



# Managing Stress

## Fact sheet for students

The University of Sheffield is making every effort to address your concerns about your academic progress. Where preparation for course work assignments, examinations or other forms of assessment have been disrupted, this will be taken into account by your departments. You will not be assessed on material which has not been covered.

Boards of examiners will be aware of any impact the industrial action and recent occupation has had upon your assessment and this will be taken into account.

The University has robust procedures in place to ensure that students' marks which contribute to a degree award are considered fairly at the Board of Examiners meeting and we have provision in the University's General Regulations to adjust marks if deemed appropriate.

### **Managing your stress when something is out of your control**

Often we have in our minds a view of what will happen in the future, when something happens that interrupts our plans we can go into what we call survival mode and this is usually triggered by fear. We can often 'Catastrophise' and imagine the worst possible scenario will happen. For thousands of years human beings and animals have had a survival response to threat and fear.

This is called the "Flight, Fight, Freeze" response. The body moves into a state where it can maximise our survival by either running, staying still or fighting. If this state continues for a longer period of time, it can turn into a state of anxiety for the person as they are continuously prepared to respond to threat.

**In order to stop the body from reacting to a potential threat over a long period of time, a number of techniques can be tried. Some of these can take a lot of practice but others you will feel benefit from in that moment.**

# Stress Reducer #1: Deep Breathing Techniques

Deep breathing techniques can be used quickly and easily by just about anyone, at any time and in any place. You can deep breathing when you're still in the middle of a stressful situation, and in doing so you can reverse your stress response and change your whole experience of a stressful situation.

## Introduction to Deep Breathing Exercise

Take a few slow, deep breaths and push your stomach out as your lungs fill with air, and naturally go in as the air leaves the lungs.

(This is called "Diaphragmic Breathing" and is more calming than "shallow breathing".)

Once your breathing is slowed and diaphragmic, breathe in for a longer time--for the count of six.

You can start with a count of three and gradually stretch it out.

Focus on the exhale

After you've practiced this a few times, introduce the last step: slowing your exhale.

## Practice Regularly

Just practice this a few times each day, and deep breathing will be another tool you can use when you are stressed. This is a great way of developing healthy stress management. As with many other stress management techniques, this one gets even better with practice. The more you practice your deep breathing, the more automatic it becomes, even in the face of stress.

Keep practice sessions short, you can start with just one or two minutes of practice per day and work your way up to longer sessions.

### Deep Breathing Techniques can help with the following symptoms:-

- **Chronic Stress Relief:**  
The danger of chronic stress comes from a body that's always under fire and a stress response that's constantly triggered. Breathing exercises can put your body back into equilibrium with the relaxation response.
- **Clearer Thinking:**  
When your stress response is triggered, some of your body's reactions make it more difficult to think clearly. When you're not thinking clearly, there's a cascade of additional stress that can be created as you may be more likely to make mistakes or fail to see creative solutions that could relieve stress.
- **Lower Overall Stress:**  
When you're already stressed, you may feel more emotionally vulnerable to additional stress. Using breathing exercises as a stress reducer can help you to feel less stressed overall, and therefore less reactive to future stressors.

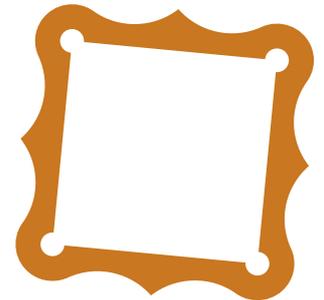
## Stress Reducer #2: Exercise

You may feel that you are too busy with a deadline or needing to focus on your academic work, but making time for exercise can be helpful in reducing stress.

- Outlet** Exercise provides you with a physical outlet for frustrations and stress.
- Distraction** Exercise can work as a distraction tool, to get you out of the environments that cause stress, and into more controlled environments that are more conducive to stress relief. (Nature, spin classes, surrounded by others who also want to relieve stress) Just getting out of a stressed space can do wonders for your mood.
- Natural High** Exercise also releases endorphins, which can help you feel good. Changing the physiological mix inside your body can be a very powerful stress reducer tool because it can change your whole experience and outlook.
- Long Term** Exercise can actually make you less reactive to stressors in the future.

## Stress Reducer #3: Re-framing your perspective

Re-framing is a way of seeing things from different perspectives and allowing ourselves to think more clearly. If we can grab hold of optimism, we can become less reactive to stress. One very important factor that determines how stressful a situation seems to be is whether it's perceived as a threat or a challenge.



Threats tend to trigger our stress responses and put us in a state of reduced creativity and greater tension. You can challenge your perceived sense of threat by analysing your thoughts and giving yourself credit.

**You may have found the recent events challenging and responded with the Flight, Fight, Freeze state. This is designed to help use manage a frightening or challenging situation.**

**When something positive or negative happens in your life, stop to analyse your thought process for a moment. Are you giving yourself due credit for making good things happen?**

**Often we start to focus on the negative when stressed.**

**Think of all the strengths you possess and the ways you contributed to make past positive events become successful. For example, if you did well in a test, don't just think of how great it is that you were prepared, but also think of how your intelligence and dedication played a role.**

## Stress Reducer #4: Practice Meditation and Mindfulness Regularly

Here at the University of Sheffield we have a Mindfulness group that runs on

**Wednesdays at 11am at 301 Glossop Road**

this is a drop in group and all are welcome.

We're just beginning to learn the amazing benefits of meditation. Mindfulness is a similar tool. Meditating or practising Mindfulness techniques for just a few minutes may put you in a calmer, present state, with your stress response returned back to pre-stress levels.

Those who meditate regularly become well-acquainted with a quiet part of themselves, and become adept in shifting their perspective from being heavily focused on the challenges they face, to being focused on the present moment.

When people stop worrying about the future and fearing what might happen, they can often come up with more creative solutions and confidence to carry them out. They begin to operate from a place of strength rather than from a stressed state.



## Stress Reducer #5: Basic self-care

Often when we are worried or stressed we struggle to sleep and also may lose track of time...

**Normal mealtime patterns can become skewed. Try to ensure that you get regular sleep and remember that this will give you more ability to focus.**

**Talking to a friend or relative that you trust can be very helpful. Just saying out loud what you are thinking or feeling can be a release and promote clarity of your thoughts.**

**Take regular breaks when revising, revision plans are very individual, try to remember time off can sometimes recharge your batteries.**

**Make a revision timetable?**

