

# Stress

Stress is a very common experience for students who are actively balancing the pressure of study with day-to-day life. Sometimes stress can be motivating and drive us to complete difficult tasks while at other times it can be debilitating and cause a negative or unpleasant experience. Generally when you hear people talk about stress, they are referring to the negative impact of stress in their life. When a person becomes over stressed it can impact on their functioning and way of coping. Stress affects everyone in different ways.

## Some things that may cause stress

- Assignments and exams
- Problems at uni or work
- Relationship problems
- Moving house or other significant changes
- Traumatic event
- Illness or disability
- Unrealistic expectations placed on you by yourself, friends, family or culture
- Financial pressures
- Social isolation and being away from family
- Anything that you may be finding difficult.

## Signs of stress

**Physical signs:** headaches, backaches, palpitations, breathlessness, upset stomach, tiredness, vague aches and pains, skin irritation or rashes, rapid weight gain or loss.

**Mental signs:** indecision, memory failing, loss of concentration, tunnel vision, bad dreams or nightmares, worrying, persistent negative thoughts, impaired judgement, hasty decisions.

**Psychological/emotional signs:** irritability, feeling tense, drained, no enthusiasm, feeling under attack, feeling nervous, anxious, sad, crying, low self esteem.

**Behavioural signs:** restlessness, loss of appetite or overeating, disturbed sleep or insomnia, drinking more alcohol, smoking more, avoiding other people.



# Stress

## How can I manage stress – RIGHT NOW?

Slow down and take some deep breaths when you notice yourself feeling stressed. Consciously slow everything down. Take some deep breaths and walk slower, speak slower, drive slower, drink and eat slower.

**Breathe:** You can use your breath to calm down. So to begin... breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of three. (You can say mentally to yourself in... two... three.) Hold your breath without straining for three counts, (hold... two... three). Breathe out slowly through your mouth saying 'relax' or 'let go' (breathe out... two... three... 'let go'). Continue breathing like this for a few minutes. In the beginning you may want to do one relaxation breath for every three normal breaths. If at any time you feel dizzy or uncomfortable, discontinue and allow the breath to return to normal.

When you hold the breath for a moment at the end of the inhalation you can mentally push the air to your extremities then breathe out slowly through the mouth. (It may help to visualise blowing the stress away.)

**Switch to soothe:** Notice the early signs of anxiety, fear or panic and know you can switch to soothe. Notice the breath and as you breathe in, focus on the sensations in the body and as you breathe out, mentally say 'I can deal with this' to yourself. Other helpful soothing words are 'I can be calm and breathe' (Stephanie Dowrick Choosing Happiness).

**Exercise:** Go for a walk or a run, let it out physically. This releases pent up energy. Any type of exercise will help relieve stress.

**Sleep:** Get enough sleep, go to bed on time. Have a bath, get a massage.

**Express yourself:** Write, draw or listen to music.

**Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine and other drugs:** Sometimes these make you feel better in the short term but they may also increase feelings of stress.

**Check your thinking:** Thoughts can influence the way you are feeling. Ask yourself 'is the way I am thinking about this helpful?' or 'is there another way to think about this situation?' Be optimistic, look for the positives in situations, keep things in perspective, welcome change and take control of the situation.

**Thought switching:** Actively channel your mind to alternative thoughts. You may want to visualise a happy memory or a place where you can feel totally relaxed

Other ideas: imagine your favourite place in nature; think of someone or something you are grateful for; tell yourself a story.

**Problem solve and set realistic goals:** Prioritise; set short term and long term goals; break things down into smaller steps. You could place categories on things like: 'must do', 'might do' and 'can wait'. When under pressure it can help to simplify things. Where possible, just focus on getting one thing done at a time. Try not to think too far ahead.

**Choices:** Say 'no' to events or commitments that make you feel overloaded. Set boundaries with friends and family if they are asking too much of you at the moment.

**Get help:** Talk to a professional about your stress and gain assistance with developing lifelong strategies to manage stress.

**For many students uni can be a very stressful time. Some students worry about exams, trying to do well, and getting on with other students. If you are experiencing stress while studying at SCU, don't wait for stress to get too bad. Make an appointment to see the free and confidential Student Counsellor.**

## Southern Cross University Student Health Service, Counselling

Lismore: 02 6626 9131

Coffs Harbour: 02 6659 3263

Gold Coast: 07 5589 3252

The Hotel School Sydney: 02 8249 3200

Southern Cross University Out of Hours

Crisis Line: 1300 782 676

All other areas: 1800 111 890

[scu.edu.au/studentssupportservices](http://scu.edu.au/studentssupportservices)

[www.scu.edu.au](http://www.scu.edu.au)