STUDENT SERVICES

STRESS BUSTERS
Coping Strategies

A level of stress is necessary to motivate us. Some people cope with quite a lot of stress that others find too much. Why is this? To some extent it is not the stress that is important but what we do with it.

You can develop coping strategies and they will help you to feel calmer and more in control. It is important to use positive methods.

In this booklet you’ll find some ideas and tips to try. They will help you manage your stress levels, to keep calm and remain focused.

Everyone is different - you’ll probably find a combination of things works best for you. These methods will also be useful at any other time in your life when you may experience stress.

If you are tempted to use some of the following as methods to deal with stress; alcohol, smoking, drugs, over or under eating or self harming - remember they are not helpful, and may damage your health. There is help available, see the back page of this booklet for more info.

Balance

Studying is important but you also need to have periods of rest and leisure. Take breaks. Break your studying into short chunks interspersed with other activities. Try not study for no longer than 5 or 6 hours a day. Plan some sort of timetable but ensure that you have a good balance of work, rest and play - don’t do it all at once during the exams!

Use Your Mind

If you find you are feeling anxious close your eyes for a moment and think of a place where you have felt especially calm and relaxed before. Visualise it carefully in your imagination for a few moments and slowly breathe out. If you feel particularly panicky then think SOS ! Sigh – Out – Slowly. If you do this you will feel calmer and more focused.

Breathe

Breathe out slowly through your mouth to a count of 4 or 5 and then in slowly through you nose. Place your hand on your stomach and imagine breathing in and out towards your hand. When we are tense we often breathe fast and shallow and this makes us feel more anxious and even dizzy. Practise this technique and you will find that it comes naturally to you whenever you feel tense or anxious. It is helpful when we are in situations that make us uptight like exams, before interviews or when running late sitting in a traffic jam. Check that your shoulders, hands and toes are relaxed and loose. Keeping our bodies tense and clenched uses up a lot of valuable energy making us feel tired.

Remember SOS!
Sigh – Out – Slowly!
Spend time with Nature
Get outside – find some green space, watch the clouds, listen to the birds, walk on the beach and listen to the waves, watch the river flow. Focusing on the natural world helps us to feel calm and centred.

Go with the flow!
Don’t sweat the small stuff – all the little stresses add up and make us even more stressed. Often we get stressed about things we cannot change. Try to work out what would help with the things you have some control over e.g. get up earlier to catch the bus on time, but stop yourself from fretting about the things that you have no control over. It is pointless and not helpful.

Think Positively
It helps to change our thinking about things in our lives – problems become challenges and events help us to learn and develop understanding about other people, the world or ourselves, even if they are not positive experiences. Try to look for the positives in situations if you can. They are there if you look, and remember...

Be kind to yourself
Give little rewards to yourself for achieving particular aims e.g. time to watch a movie, phone friends or family, listen to a favourite CD, soak in the bath – what ever makes you feel good but does not end up causing problems (i.e. raging hangover).

Just say no
You have the right to say no. If you are being asked to do extra things or go out when you are trying to study.

Be Your Own Best Friend
Often people spend a lot of time saying to themself ‘I shouldn’t have…..’ or ‘I could have....’ or ‘Why did I......?’ This type of negative self talk can make us feel very down. Stop beating yourself up! There are enough problems in life without making yourself feel worse about everything you say or do. Learn to love yourself a little, this takes time. Check yourself when you start thinking this way. Everyday think of something positive to say to yourself about the day. Change your “mental ipod”.

You can do it!
Have Achievable Goals
Set yourself achievable targets. Having some sort of plan can be helpful, but whatever you do it must be realistic. If you are trying to set yourself unrealistic targets then stress and frustration will follow. Some sort of goal setting and planning helps us to feel more in control and less stressed. The targets we set and the plans we make are not ‘written in stone’ – they can be changed or adapted. Being flexible allows us more scope to achieve, explore and be creative.

Don’t be a perfectionist
Cut out unnecessary stress or chores, it doesn’t need to be perfect. Prioritise and consider what can be left.

Keep it simple
Don’t over complicate your life while the exams are on – trying to juggle too many things and do everything perfectly will only make you more stressed.

Smile and socialise
Smiling makes us feel good - it releases our ‘happy hormones’ (endorphins) into our system which help us to relax and cheers us up. Socialising with friends helps us to feel less alone and gives us the timeout we need to ‘recharge our batteries’.

Laugh
Preferably with others. Watch silly videos or comedy shows. Laughing is nature’s antidote to stress.

Dump the Junk
Eat regularly and dump the junk. It is easy to get into a habit of eating irregularly, not taking breaks to eat and eating junk as it is convenient. Your brain uses most of the nutrition you eat – if you want it to function well you need to feed it properly. Eat fruit and drink plenty of water.
Sleep
Tempting as it is to keep studying on and on into the small hours of the night, is not helpful. Try to keep regular hours and aim to get about 8 hours sleep each night. Working all-night and sleeping all day is not a good pattern. Avoid drinking large quantities of caffeinated drinks to keep you alert as these can make you feel edgy and jittery. If you find sleeping difficult then gentle exercise earlier in the day will help you to unwind. If your bed is near your study area, cover it with something or try and screen it off from where you sleep or you will be endlessly thinking about studying.

Give yourself time
It is not possible to feel in control and calm if you are always rushing or leaving things to the last minute.

Stretch and shake
Loosen up tense shoulders and neck muscles by gentle stretching and rotating of the shoulders and head. Shake your arms and legs. Learn to identify your tense areas and consciously 'breathe out' as you relax the muscles. Remind yourself to breathe out and drop your shoulders. Take breaks away from the desk or books and get up and move.

Dance
Put on some mad music and get your body moving.

Exercise
Doesn't matter what it is but it is important - take a walk, a swim or bash a ball about on the tennis court. It will make you feel less tense and the endorphins released will make you feel good. Take a break and fit some sort of exercise into your day. Even a short walk in the fresh air will make you feel better. Encourage a friend to go with you for chat and motivation!

Do something different
Try something new or go somewhere different. Try a new activity, visit a new place, eat something different. Get out of the comfort zone (or your rut) and try a new experience. Doing fresh things gives us a boost.

Talk
Sharing how we are feeling is important. Talk to a friend or ask to be put in touch with Peer Connections volunteers. If you feel you need more help, you can speak to someone in the Counselling Service.
You can get help and support by contacting

Joan Muszynski Student Support Advisor
Email j.m.muszynski@dundee.ac.uk

or

University Health Service
Tel: 01382 384168
Email: n.z.smith@dundee.ac.uk

or

Counselling Service
Office hours are from 9am - 5pm
Monday - Friday.

Emergency Counselling Drop In service
Available Monday – Friday at 10.30am
Telephone 01382 384164 to make an appointment
Email: counselling@dundee.ac.uk