

Your Stress



(less) booklet

STRESS BUSTING WORKSHOP



Photo by Loverna Journey on Unsplash

- 1. What is stress?**
- 2. Signs and symptoms.**
- 3. How to cope with stress.**
Before, during and after exams.
- 4. Stress bucket.**
- 5. Stress busting plan.**
- 6. 3 min breathing exercise.**
- 7. Feedback.**

Notes page...

What is stress?

When we encounter stress, it is our body's way of reacting to pressures we are experiencing. Stress affects people in different ways, and what one person finds stressful, another person may not. It may be caused by a new situation that you haven't experienced before, change in your circumstances, something you feel threatened by or don't have control over, or it may be caused by something completely unexpected.

When experiencing stress, our bodies react with a "fight, flight or freeze" response, released by the amygdala in our brain.

Our brains respond in this way to protect us from danger and can also be used to our benefits in times of stress. However, we are not always in control of when this defence system is triggered and can at times feel overwhelmed by the feeling. If experienced for a length of time this can also be detrimental to our health.

Signs and symptoms of overwhelming stress.

<p><i>Cognitive symptoms</i></p> <p>Becoming forgetful. Inability to focus. Becoming disorganised. Making poor decisions. Becoming pessimistic. Anxious or repetitive thoughts. Constant worry.</p>	<p><i>Emotional symptoms</i></p> <p>Depression, sadness and frustration. Anxiety and agitation. Moodiness, irritability, or anger. Feeling overwhelmed. Internalising your feelings and isolating yourself. Other mental or emotional health problems.</p>
<p><i>Physical symptoms</i></p> <p>Increased heartbeat. Feeling sweaty or clammy. Increased need to use the toilet. Nausea, dizziness. Headaches / joint aches. Chest pain, rapid heart rate. Feeling ill.</p>	<p><i>Behavioural symptoms</i></p> <p>Over or undereating. Insomnia or sleeping too much. Putting off tasks, becoming lethargic. Self-medicating with drugs, cigarettes or alcohol. Becoming withdrawn. Forming, or increasing nervous habits and behaviours e.g. teeth grinding/ nail biting.</p>

How to cope with stress during exams

On the lead up to exams

- Create a daily/weekly/monthly to do list to keep you on track, but don't beat yourself up if you don't complete everything! Instead, revise your future lists so they become more manageable.
- Figure out your schedule: different people work best at different times and locations. Find your comfortable revision space and time.
- Don't forget to slot in regular breaks. This is vital to process and retain information effectively and reduces the risk of burnout. Make sure you also put time aside for non-revision activities.
- Try out the [Pomodoro Technique](#): 25 minutes revising, 5 minutes break and then after 4 "Pomodoros" take a 30-minute break. Research shows that we can only properly concentrate for 30-45 minutes at a time.
- Don't compare the amount of revision you are doing to your peers. People process information differently so find out what is right for you.
- Don't sacrifice your sleep! A good night's sleep refreshes and repairs the brain ready for the next day.

During the Exam

- Spend the first few minutes reading through the questions so you can take in all the information given. Remember – you don't have to answer the questions in the order given.
- Take deep breaths: in for 4 seconds, out for 7. This will reduce stress and help you to concentrate.
- If you can't concentrate take a few moments to be aware of your senses and surroundings. Feel the chair against your back, listen to the noises outside the room, feel the pen in your hand and the texture of it. Be aware of your posture – if it is tense, soften up and ground your feet.
- This will help to bring you back to the present rather than get stuck in stressful thoughts.
- Wear comfortable clothing so that you don't have to be worried about being too hot, cold or restricted during the exam.

After the exam

- Take some deep breaths to bring you back to the present and shake off that "exam feeling".
- Remember to congratulate yourself for getting through the work! It may help to reflect on which calming techniques worked best for next time.
- Try to not take part in discussions about the answers. You can't change your answers, and comparing notes just increases stress. If it helps, and you have another piece of work or exam related to the one you have just taken, write some notes about areas you think you might need to revise more. Be mindful of your friends as well, if you enjoy talking about your answers your friends might not.
- Celebrate finishing your work with friends by going for a coffee or doing an activity together. Consider banning the mention of uni work and exams during this time so you can just concentrate on relaxing.
- Decide how you want to receive your results. Some people want to be around friends/loved ones. Others want to be by themselves when they open their results. Do what is best for you and don't feel pressured into doing it in a way that will further stress you out.

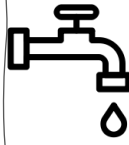
Remember:

- Exams are only a small portion of your life and do not make up who you are as a person.
- Degree results are also only a tiny part of what employers look for in a candidate. They look at the whole person, including evidence of experience, skills and extra-curricular activities. Many don't even mention that you need a particular grade to apply!
- Don't feel like you have to deal with exam stress alone. Find a trusted person to talk to about it with and surround yourself with a support system for when times get tough.

Stress bucket

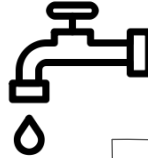
Personal stress

Stress stemming from relationships with family or friends, health and wellbeing.



Academic stress

Stresses that you are feeling from your course, exams or assignments.

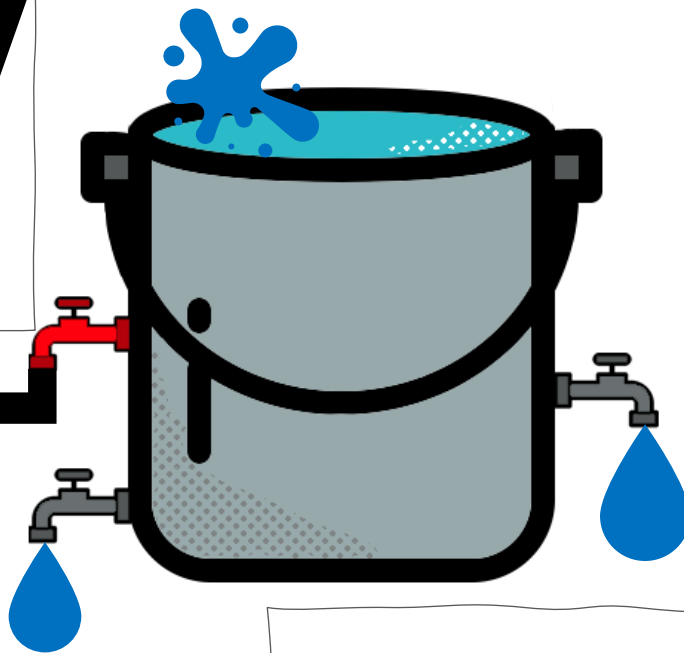


External stress

Situations that are happening in your surrounding environment. It may be stress from a job, financial situations, finding accommodation

Unhelpful coping techniques & strategies

This may be habits such as staying up late to complete work, making you too tired to work the next day, not allowing yourself breaks from work or avoiding your growing workload.



Situational coping techniques & strategies

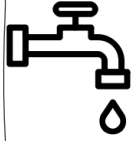
Things you may be able to do to change the situation or environment you are in.

Personal coping techniques & strategies

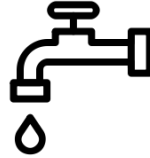
Things you can put into place to help you manage personally when faced with difficult situations. Examples could be mindfulness exercises or reflecting and growing from your previous experiences.

In my stress bucket

Personal stress



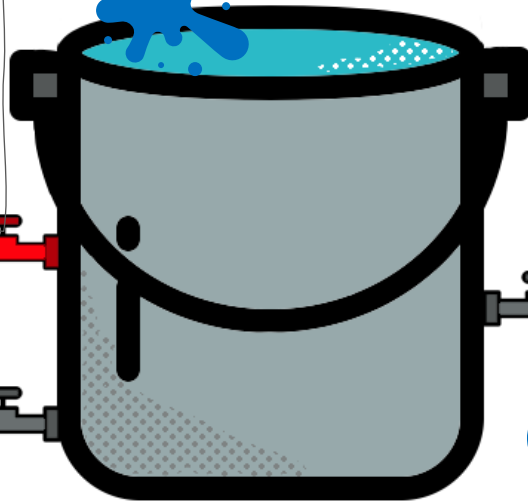
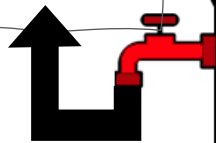
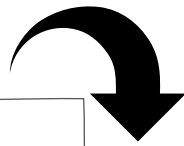
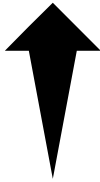
Academic stress



External stress



Unhelpful coping techniques & strategies



Situational coping techniques & strategies

Personal coping techniques & strategies



**My stress
busting plan**

A 3-minute mindful breathing meditation

- Place your feet flat on the floor...
- Gently rest your arms on your lap...
- If you feel comfortable, close your eyes...
- Take a deep slow breath in and deep slow breath out...
- And relax...
- Feel the weight of your body on the chair...
- Take a few deep breaths in and out, big low breaths in and out...
- When breathing deeply, relax your shoulders, relax your stomach muscles...
- Breathing in and slowly out...
- Allowing your body to relax...
- Relax the muscles in your face, your hands and your fingers...
- Breathe... let your legs and your feet feel heavy...
- Let go of all the tightness in your body...
- Now bring your attention back to your breath...
- Notice what it feels like it as it goes through your nose, down through your throat, filling your lungs and back through your nose...
- Notice your tummy rising and falling slowly...
- Notice the rise on the in-breath and the fall on the out-breath...
- Allow your breathing to be natural and relax...
- Now bring to the attention to the feeling of your breath through your nose...
- Paying attention to the sensation...
- Focus your breath as it comes in and out...
- When your mind wanders or you become distracted, notice this then...
- Bring back your attention to your breath going in and out...
- Focus on the feeling of the breath in and out softly...
- Let thoughts come and go in the background...
- Breathe...
- Now gently bring your attention back to the touch of your body on the seat... Breathe...
- Slowly and Gently open your eyes ... and smile...

Useful links

Student Minds, exam stress:

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/examstress.html>

The Pomodoro Technique:

<https://youtu.be/VFW3Ld7J00w>

Students against depression relaxation plan:

https://www.studentsagainstdepression.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/practising_relaxation_worksheet.pdf

List of to do apps:

<https://www.ntaskmanager.com/blog/best-to-do-list-apps/>

6 Breathing Exercises That Can Help You Relax:

<https://greatist.com/happiness/breathing-exercises-relax>

Dealing with stress at University or College:

<https://www.fix.com/blog/handling-stress-at-university/>

How to Stay Calm During a Test:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Stay-Calm-During-a-Test>

Loughborough University Mental Health Support Team feedback.

We'd really appreciate your feedback to understand what worked well, what we could improve, and whether we should run the session again. Please follow the link below or complete this form and hand it in if you can. Thanks!

Within Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity, we are researching and identifying non 1:1 mental health and wellbeing support for students. We would love to find out more from students and what you would like to see more of at Loughborough University.

Please complete the survey below to let us know your thoughts and feedback: <https://lboro.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/non-11-mh-support-for-students>.