

# Stress Management

## Coping Techniques

Stress can provide stimulation, intellectual challenges and motivate us to focus. Some amount of stress is normal and we typically encounter stress throughout our day!

You experience minimal stress when your coping abilities meet the level of expectations of demands you regularly experience. It is when those expectations or demands are too heavy that you may feel overwhelmed or “stressed out”.

## Coping with Stress

Some stress is normal. So much so that you likely already incorporate coping strategies into your life without recognizing it! However, sometimes we need to find new healthy coping mechanisms or active strategies to tackle stress.

## Stress-reactions

Everyone responds to situations differently – including whether or not you find something stressful. In fact, what bothers you may not impact another as strongly or even at all. However, we all experience the effects of stress similarly. These responses are called “stress-reactions” and fall within three different categories:

### Physiological

- Pounding heart
- Nausea
- Migraines
- Excessive Sweat

...and more

### Psychological

- Increased worry
- Concentration Issues
- Withdrawal
- Anger

...and more

### Behavioural

- Increased irritability
- Increased substance use
- Difficulty sleeping
- Withdrawal from supportive relationships

...and more

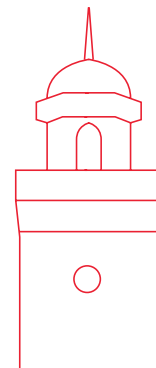
Most effective techniques for each category of stress response?

- Relaxation Exercises
- Modifying Thoughts
- Exercise & Healthy Lifestyle Choices
- Reappraising Situations

## Stress vs Anxiety

While we may hear the terms “stress” and “anxiety” used interchangeably, they are actual two very different things. Stress is a normal response or reaction to situational pressures or demands. The goal of this response is to adapt to or eliminate the cause of stress. Whereas anxiety is a chronic condition that negatively impacts your daily life and has done so for a significant length of time.

In fact, you could say there is “good” and “bad” stress. Good stress can be managed. It stimulates and helps you achieve balance in all the responsibilities of your life. You can handle good stress. Bad stress may cause you to feel out of control. It may or may not be severe enough to be diagnosable as anxiety. But it can be frightening and can harm your health and happiness.



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### Stress

- Normal and expected reaction to everyday things
- Often experienced daily
- Signal that you need to solve the problem causing the distress

### Anxiety

- Substantial and persistent
- Prevents you from being able to do well at school, at work, or in your relationships
- No obvious cause

## Stress Management Techniques

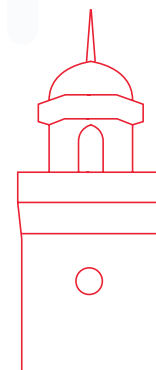
### Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Get into a comfortable position. Close your eyes and pay attention to your body and breath.
- Inhale deeply through your nose, allowing your abdomen to fill with air, gently expanding out. Exhale by relaxing and releasing all of the air through your nose.
- Place one hand on your abdomen, right below your navel, and the other hand on your upper chest. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your nose. Feel the coolness of the air as it enters in and the warmth as it flows out.
- As you breathe in and out through your nose, focus on shifting your breath so that you can feel the rise and fall of your breathing in your abdomen more than in your chest. In other words, make the hand that rests on your abdomen move more than the hand on your chest. Take a deep breath in through your nose, sending it through the back of your throat and down to your belly. Let your abdomen slowly deflate as you exhale through your nose.
- Take three more slow, deep breaths with conscious focus on the rise and fall of your abdomen. Continue to breathe fully and deeply, allowing and trusting the body as the breath slows and becomes more relaxed.

### Thought Adjustment Processes

#### Move from Negative Thoughts to Realistic Thinking

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• focusing on the negative</li><li>• discounting the positive</li><li>• mind reading</li><li>• fortune telling</li><li>• blame</li><li>• impostor syndrome</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• befriend yourself</li><li>• de-labeling</li><li>• pros and cons</li><li>• test assumptions</li><li>• talk to others</li><li>• broaden the picture</li></ul> |
|--|---|



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### Judgement Pause

*Do you find yourself judging and assessing everything you experience?*

Take 3 minutes and challenge yourself to experience someone or something without trying to critique or improve. When you delay judgment, you create space for gratitude. You may find that what is in front of you is good enough — or enjoyable as is.

### Become More Self-aware

Becoming more aware of your thoughts and actions can help you recognize patterns and areas where you can improve. Plus, it allows you to acknowledge what you're already doing well. The next time you feel stressed, simply pause and notice your reaction. You might ask yourself, "Where is this coming from?" Once you've done that, you can choose another response or way of thinking.

Try these tips to strengthen your personal awareness:

- **Listen to your body.** How does your body react to stressful situations? Do you clench your jaw or teeth? Do you notice your heart rate increasing? Are your thoughts racing, or are you repeatedly worrying about the same issue?
- **Write it down.** Make a list of your signs and symptoms of stress. This gives you a moment to check in with yourself and pause before you respond.
- **Reflect.** Take note of what your mind is telling you in the moment of stress. You can then question if what you're telling yourself is true, real or rational. Stress often triggers irrational thoughts. By noticing them, you can step back and gain perspective.



### Relaxation Imagery

1. Find a quiet place
2. Sit comfortably
3. Picture a relaxing/comforting place
4. Concentrate on colours
5. Concentrate on sounds
6. Imagine touching something in location
7. Concentrate on scents
8. Open eyes when ready

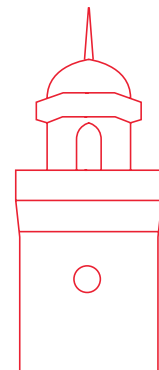
### Coping Imagery

**Step 1:** Think of a future situation you are stressed about

**Step 2:** Write the aspects of the situation you are most stressed about

**Step 3:** Develop ways to deal with these difficulties.

**Step 4:** Practice the new approaches to dealing with the difficult situations daily



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### Time Projection Imagery

**Step 1:** Think of a problem or situation you are stressed about.

**Step 2:** Picture yourself three months in the future. Will the current problem be as stressful as it is now?

**Step 3:** Picture yourself six months in the future. Will the current problem be as stressful? Can you see yourself getting on with your life?

**Step 4:** 12 months in the future...

**Step 5:** 2 years in the future. Will the current problem be as stressful or important as it is now? Will you laugh at the problem looking back on it?

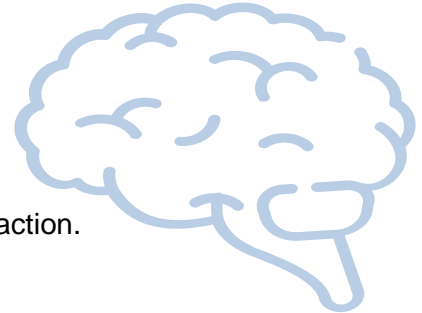
### Motivation Imagery

**Step 1:** Think of a task/area of life that needs attention

**Step 2:** What happens if you do not do it?

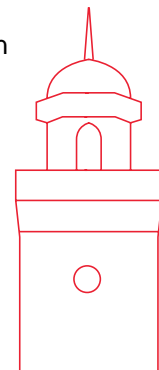
**Step 3:** Imagine making the change

**Step 4:** Consider how to make that change. Put your thoughts into action.



### ABCDEF Method

Aware	Consider the event that triggered your emotional response - whatever happened <i>right before</i> you noticed feeling a negative emotion. Becoming more aware of events that typically trigger strong emotional responses can help you anticipate and develop better coping mechanisms.
Belief	We all tell ourselves stories about what events <i>mean</i> . For the moment, avoid judging your beliefs as “right” or “wrong” and simply notice what they are. We often have irrational beliefs that perpetuate problems. A belief is generally “irrational” when it lacks clear evidence, is overgeneralized, or is otherwise based on faulty reasoning.
Consequences	Consequences are more than just the clear cut “outcome” of the event. Consequences can take behavioral and emotional forms. Sometimes we observe consequences externally, such as noticing that another person is lashing out at us or withdrawing from us. Other times, consequences are internal, such as experiencing debilitating anxiety or sadness.
Dispute	Dispute harmful belief systems through mindful examination. Ask yourself the following six questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Does this belief fit with reality?</li><li>2. Does this belief support the achievement of reasonable/constructive interests and goals?</li><li>3. Does this belief help foster positive/healthy relationships?</li><li>4. Does this belief contradict parasitic thinking?</li><li>5. Does this belief seem reasonable and logical given the context in which it occurred?</li><li>6. Is this belief generally detrimental or generally helpful?</li></ol>
Effects	Notice the effects that result from actively examining and disputing parasitic/faulty thinking. Once you identify and clarify your emotionally charged beliefs about a situation, you can begin to create an alternative line of thinking that is based upon more plausible and reasonable beliefs.



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### Additional Resources

#### Acadia Health & Wellness

<https://hr.acadiau.ca/benefits/health-wellness.html>

#### Crisis Text Line

*Crisis Text Line Powered by Kid's Help Phone is a Canadian text-based volunteer-support service available 24/7/365.*

Text Good2TalkNS to 686868 to be connected to a volunteer-supporter from the privacy of your phone.

#### HealthyMinds

<https://healthymindsns.ca/>

#### Good2Talk Nova Scotia

1.833.292.3698

Good2Talk is a free, confidential helpline providing professional counselling and information and referrals for mental health, addictions and well-being to post-secondary students in Nova Scotia, 24/7/365.

#### Therapy Assistance Online (TAO)

TAO is a Digital Platform of Tools and Educational Materials to Help you Understand and Change your Thought Patterns.

#### 7 Cups

*Sign up code: acadia*

Free, anonymous and confidential online text chat with trained listeners, online therapists, and counselors.

#### Kognito

Kognito is "A health simulation company that believes in the power of conversation to change lives." It does this using virtual humans that help prepare people to engage in real life conversations.

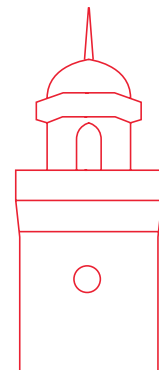
#### Q-Life Student Resilience Training

This online program uses engaging videos and practical activities to help you strengthen your resilience and develop skills to better manage stress and the demands of being a University student.

#### NS Mental Health

<https://mha.nshealth.ca/en/help>

*Selection tool to direct you to the resources likely to best suit your needs*



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### Nova Scotia Health Mental Health & Addictions

Phone: 902-424-8866

Toll Free: 1-866-340-6700

Real people Monday – Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm. Voicemail evenings, weekends, and holidays.

### Canadian Mental Health Association

Annapolis County Branch    Kings County Branch

902.665.4801

902.679.7464

### Nova Scotia Government Resources

[novascotia.ca/help](http://novascotia.ca/help)

Kentville

902.679.2567 ext. 2870

Middleton

902.825.4825

Berwick

902.583.3111 ext.143

Annapolis Valley Health Authority

1.855.273.7110

## References

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<https://cmha.bc.ca/documents/stress/>

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<https://novascotia.cmha.ca/documents/stress/>

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