

**THINK YOU
COULD BE
SUFFERING
FROM
STRESS?**

We need a certain amount of stress in order to keep ourselves going but a build-up of stress over a prolonged period can seriously affect both your mental and physical health. To maintain healthy stress levels we have to find the right balance of diet, exercise, work and relaxation for our own body and mind.

STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

To see how your stress levels rate at the moment answer Yes or No to the following questions. Keep your score and check out how stressed you are below:

- 1 Are you finding it hard to concentrate or to remember things?
- 2 Do you feel angry or irritable much of the time?
- 3 Are you having trouble sleeping?
- 4 Are you smoking or drinking more than normal?
- 5 Are you having frequent headaches?
- 6 Do you have a dry mouth or sweaty palms?
- 7 Are you having trouble making decisions?
- 8 Are you often feeling anxious for very little reason?
- 9 Do you frequently put things off until later?
- 10 Do you have tense or aching shoulder and neck muscles?
- 11 Do you often feel unable to cope?
- 12 Have you lost interest in food, sex or things you'd usually find pleasurable?
- 13 Do you have an upset stomach, diarrhoea or constipation?
- 14 Are you always getting colds or infections?
- 15 Do you constantly feel tired?
- 16 Are you feeling more impatient than usual?
- 17 Are you eating erratically?
- 18 Do you find it difficult to relax?



If you responded 'Yes' to 4 or less

It seems from your answers that you are not under a great deal of stress or if you are you are at least not experiencing any major negative consequences. Try and keep aware of your stress levels and build on the positive things you already do.



If you responded 'Yes' to 5 or above

Your answers suggest that you are experiencing moderate stress and are also feeling the consequences of this stress in various aspects of your life. You need to look at the stresses in your life and how you are dealing with them. Make sure you try to deal with this stress positively - for example, by taking regular exercise, eating healthily and making time for yourself.



If you responded 'Yes' to 8 or above

It appears that you are experiencing a great deal of stress. This can affect many aspects of your life in a negative way (not least your physical health and your relationships with others). Consider thinking about how you might be able to reduce your stress levels. This can sometimes be a lot easier when you talk to someone else about how all this stress is making you feel. Seek help. Talk it over with a friend, partner or a member of the Wellbeing team at Anglia Ruskin.



If you responded 'Yes' to 12 or above

Your answers suggest that you are experiencing extreme stress. Such signs are a serious warning. You must seek help. You need to take immediate positive action to reduce those things in your life that are causing you stress and to develop skills for dealing with stress. You need to seek professional help from your GP or from the Wellbeing team.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress can result from pressures outside ourselves or those we put on ourselves. Stress can build up over a long time and it can take only a small thing to tip the balance and make you feel you can't cope. A certain level of stress can be helpful – it can motivate us and be exciting. However, too much can seriously interfere with your wellbeing.

TOP
TIPS

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU'RE STRESSED?

There are physical, emotional and behavioural signs of stress. We can often adapt to increasing levels of stress and ignore signs that may provide a warning. Sometimes it takes a physical symptom for us to realise something is wrong. Do any of these signs apply to you?

- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Irritability
- Impatience
- Tearful
- Sleep problems
- Drinking more than normal
- Can't sit still
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Worsening of skin complaints
- Talking very fast
- Loss of appetite
- Finding it difficult to make decisions
- Can't concentrate
- Faster heartbeat



**TRY****WAYS TO RELIEVE STRESS**

- **Listen to music** One of the best ways to relieve mild stress. It doesn't have to be peaceful music, just something you like and that brings up good memories.
- **Sleep** The less sleep you get, the more tense you're likely to feel.
- **Avoid smoking and alcohol** Drinking alcohol and smoking may feel relaxing but they only temporarily mask stress. They don't reduce it.
- **Eat well** Some nutrients are used up more quickly when you're stressed. Eat plenty of vitamins B (green vegetables, fruit, nuts, eggs) and C (fruit juices) and complex carbohydrates (oats, pasta, rice).
- **Exercise** A short daily brisk walk will help relieve anxiety, burn off excess adrenaline and will boost your mood.
- **Talk to other people** Get support (and you'll probably find you're not the only one feeling stressed!)
- **Cut down caffeine** Tea, coffee, chocolate and cola all raise your stress levels.
- **Relax** Include regular relaxation in your life. Have a bath, do yoga or breathing exercises, sit in silence or watch a film.
- **Be more assertive** Ask for what you want and learn to say no without feeling guilty.
- **Get help** Don't struggle on your own. Deal with what's causing your stress. Get help from your tutor, your boss, your family, the Students' Union or the Wellbeing Department.
- **Enjoy yourself** Do something purely for enjoyment at least once a week. Meet a friend, watch TV, shop, read, do karate, play an instrument or go out dancing. Do whatever you enjoy and whatever helps you to feel relaxed.

HOW TO COPE WITH AND REDUCE STRESS

STRESS REDUCTION AND RELAXATION

TOP TIPS

All our body functions (heart rate, breathing, production of hormones, adrenalin etc.) are normally controlled automatically so that we do not have to think about them. At the first sign of danger, we start to breathe quickly, take in more oxygen and a whole host of reactions happen in our bodies to prime us to be at our best to fight or to run away to save our lives.

Unfortunately we are nowadays rarely in real physical danger but our bodies still react the same way – whether we are worried about exams, presentations, money, relationships, interviews etc. Our bodies then get stiff and tense because we are not running or fighting. It gets harder to think clearly so we may get irritable, tearful, and ill. The good news is that once we recognise what is happening, we can do things to change this reaction:

- 1 Try to recognise the fear stimulus as a problem to be solved and not a life or death worry. Talk it over to get fresh perspective or make changes if possible.
- 2 Train our bodies not to automatically go into the stress response but to learn how to replace it with the relaxation response. This is calmer, more productive state for problem solving. We can do this with our breathing.

BREATHING EXERCISE

Autogenics is the jargon word for regaining control of our stress responses and replacing them with the relaxation response. Although it might seem strange, we can quickly and easily learn how to reduce the production of adrenalin, lower the heart rate etc. The answer is with consciously controlling our breathing.

When we are stressed we breathe fast and take in lots of oxygen. If we breathe slowly and deeply with the emphasis on a nice long outbreath, we will gradually decrease the amount of oxygen and increase the amount of carbon dioxide in our bodies. This acts as a powerful biochemical signal to the rest of the body and brings about a reduction in levels of adrenalin, a lower heart rate and a steady blood flow around the whole body. It is this that makes it easier to think more clearly as the blood flows freely to

the brain then. People sometimes think that they have to be stressed in order to revise for exams. In fact revision and recall is much better if you can relax.

TRY

The important thing is to breathe out for slightly longer than you breathe in.

A simple exercise is to breathe in to the count of 4 and then breathe out to the count of 8. Do this at least 10 times and you will feel calmer. If you start to feel dizzy, then this is a very useful signal to you to indicate that you are still taking in too much oxygen. Make your out breathe a little bit longer.

Like any new thing, it gets easier with practice. Try doing it several times a day e.g. in between lectures, before meals etc. The more you practice, the easier it will be to do it at those times when you really need it.

This exercise will help you to learn the relaxation response. If you have been feeling anxious and tense for a long while, it may take several goes before you begin to feel any benefit. Try not to force the feelings as this will obviously not help and we don't want to add to your worries by fears of not doing the exercises right. Just give yourself time. Gradually, you will find that as you become more familiar with a relaxed state by the end of the exercise, you will find it easier to get in touch with that state when you are feeling stressed in the day, i.e. by noticing when you get tense, a few breaths will help you calm yourself down. Eventually, you will get used to calming yourself this way and may not need to do the full exercise every day.

To start with you must do the full exercise at least once a day: Set aside 20 minutes at a regular time and arrange to be undisturbed by phone or other people. You need to be warm and comfortable where you lie down. Wear clothing that is loose enough for you to breathe easily and remove glasses and shoes.

Remember throughout this exercise that you are relaxing yourself through letting go of your tensions and breathing away the stress. When you are relaxed, your brain can function at optimum and you feel clear, calm and focused.

Finally: do make sure you breathe out fully and completely – try breathing in to the count of 4 and out to the count of 8 at any time in the day to help you stay calm.

OTHER ACTIONS TO HELP REDUCE STRESS

- Exercise to “burn off” the extra adrenalin e.g. walking, running, dancing, active sports, swimming etc.
- Avoid caffeine which stimulates the production of adrenalin. Reduce intake of coffee, tea, cola drinks and chocolate (reduce gradually if you are used to a lot, as you could get withdrawal headaches).
- Don't have sudden large amounts of sugar. Avoid sugary food, sweets etc. A sudden rise in blood sugar levels can also trigger high adrenalin levels. It is better to snack on carbohydrates (bread, potatoes) or fruit.

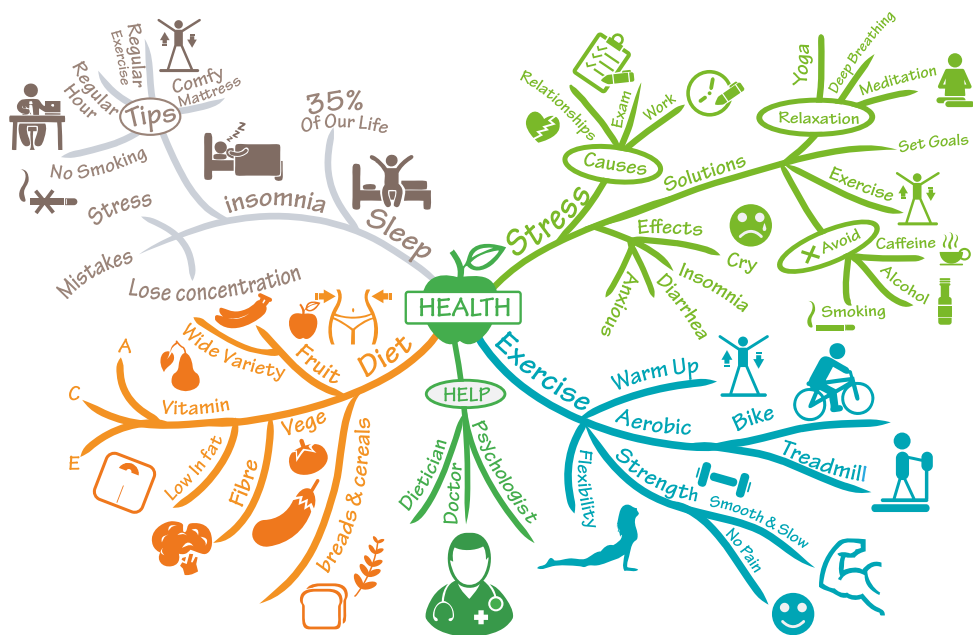
TALK WITH FRIENDS

- To unload fears
- To get fresh perspectives
- To help think about other things
- Get out and about and enjoy fresh air
- Be creative and make things, draw, paint etc. It will help you feel calmer
- Explore meditation, yoga and tai chi

OTHER SOURCES OF HELP

If your stress symptoms are causing you concern, consult your GP.





CONTACT US

To contact the **Students' Union Advice Service**:

Email london.advice@angliastudent.com

Visit angliastudent.com/london/advice

To contact the **ARU London Wellbeing Department**:

Email studentwellbeing@london.aru.ac.uk

Visit london.aru.ac.uk/student-life/student-support/student-wellbeing

NOTES

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

