

Wellness Education Centre

Managing stress and anxiety during the academic year
through physical wellness

Part 1: Physical Wellness

I regret neglecting to care for my mind, body and spirit during hectic moments in the first two years of my undergraduate degree. I was a self-proclaimed *unhealthy perfectionist*, and it was not until I recognized the troubling aspects of my obsessive tendencies that I began to enjoy my journey at Western University. In my experience, learning to manage school-related stress and anxiety is a gradual undertaking. The Wellness Education Centre offers a range of supportive resources which act as educational and directional guides. Certain characteristics of these resources are included in what follows. I have incorporated my own thoughts as well, joined by the insights of a few scholars.

Some of us are less equipped than others to deal with stressors (exams, deadlines, presentations, among others) that can trigger anxiety during the academic year. Fortunately, we are capable of managing how we perceive and respond to these circumstances with the use of proper tools. Routine exercise and mental wellbeing are in many ways intertwined.

“The mood benefits of exercise are supported by striking scientific evidence. Exercise can be as powerful as antidepressant medications in treating depression, and, more broadly, regular exercise is linked with decreased anxiety, stress, and hostility” (Otto 13). This lends me to ask... **why?**

1

NEUROTRANSMITTERS

“...exercise increases serotonin production in a manner similar to the desired action of antidepressant medications” (Otto 16).

2

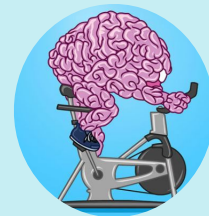
ADAPTATION

“Exercise is itself a stressor- it requires effort, and it forces the body to adapt to the demands placed on it” (Otto 14).

3

NEUROTRANSMITTERS

“... release of endorphins and endocannabinoids [leads to] anxiolysis and a sense of well-being” (Lehrer et al 339).



Exercise:

Improves concentration and cognitive function.



Exercise:

Enhances one's ability to sleep and eat despite experiencing stress.



Exercise:

Instills confidence, a sense of control, and stabilizes mood.

ESTABLISHING OBJECTIVES

“A Guide to Evidence-based Integrative and Complementary Medicine” recommends that adults take part in 30-60 minutes of exercise daily (Sali et al 81).

Establishing exercise objectives is helpful when working to maintain a balanced mind and body in the face of stress.

For example:

- I am not as self-motivated as I would like to be. I will build an exercise routine in collaboration with a friend- this may inspire me to remain active on a consistent basis.
- I do not typically engage in physical activity. I will start with 15 minutes daily and slowly build strength and endurance. My long-term objective is to add a few minutes each day to my workout.
- My goal this week is to complete 15 daily pushups using a bench in the park near me.



“When all else fails, take a walk!”

Grab a friend to make it social, or go solo to clear your head and get in touch with your environment (Lauren Kanko).

EXERCISE TIPS

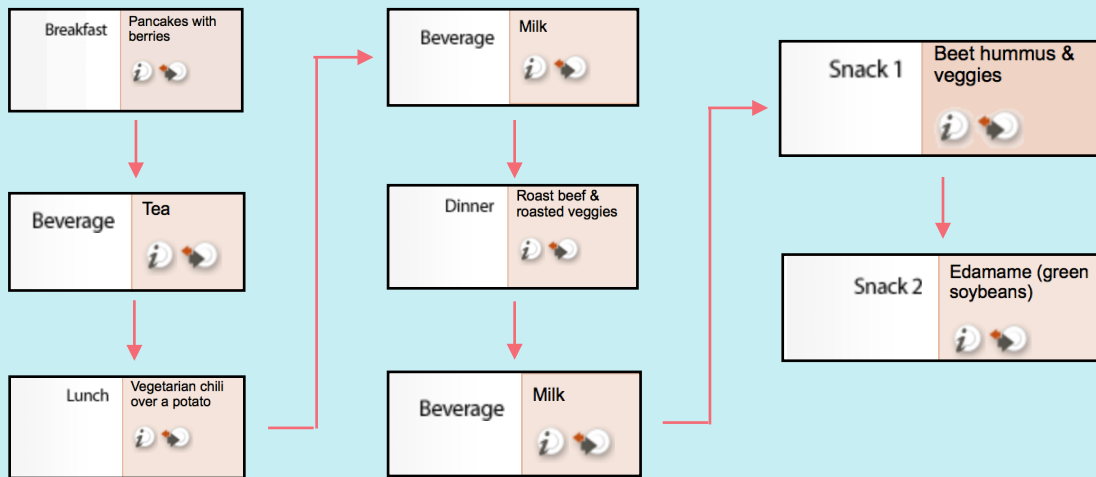
- Create your own bootcamp and encourage your friends or roommates to join.
- Explore Gibbon’s Park, a beautiful area that is unknown to many students living in London.
- Turn chores into a workout. Increase your usual cleaning pace and incorporate occasional squats, lunges, or jumping jacks.
- Arrange to meet a group of friends at the outdoor volleyball court on campus.
- Assemble a relaxing playlist and practice basic yoga positions in the comfort of your own home.
- Run or walk for a good cause (CIBC Run for the Cure, Run for Ovarian Cancer, etc).
- Celebrate small victories and treat yourself.



DIETARY TIPS

Some dieticians recommend consuming 3 meals daily and 2 snacks, “each [ideally] containing protein in order to avoid fluctuating blood sugar levels” (Sali et al 81).

Eat Right Ontario offers excellent (and realistic) meal plans:



Maintaining a balanced diet in combination with routine exercise strengthens your ability to function effectively, alleviate tension, and stabilize cortisol in the body. Collectively, these tips and reminders emphasize the importance of **designating time in the day for you.**

Works Cited

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Lehrer, Paul and Robert Woolfolk. *Principles and Practice of Stress Management, Third Edition*. New York: Guilford Publications, 2007.

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Otto, Michael W. and Jasper A. J. Smits. *Exercise for Mood and Anxiety: Proven Strategies for Overcoming Depression and Enhancing Well-Being*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

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