chronic problem

RELAX YOUR BODY

- Use mindfulness, breathing and relaxation techniques
- Download guided meditation recordings and listen to them before going to sleep.
- Sign up for yoga, tai chi, meditation, etc and BREATHE

LET YOUR MIND BE QUIET

- Listen to a relaxation tape
- Sign up for yoga, tai chi, mediation, etc and learn to be still and quiet inside
- If your mind is racing with negative thoughts, yell "STOP" (either out loud or in your head) and take 3 deep breaths.

***If your brain doesn't receive the messages triggering the 'stress response' for more than a few minutes, your body WILL begin to relax*

THINK POSITIVELY

- Give yourself messages about how well you can cope rather than how horrible everything is going to be.
- Remember, your negative and anxious messages may trigger the 'stress response'.

SLEEP WELL

- Introduce a relaxing bedtime ritual that includes deep breathing before bed.
- Aim to go to sleep and wake up at the same time everyday

MOVE YOUR BODY

- Maintain your ideal weight
- Exercise alters your body chemistry and is essential for releasing tension.
- Include walking, swimming, sports, dancing, aerobics, etc into your week –20 minutes 3x a week can make a HUGE difference.
- Stretch your body whenever you start feeling tense
- Shake out the tension: The wet-dog exercise

FEED YOUR BODY HIGH-QUALITY FUEL

- Eat healthy food –example: protein feeds the brain and balances the blood sugar.
- Drink lots of water
- Limit caffeine...it will do NOTHING to help with your stress
- Eat regularly

BUILD A SUPPORT SYSTEM

- Don't suffer alone. Find people (and/or pets) that you can talk to and relax with.

EXPRESS FEELINGS

- See a counsellor/therapist to help you deal with the impact of stress
- Punch a pillow, write in a journal, paint...anything to prevent things getting bottled up inside.

USE SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES

- See a learning strategist to help with time management, organization, study skills, etc
- Ask a Registrar, Academic Advisor or Professor for help
- Get help with problem areas NOW

SET ATTAINABLE/REALISTIC GOALS

- Practice setting realistic goals and expectations
- Use the SMART approach to setting goals:
 - Specific –Pick one goal and write it down
 - Measurable –Can you count it or check it off a list? Put a number to it.
 - Achievable –Is it realistic? If not, make it smaller.
 - Rewarded –Decide how to reward yourself when you reach your goal
 - Time-limited –Set a specific, realistic date to finish or achieve your goal
- Don't sweat the small stuff. Learn to be flexible and make changes as things come up unexpectedly
- Reduce the number of things on your plate

REPLENISH YOURSELF –Mind, body, and spirit

- Book a 'date night' with yourself once a week or twice a month and do things that are 100% enjoyable. For example, read a novel, go to a movie, paint, write, sleep, cook, hike, skate, go for ice-cream, etc.
- Get involved with things that give you meaning. For example, get involved in your religious institution, go out into nature, volunteer for a particular cause, etc. It doesn't need to be a big time commitment and will make a huge difference in your sense of fulfillment

USE YOUR RIGHT BRAIN

- Be creative! Sing, cook, dance, write, etc. Moving from using your left brain to your right brain (even for just a few minutes) can be a huge stress-reliever.

LAUGH –the greatest stress reliever!

- Rent funny movies, go see a comedy show, read the comics, spend time with people who make you laugh, etc

Remember...

The more fulfilled and balanced you feel you are in your life, the more resilient you will be in the face of stress. The best strategies are ones that are ongoing and involve your whole life and are not just crisis management in the moment!