

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

## Mental Health & Wellbeing

> **Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy**

> **Mental Health & Wellbeing resources**

> **The Mental Health and Wellbeing Team**

> **Collaboration and Initiatives**

> Online Resources

## Stress

Stress can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain and is often linked with feeling overloaded, wound-up, tense, and worried. However, stress is a very normal and common physical response that our bodies have to challenging or new situations. Everyone will experience stress to some degree - it is the way you respond to stress that makes a big difference to your overall well-being.

On this page:

- [What is Stress?](#)
- [Strategies to manage Stress](#)
- [Stress and my studies](#)

- [University Support](#)
- [Community Support](#)
- [Resources](#)

## What is Stress?

Stress is your body's response to anything that requires attention or action. When you are feeling stressed, your body releases hormones, such as adrenaline, that brings on physical changes to help you to respond to that situation. It is important to be aware of different types of stress and how it can impact on our ability to engage in day-to-day activities.

Small amounts of stress can help us to complete tasks, spur us on to perform well and feel more energised. This form of stress can be beneficial and even motivating if harnessed effectively. However, stress that lasts for long periods of time or is very intense may negatively impact your physical, mental, social, and emotional health causing more harm than good.

The body's stress response, also called the 'Fight, Flight or Freeze' response, is a helpful and natural way that your body has adapted to respond to danger. When you experience episodes of stress, your body releases stress hormones to keep you alert and able to face challenges.

The key to stress management is finding the right balance between productive stress and stress that makes you feel overwhelmed and unproductive. This point is different for everyone, but you might look out for the following clues:

- Feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope
- Feeling 'on edge' or unable to stop worrying
- Changes in sleep patterns and feeling exhausted
- Changes in appetite
- Physical reactions, such as headaches, muscle tension or an upset stomach
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in mood, irritability, or anger
- Withdrawal from friends and family.

Current research by Stanford Psychologist, Kelly McGonigal, has shown us that if people embrace the concept of stress, it can make them stronger, smarter, and happier. Viewing stress as a helpful part of life, rather than as harmful, is associated with better health, emotional well-being, and productivity at work – even during periods of high stress.

## Strategies to manage stress

While everyone will feel stress at times, each person's experience will be different. Knowing what makes you stressed and how to respond to different challenges in life will help you manage stressful periods. Some of the techniques below can help you manage stress and boost your ability to cope, including:

- **Meditation:** Meditation brings short-term stress relief as well as lasting management benefits. There are many different forms of meditation to try as each one is unique and brings its own appeal. When you are focused on the here-and-now, rumination about something that has already happened decreases as does worry about the future.

- **Breathing exercises:** Just focusing on your breathing or changing the way you breathe can make a big difference to your overall stress levels. Breathing techniques can calm your body and your brain in just a few minutes. The best news about this is that no one around will know you are doing them. So, whether you're in a stressful meeting or sitting in a crowded theatre, breathing exercises are key to reducing your stress.

While there are many different breathing exercises, a simple exercise includes:

1. Breathe in through your nose and watch your belly fill with air. Count slowly to three as you inhale. Hold for one second, and then slowly breathe out through your nose as you count to three again.
2. Breathe in through your nose and imagine that you're inhaling peaceful, calm air. Imagine that air spreading throughout your body. As you exhale, imagine that you're breathing out stress and tension. You may also wish to say "relax" to yourself as you do.

- **Get a hug from a loved one:** Physical touch can do a lot to relieve your stress. Hugging a loved one can be especially beneficial. When you hug someone, oxytocin is released and is associated with higher levels of happiness, and lower levels of stress and blood pressure. This reduces the stress hormone and produces a sense of relaxation. Don't be afraid to ask a loved one for a hug if you need it. It's good for both of you and it can be one of the simplest forms of stress relief available. It is always important when asking for a hug to gain consent first.
- **Sleep:** Sleep is a powerful stress reducer. Following a regular sleep routine calms and restores the body, improves concentration, regulates mood, and sharpens judgment and decision-making. Try avoiding alcohol, limit coffee and caffeine late in the day. Many anxious and worrying thoughts have been proven to be found by lack of sleep, therefore getting 7-9 hours each night will help you face any stressful challenges throughout the day effectively.
- **Grounding Techniques:** Grounding is a simple but effective therapeutic technique that can help you when strong anxiety hits from feeling overwhelmed and stressed. Grounding helps to bring a person back to the "here and now", to realise that they are safe and in control of their reality and emotions. It helps a person to refocus and find calmness and strength in the present moment when they are highly anxious and emotional.

Five quick ways to ground yourself are:

- The 54321 technique
- Touch and describe an object

- Memory game
- Say your mantra
- Square breathing

You can find more information at [5 Quick Ways to Ground Yourself When Anxiety Hits](#)

- **Be kind to yourself:** Remember that everyone experiences stress at one time or another. Take the time to focus on what your body is telling you and practice strategies that are beneficial to you. Acknowledge your efforts and use it as motivation to continue with your tasks.

## Stress and my studies

When preparing for exams or managing your studies at university, consider these tips and apply the strategies that work for you, one at a time - don't overwhelm yourself.

- **Create structure and useful habits:** Try strategies and see what works for you. Create a routine and practice useful habits regularly.
- **Slow down:** Practice breathing and mindfulness techniques to increase your attention and focus on the task.
- **One thing at a time:** Focus on one question at a time, do not allow your brain to wander off or begin working on the next question before you finish the first one.
- **Don't watch the clock:** Take your time, work at a steady and productive pace.
- **Develop a positive self-talk habit:** The way you talk to yourself matters. Harsh self-criticism, self-doubt, and catastrophic predictions aren't helpful. If you are constantly thinking things like "I don't have time for this" and "I can't stand this", you will stress yourself out. Talking to yourself in a more realistic and compassionate manner will help you develop a healthier outlook. Optimistic and compassionate conversation can help you manage your emotions and take positive action.
- **Eating a balanced diet:** A poor diet can bring greater reactivity toward stress. Emotional eating and reaching for high-fat or high-sugar food can provide temporary sense of relief that adds to your long-term stress. Consuming a healthy diet can help you combat stress over the long haul.

- **Obtain social support:** Having supportive people in your life is the key to stress management. This may mean reaching out to your existing network or confiding in a family member or distant friend can provide you with the [social support](#) you need.

## University Support

WSU resources:

- **[Study, Money and Life Skills](#).**

The [Counselling Service](#) has developed some useful resources with relation to stress, time management, exam anxiety, perfectionism and maximising memory.

If your stress is creating barriers that may affect your study or you want support to optimise your study then the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or telephone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370 or sending an email to [counselling@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:counselling@westernsydney.edu.au). Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30 pm.

- **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email [disability@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:disability@westernsydney.edu.au) or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- **WSU [Student Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress

management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email [d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au).

- **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

- **Deferred Exam**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

- **Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

- **Leave of Absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant Census Date.

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the [Counselling Service](#) for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

## Community Support

Community resources:

- **[Lifeline](#).**

If you are really struggling during the night when completing assessments or feel most alone, contact [Lifeline](#) (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14** or, Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back!

- **Mental Health Telephone Access Line**

[Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#) - 1800 011 511

This Mental Health Line is staffed by mental health professionals that can help and provide you advice about your needs and discuss referrals to local mental health services. It is available to everyone in NSW and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



- **This Way Up**

[This Way Up](#) – Free stress management online program for adults

- **Therapist Aid**

[Therapist Aid](#) – Free evidence-based education and therapy tools on stress

- **Reach out Australia**

[Reach Out](#) Australia helps young people to recognise signs and symptoms of mental health issues, understand mental health concepts, and get guidance on how to seek help or build skills for coping and resilience. Our trusted self-help information, peer-support program and referral tools save lives by helping young people be well and stay well. Accessed by more than 2 million people in Australia each year, ReachOut is a free service that's available anytime and pretty much anywhere.

- **Fostering Resilience**

[Fostering resilience](#): Creating your own personal stress management plan

## Resources

- [Podcasts](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Apps](#)

### Podcasts

**'7 Ways Successful People Stay Calm at Work and Manage Stress More Effectively'**

In this podcast episode, stress is acknowledged as a strength and provides strategies on how to manage stress more effectively.

You can listen via [Apple](#) or [Spotify](#).

## **'8 Steps to Relieve Stress– The Mindset Mentor'**

This podcast episode by The Mindset Mentor aims to teach you 8 simple steps to relieve stress.

You can listen via [Apple](#) or [Spotify](#).

Videos

### **How stress affects your brain - Madhumita Murgia**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuyPuH9ojCE&t=56s>

### **How stress affects your body - Sharon Horesh Bergquist**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-t1Z5-oPtU>

## Does stress affect your memory? - Elizabeth Cox



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyg7lcU4g8E>

### Apps

- **[Talk Campus](#)**: There is a 24/7 support app called TalkCampus, which is free and available to download on iOS devices (App Store) and android devices (Google Play). WSU students can connect and talk with other students about anything.
- **[Smiling Mind](#)**: Smiling Mind offers a free app to help you practice your daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. There is a specific program on stress management and a program designed for students that I would recommend for you. Free and available on the app store and google play.
- **[Headspace](#)**: Learn to manage feelings and thoughts with the lifelong skill of everyday mindfulness, any time of the day. Free and available on the app store and google play.

- **[My Compass](#)**: myCompass is a free app that is available to download on iOS devices (App store) and android (Google play). Interactive self-help program designed to address mild to-moderate symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression through personalised treatments delivered entirely online.
- **[GPS for Soul](#)**: Allows you to measure stress levels and follow interactive mediation and breathing guides. Free and available only on the app store
- **[Breathe 2 Relax](#)**: provides instructions for deep breathing exercises that can help reduce stress. Free and available on the app store and google play.
- **[iBreathe](#)**: iBreathe app is free access and is available on all iOS devices (App store) and can be installed on your apple watch and iMessage to send to your friends. iBreathe helps you guide through deep breathing exercises and is simple and easy-to-use.

## Still struggling?

Stress can be challenging. Asking for help is an important step in managing these feelings and realising your full potential!

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU [Counselling Service](#) for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional. Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

**View a PDF version of this webpage [here](#).**

Resources:

[Psychology.Org - Stress](#)

[American Psychological Association - Stress effects on the body](#)

[Health Direct - Stress](#)

[Managing Stress](#)

[World Health Organisation – Doing What Matters in Times of Stress](#)

[30 Grounding Techniques to Quiet Distressing Thoughts](#)