



# Guide to Stress and Anxiety

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This package was created by Healthy U: Peer Health & Wellness at the University of Manitoba. We are a group of trained, non-judgmental, and confidential student health and wellness leaders on campus.

We provide outreach activities, workshops, and one-on-one support for our fellow students on a variety of health and well-being topics. Feel free to drop in to chat or pick up more information packages.

If you would like to request or attend one of our workshops or events, check out our website for details.



# Stress Management Facts

To be human is to feel stress and virtually every person will feel stress at times.

University can be extremely challenging, so it is very common for university students to experience stress and/or anxiety. This doesn't mean you can't do anything about it!

You are not weak or inferior if you feel stress.

Every student has a unique stress reality - what stresses one person and how they show that stress can be quite different from another person. For example, some students are stressed by having to give a public presentation while others enjoy that activity. There is nothing wrong with you if you are stressed by something that someone else enjoys.

There are many ways to manage stress and a good way to start is to not criticize yourself for feeling stressed.

It is usually easier to manage stress if you take action as soon as you feel signs and symptoms of stress rather than waiting until your stress reaction gets stronger.

Stress can gradually build if not managed well and can lead to very serious difficulties like anxiety and depression.

Stress can come from positive events and experiences like a vacation, graduation, or when starting a new job.



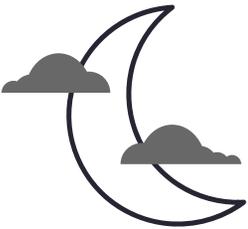
# Coping with Anxiety

Since there are no one-size-fits-all techniques for tackling anxiety, don't be scared to try a few different things before deciding what works for you. Just remember that you usually have to do something several times (i.e. every day for a week) before it starts to make an impact. Don't give up!

The following are 4 categories of self-care to think of when managing your anxiety.

## Sleep

Getting enough rest won't necessarily take away your anxiety, but it will help you become more prepared to manage it. Here are some pointers:



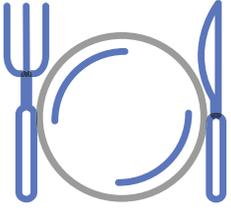
- Schedule 7-9 hours each night for sleep.
- Practice good sleep hygiene (have a bedtime routine, turn off your screens an hour before bed, and make sure your room is dark and cool).
- Turn the clock away from you to avoid staring at it.
- Ask a Healthy U member about starting a sleep journal.

## Exercise

- Even a small amount of exercise can reduce your anxiety for several hours - 5 minutes of cardio or 10 minutes of walking is a great place to start.
- Anxiety uses up energy, and exercise can help return your energy once you get started.



## Nutrition



Keeping your body well-nourished is a very important aspect of self-care. Try to become aware of your anxiety's effects on your eating habits - do you tend to over- or under-eat when anxious? Ask a Healthy U member for tips on how to prepare easy and healthy food.

## Meditation

There are many meditation strategies you can try to help manage your anxiety. Some might help you feel calm right away, while others require practice. This package includes instructions for several exercises - remember that not everything works for everyone. Try a couple and see which ones you like!



## THINKING TRAPS & TEST ANXIETY

| THINKING TRAP  | EXAMPLE re: tests & school performance  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Fortune-telling:</b><br/>This is when we predict that things will turn out badly. But, in reality, we cannot predict the future because we don't have a magic ball!</p>  | <p><i>"I know I'll mess up."</i></p> <p><i>"I'll never be able to pass math."</i></p>   |
| <p><b>Black-and-white thinking:</b><br/>This is when we only look at situations in terms of extremes: things are either good or bad, a success or a failure. But, in reality, most events call for a more 'moderate' explanation. For example, missing one class assignment does not mean you have failed the entire course ~ you just need to get caught up in class and/or complete the next assignment.</p> | <p><i>"If I don't get a good mark, I'll totally fail."</i></p> <p><i>"I planned to study 6 hours and I know I only studied for 4 and a half. Now there's no way I can pass!"</i></p>                  |
| <p><b>Mind-reading:</b><br/>This trap happens when we believe that we know what others are thinking and we assume that they are thinking the worst of us. The problem is that no one can read minds, so we don't really know what others are thinking!</p>   | <p><i>"Everyone will think I'm stupid."</i></p> <p><i>"The teacher doesn't like me."</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Over-generalization:</b><br/>This is when we use words like 'always' or 'never' to describe situations or events. This type of thinking is not helpful because it does not take all situations into account. For example, sometimes we make mistakes, but we don't always make mistakes.</p>   | <p><i>"I always fail school work."</i></p> <p><i>"I never pass tests."</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Labeling:</b><br/>Sometimes we talk to ourselves in mean ways and use a single negative word to describe ourselves. This kind of thinking is unhelpful and unfair. We are too complex to be summed up in a single word!</p>  | <p><i>"I'm dumb."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm a loser."</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Over-estimating danger:</b><br/>This is when we believe that something that is unlikely to happen is actually right around the corner. It's not hard to see how this type of thinking can maintain your anxiety. For example, how can you not feel scared if you think that you could have a heart attack at any time?</p>   | <p><i>"I'm going crazy."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm dying."</i></p> <p><i>"I will throw up."</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Filtering:</b><br/>This happens when we only pay attention to the bad things that happen, but ignore all the good things. This prevents us from looking at all aspects of a situation and drawing a more balanced conclusion.</p>  | <p><i>Believing you got a bad mark on a test because you left 3 questions blank, even though you know you did all of the other 32 questions on the paper.</i></p>                                     |
| <p><b>Catastrophizing:</b><br/>This is when we imagine that the worst possible thing is about to happen, and predict that we won't be able to cope with the outcome. But, the imagined worst-case scenario usually never happens and even if it did, we are most likely able to cope with it.</p>  | <p><i>"I'll freak out and everyone will sit and watch me. No one will help."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm going to look like such an idiot! The other kids will laugh and I'll die from embarrassment."</i></p> |
| <p><b>Should statements:</b><br/>This is when you tell yourself how you "should", "must", or "ought" to feel and behave. However, this is NOT how you actually feel or behave. The result is that you are constantly anxious and disappointed with yourself and/or with others around you.</p>   | <p><i>"I should stop worrying about my tests."</i></p> <p><i>"I should never make mistakes in my schoolwork."</i></p>   |

# Becoming Less Worried

## 1. Identify worry thoughts

- Are you thinking too much about a problem?
- Are you imagining the worst possible outcome?
- Do your thoughts cause high levels of anxiety?
- Do your thoughts go in circles, not leading to a solution?
- Do you try to suppress these thoughts?

## 2. Challenge worry thoughts

- Would most people agree with this thought?
- What will happen if you keep thinking this way?
- What would be a more encouraging or productive way of thinking?
- Have you spoken with someone else for their opinion?

## 3. Practice calming and realistic thinking

- Recognize unrealistic thoughts and come up with a rational alternative
- With practice, you will come to accept realistic thoughts more naturally.

## 4. Schedule "worry time"

- Telling yourself to stop worrying doesn't work, so schedule time to worry.
- Pick a time each week to sit down and write about your worries.
- When a "worry thought" enters your mind, save it for scheduled worry time.
- Your worrying will take up less time and may become productive, allowing you to worry toward solutions.



# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This exercise helps to reduce tension and relax your body. It can give your mind something else to focus on, therefore relieving stress. For better stress relief and long-term benefits, try doing this at least once every day.

**Step 1:** Lie down in comfortable clothing, somewhere you won't be disturbed. Take 5 slow, deep breaths.

**Step 2:** Start by tensing the muscles in your feet as hard as you can (without causing pain!). Hold for 5 seconds, breathing in slowly.

**Step 3:** Slowly relax these muscles over another 5 seconds, breathing out slowly. Make sure you focus on how it feels to tense and relax.

**Step 4:** Pause for 15 seconds, remaining in a relaxed state.

**Step 5:** Repeat this with each body part, working your way up the body.

# The Quick Stretch

## (Opening Your Diaphragm)

Sit with both feet on the ground and clasp your hands in front. While keeping your hands clasped, turn them so your palms are facing outward.

With your hands staying in this position, place them behind your neck.

Inhale through you nose while you stretch your elbows backward to open up your chest and lift your head slightly to get a neck stretch.

Exhale through your mouth and gently and slowly move your elbows forward a little while also lowering your head slightly.

Repeat this three times (or more if you wish!)

Reflect: What did that feel like to you? What did you notice in your chest, neck and shoulders?

Many students find this helpful because it is quick and does not take time away from their work. We recommend trying this once every thirty minutes of studying to keep your body more relaxed.

\*Please do not use this activity if you have pain anywhere in your body while trying it.

# The Pleasure Walk

Take a walk 15-30 minute walk (outdoors if possible!)

Notice as many pleasurable things as possible, slowly, one after the other, using all of your senses. For example, the smell of recently cut grass, a fresh breeze on your skin, the blue sky, the sound of a bird, etc.

When something attracts your attention, focus on it until you move on to the next thing.

If you find yourself thinking about something stressful in your life, gently remind yourself to focus on the world around you instead.

Take time to reflect: How did you feel right afterwards? How did you feel for the next few hours?

- Bonus: Going for a walk is a great way to get your blood flowing, which means you'll study better afterwards!

# Diaphragmatic Breathing

When we feel stress our breathing is often the first thing to change. It can become shallow, rapid and jagged or raspy. Relaxing your breathing will reduce the stress your feeling in your body and may reduce stressed thoughts.

- Place both feet on the ground and close your eyes or soften your gaze and look at a spot on the floor. Focus on your breathing , noticing the rhythm without adjusting it. Do this for 30 seconds.
- Next, if you aren't already doing this, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. (Inhaling through your nose slows down your breathing and helps you move toward a relaxed muscle body.) Do this for 30 seconds.
- Slowly take a deep breath. As you breathe in, pull your stomach muscles out to pull the breath down as deep as you can.
- Hold it in for 3 seconds, then exhale slowly through your mouth. As you breathe out, pull your stomach muscles in to help expel all the air.
- Continue with this pattern for the next few moments.
- Check in with your body to see how you're feeling.
- Practice daily until you remember each of the steps and can do this when needed. You could do this on the bus, waiting in line or while watching TV. Eventually your body will start deep breathing when you are stressed or upset.

# The Wet Noodle

This is a quick body relaxation activity that you can do virtually anywhere without losing significant time. Unlike the other activities, this one doesn't need practice to be helpful, but practice will help you become more efficient and will help you gain more from this activity.

To start, imagine your body is a wet noodle as you sit in your chair. Make yourself as loose as you can.

Close your eyes or soften your gaze and look at a spot on the floor. Starting at your feet and slowly moving up your body to the top of your head, scan for any muscle tension.

If you find some muscle tension, tense that muscle a little more for a count of three and then release it and continue with your scan.

Once you finish your scan continue to keep your body as a wet noodle for 30 seconds.

Reflect: How did you feel during the exercise? How do you feel after?

# gratitude journal

Once per week, write down 5 things you are thankful for, and why. When done on a regular basis, this can reduce your stress! Alternatively, you can write one thing each day.

Examples:

"I am grateful for my sister, because she is a good listener and makes me feel understood."

"I am grateful for my dog, because he makes me feel more safe at night."

"I am grateful for the weather today, because I enjoyed the sunny walk to class."

Week 1:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

# gratitude journal

Week 2:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

# gratitude journal

Week 3:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

# gratitude journal

Week 4:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

# Self-Compassion

It is important to be compassionate toward yourself when you are feeling stressed. Dr. K. Neff has done tremendous work in the area of self-compassion and this activity can be very helpful.

This activity involves three phrases that you can say to yourself. The first phrase acknowledges the difficulty of having negative emotions. The second phrase reminds you that having negative feelings are a normal, natural part of being human and should not be judged. The final phrase can help you get in touch with your desire to be happy.

It's hard to feel (fill in with the emotion you're feeling) right now.

Feeling (fill in with the same emotion) is part of the human experience.

What can I do to make myself happier in this moment?

## **Example:**

It's hard to feel guilty right now.

Feeling guilty is part of the human experience.

What can I do to make myself happier in this moment? I can go for a walk with my dog.

## **Practice:**

It's hard to feel \_\_\_\_\_ right now.

Feeling \_\_\_\_\_ is part of the human experience.

What can I do to make myself happier in this moment?

I can

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# Resources for Stress and Anxiety

## On Campus

### **Student Counselling Centre (SCC)\***

Attend a workshop, group session, or individual counselling. Free for UofM students!

474 UMSU University Centre

204-474-8592

<http://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/counselling-resources-students>

## Off Campus

### **Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba (ADAM)**

(ADAM)'s website has audio files for guided meditation, such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation. They also have lots of information about anxiety.

<http://www.adam.mb.ca/>

## Apps

### **Exam Stress: An App for Exam Anxiety**

An app created by the Student Counselling Service to help students with exam anxiety.

### **Calm in the Storm: An App for Mindfulness Meditation**

This Mindfulness Meditation app will guide you through a variety of meditation practices including body awareness, self-compassion, and Aboriginal teachings. The meditations range from 5-15 minutes - it won't take time out of your busy schedule! Available free for download from the App Store, or can be used online. [calminthestormapp.com](http://calminthestormapp.com)

### **Calm: An App for Guided Meditation**

This app also focuses on guided meditation and has options lasting from 1-30 minutes.

### **Mindshift: An App for Anxiety Management**

Need help learning to cope with anxiety? This app will provide you with a wide range of definitions, facts, and coping tools to better equip you to manage your anxiety on a daily basis. Available free for download from the App Store. [Anxietybc.com/resources/mindshift-app](http://Anxietybc.com/resources/mindshift-app).

### **Relax Melodies: A Music App**

This app offers relaxing music, as well as 50 different sounds you can blend to create your own music.

\*There are no in-person services at the University of Manitoba currently.

Check the relevant websites for remote services and updates.