



MANAGING ANXIETY AND STRESS



Stress is not totally bad. A certain level of stress can be useful. Stress can get your blood pumping faster and the adrenalin flowing. Your mind can be sharper, more focused and more driven to do well. But too much stress of course starts to work against you. Have you ever been stressed? Some of the symptoms are listed below. Which of the following do you experience when you are stressed? Rank your top 5-10 stress indicators:

- ___ You eat much more than usual, particularly junk food.
- ___ You eat lots and lots of chocolate.
- ___ You lose your appetite and don't feel like eating much.
- ___ You feel really tired all the time, lack energy and sleep much longer than normal.
- ___ You have difficulty getting to sleep at night or have a very interrupted sleep.
- ___ Your skin breaks out or you develop things like cold sores.
- ___ You become cranky, irritable and snap at your family and friends.
- ___ You become moody, easily upset and are close to tears at the slightest thing.
- ___ You shut down and don't communicate how you feel to the people close to you.
- ___ You start to feel physically ill and sick in the pit of your stomach.
- ___ You try to ignore and not face anything that is causing you stress.
- ___ You indulge in destructive self-behaviour.

What can you do???

BE PREPARED. The best way to avoid stress and anxiety is by being well prepared - put enough time into your studies, create solid study notes and study for assessments and exams effectively!

DEAL WITH PHYSICAL FACTORS as they can also play a role in contributing to / reducing your stress levels.

How would you rate your:

a) diet (healthy eating)	VG	G	S	P
b) amount of exercise	VG	G	S	P
c) exposure to sun and fresh air	VG	G	S	P
d) amount of sleep	VG	G	S	P

then

a) FACE YOUR FEARS

- Look for and recognise the causes and symptoms. Write down all the things that are troubling you or bothering you. Rank them from the thing that is bugging you the most to the thing that is bothering you the least. By doing this you face your fears and can start to deal with them. Talk to someone about how you are feeling, write a letter, write in a journal - get it out of your head, express it!

b) TAKE ACTION

- Decide to do something positive about your stress - you are in control. Look at your list. Some of the things you can change and do something about, others you can't. See if you can make any changes to reduce your stress and accept those things you cannot change. If there are actions you can take to help reduce the stressful situation, make a decision to take them! If you are feeling overwhelmed, follow the diary example to help you manage your workload.

c) RELAX YOURSELF

- Give yourself permission to relax and do something that you enjoy. Many students get so caught up in their schoolwork that they neglect giving time to do things they really care about. 'I have too much work to do'. (Of course, some students take the opposite tack and spend all their time doing fun things and almost no time studying). If you are finding you are working too hard, force yourself to take a bit of time out for yourself. It will make you feel better and your increased productivity will make up for the time away from the books anyway. Allow yourself at least one thing you enjoy each day - whether it is listening to a favourite CD, reading a book, having a little nap, taking a relaxing bath, or spending time with a friend. Everyone needs balance in their lives.

d) DO SOMETHING ACTIVE

- If you feel tension building up, do something active. Exercise can not only help get rid of stress but can also help prevent and relieve stress. Go for a walk, go to the gym or play some sport. Even a quick jog around the block can calm you when things seem to be getting too much or when you are unable to get yourself started on your work.

e) USE MENTAL STRATEGIES

Mental strategies are harder to do although when you master them they are highly effective. Our thoughts are incredibly powerful and trigger physical responses in our body. Changing the thoughts we are listening to in our heads can change the way we are physically feeling. Some strategies you can try to manage your thoughts more effectively are:

- Get things in perspective, don't make mountains out of molehills. Think about the particular thing you are stressed about in relation to everything else in your life. Is it really as big a deal as it seems? How will it seem in a week? In a month? In a year?
- Chill out, sit out, meditate, withdraw from problems and have a quiet time to calm your mind. Lie somewhere quiet, maybe with some soft music and picture yourself in a beautiful place feeling relaxed and in control of your life.
- The Catastrophe scale. Imagine a ruler marked 1 to 100 and think of all the things that are not good in the world. Where at the moment is the thing that is making you feel bad on this scale. This reminds us that reality is not as bad as it seems.
- The Rehearsal Technique. To deal with examination nerves, visualise the day of the examination and imagine it all going well. In your mind, go through each of the steps. Lining up for the exam, walking in, arranging your papers, opening the exam and writing your answers. See yourself doing a good job and finishing the paper and feeling satisfied. Every day keep imagining this before you go to sleep until your mind starts to believe it is true.

95% of things we worry about never even happen

f) START CREATING POSITIVE SELF TALK

- Use the power of your mind to help yourself relax. When you notice signs of stress you can use positive statements like 'Just relax' or 'I'm not going to let it bother me'. Talking positively to yourself helps you focus on the positives rather than the negatives. Most people don't even realise that all day long there is a monologue going on inside their head. For many people this monologue is very negative and contributes to their stress without them even knowing. Start to listen to your thoughts and what you are saying to yourself and each time you think a negative thought, think a positive thought to counter it.

What thoughts do you need to change?

Think about how you view yourself and your abilities and start to change the messages you are sending to your brain. Think about some of the self-talk you say to yourself and think carefully about how you could change it into a positive present tense message. Write the old and new message in the table below. Some examples are listed below:

I always do poorly in exams.	I am improving my results in exams by starting to study much earlier.
I am going to fail this test.	I am spending more time on Science and asking more questions and my marks are getting better!

If you are serious about changing the messages in your brain, write the new sentence on a card and read it out loud 5 times when you first get up in the morning and 5 times just before you go to sleep each night for 30 days. Any time you think the old thought immediately say the new one 5 times. Sounds weird, but it really works!