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**Managing Stress**

A mild degree of stress can be helpful, providing a challenge with stimulation, excitement, and focus. Some people deliberately search out stress to make life more exciting.

Studying towards deadlines and exams involves different amounts of stress for each student. Added life pressures, such as shortage of money, difficult relationships, bereavement, or changes in your work, family or housing

situation, can all add to your stress level. Excess stress can severely affect physical and emotional health, concentration and memory.

If you suffer from excess stress, you need to take steps to reduce it.

**Stay relaxed**

***Sleep properly***

* Aim to sleep for 7 hours each day. More or less than this can tire you.

***Take breaks***

* Give yourself regular breaks in whatever you are doing.

***Use the STOP! Exercise***

* Let yourself stop everything for a moment.

 Breathe slowly or count to 100.

* Let yourself smile – even if this is difficult.
* Spread out your hands and relax your fingers.
* Let your hands and feet be still.
* Repeat ‘Stop’ to yourself until you feel calm.

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**Monitor your state of mind**

One aspect of stress is the attitude we take towards challenges. The situation and feelings that panic one person may excite and interest another.

***Listen to the voice in your head***

* If you tend to think, ‘I can’t …’, ‘Other people can …’ or ‘I’m useless at …’, you need to change the record!
* Turn the message round: ‘I can …’, ‘I have already …’, ‘I am able to …’, ‘I am going to …’

***Question your way of thinking***

Ask yourself questions such as:

* Is there another way of thinking about this?
* Am I being a perfectionist?
* Am I expecting too much of myself (or others) in the current circumstances?
* Am I getting things out of proportion?
* What is the effect on me of having this attitude?
* Am I blaming myself for things that can’t be helped?
* What can I do to improve matters?

**Manage your time**

***Be organised ***

* Organise yourself to avoid stress. Make timetables and action plans to avoid predictable crises and panics. Take control of your time.

***Set priorities***

* Work out your priorities and when you will do each of the tasks. Work out which things can wait – and let them.

**Take care of your body**

***Get exercise***

* Do something energetic – walk, swim, run, play a game, clean the room, do some gardening.

***Have a healthy diet***

* Check what you are putting into your body. Could you fill it with less coffee, less smoke, and fewer chemicals? Does your body need bigger helpings of substances that help it renew itself – such as food and water?

**Relax**

***Treat yourself***

* Take a relaxing bath. Don’t rush it.
* Put some time aside every day just to enjoy yourself or to do nothing. Try to get at least 20 minutes on your own in quiet.

***Celebrate success***

* Reflect on your achievements over the day or week – and reward yourself.

***Use a relaxation exercise***

* Take time to relax, consciously.

1 Lie on the floor or sit in a comfortable chair.

2 Close your eyes and breathe out slowly several times. Don’t force the

 breathing.

3 If your mind is racing, do the ‘Stop!’ exercise.

4 Notice where your body feels tense. Then do each of the following several

 times.

5 Clench your toes tightly, count to three, then ‘let go’. Repeat this several

 times.

6 Repeat this with all the muscles you can, working from your toes up to your

 neck.

7 Pull your shoulders right up to your ears – and let them drop. Repeat several

 times.

8 Screw up all the face muscles. Then relax. Open your mouth into a big yawn.

9 Imagine yourself in a peaceful, beautiful, safe place. Listen for sounds and

 look at the colours there. It can be any place, real or imaginary. This can be a

 safe ‘retreat’ in the mind for you to go when stressed.

***Breathe calmly***

* After relaxation, sit or lie comfortably. Close your eyes. Put on relaxing music if you wish.
1. Imagine that you are breathing in calm and tranquillity with each in-

 breath, and letting go of stress with each out-breath.

2 Think of one word you find soothing, and repeat this in your mind.

3 Do this for about ten minutes – or longer if you like.

* If you find that difficult, just stay still and be quiet. Listen to the sounds around you.

**References**

Cottrell, S. (2013). *The study skills handbook* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Palgrave

 MacMillan.