



RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO STRESS

Stress is a normal part of the student experience. Everyone experiences stress or has to handle stressful situations. We don't choose or plan our response(s) to stress, whether physical, emotional or behavioural. But, we know when we feel stressed. Learning how to respond to stressful situations in a proactive way can help you become more resilient.

Recognize Your Signs of Stress

First, you need to be able to identify when you're experiencing stress to manage your stress response. For example, you may feel suddenly overwhelmed or exhausted. You may have sleep problems as you approach final exams, or you may experience physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches.

Some possible signs of stress may include:

- Changes sleeping habits (sleeping too much or too little, being tired all the time)
- Irritability, constant anxiety, or tension
- Noticeable changes in ability to concentrate and stay motivated
- Trouble completing assignments on time
- Headaches

Manage Your Stress

When you notice that you're experiencing stress, you can take action:

1. Reframe Challenges

Think: "My body and brain are getting me ready to face this challenge. I am getting ready for an important task."

2. Regain Control

Our brain, when it is faced with a challenge prepares for fight or flight. And this is why breathing space is so important. It is the one thing we have control of in times of stress. **Take a deep breath.** Then, you can make clearer decisions.

- **Make a plan.** Use past experiences or brainstorm new ways to approach a difficult situation. Discuss with friends and family, and ask for help, if needed.
- **Apply your solutions to the problem.** If academics is the source of your stress access support and resources around learning strategies. You can also find tips on how to [manage your time](#).

- **Evaluate the success of your solutions.** If you've attempted to resolve your problem and it doesn't work, return to the first step and consider alternative solutions.

3. Remember Your Commitment

Recent research shows that when you look at commitment, which is purpose towards achieving something greater than yourself, you are less affected by stress. Keep your long-term goals in mind. They will help you maintain your motivation.

Other Practical Tips for Managing Stress

- Practice time management skills to manage your academic schedule, social and personal time.
- Avoid procrastinating. Procrastinating can create more mental and physical stress. If you are having trouble staying on task, consider downloading apps that will help you keep on track.
- Exercise regularly. Physical activity can help you burn off the energy generated by stress.
- Practice good sleep habits to make sure you are well-rested. Sleep deprivation can increase stress.
- Limit (or eliminate) the use of stimulants like caffeine, which can elevate the stress response in your body.
- Pace yourself throughout the day, taking regular breaks. During these breaks, spend time walking outside, listening to music or just sitting quietly, to clear and calm your mind.
- Start a journal. Many people find journaling to be helpful for understanding emotions and managing stress.
- Seek the support of friends or family when you need to 'vent' about situations or stressful feelings. But make sure you don't focus solely on negative events. Try to think of at least three things that are going well for you, and share those experiences.

A Note About Technology

It's easy to spend time online as a break, such as scrolling through social media, watching videos, or mindlessly surfing from one site to another.

These types of breaks may help distract your mind from worries, but they can also result in more time spent online than intended. Another more mindful, relaxing activity, such as taking a walk outdoors, may be more helpful.