

# Managing Stress



Every day we experience situations which are potentially stressful. We feel 'stress' when our level of bodily arousal climbs too high for us to consider it 'normal'. A certain amount of arousal is good and helps us feel 'alive' and 'invigorated', but when this level of arousal is over-intensified, we feel stressed-out, anxious, and unable to think or cope rationally with the requirements of daily living.

It is useful for all of us to learn a variety of stress reduction techniques. The following techniques can produce a feeling of deep relaxation and bring physiological changes, such as slowing down of breathing and heart rate.

## **Breathe as deeply and as slowly as is comfortable for you.**

As you breathe in, imagine that you are breathing in and bringing relaxation to all parts of your body. As you breathe out, feel your body letting go of tension, becoming heavier, and warmer as you relax.

## **Remember a time and place where you felt really relaxed.**

Focus on where you were, whom you were with, the approximate time of day, any sights, sounds, smells you remember. It might be a beach you visited as a child ; a forest that you hiked through on your travels ; a favourite park or garden in your neighbourhood. If you don't remember such an experience, invent one. As you breathe out, feel again the pleasant sensation you experienced in that place.

## **When and where should you practise these techniques?**

- Set aside a regular time and place.
- Make this a quiet location where you will not be disturbed. Take the phone off the hook and ask the family or your house-mates not to interrupt you.
- Practise at least 20 minutes, twice a day if you have time and feel the need. But, if you have only 10 minutes, that is better than none at all.
- Avoid practicing immediately after eating.

By giving yourself this time, you will have greater energy for the people and the work in your life. Your mind will become clear and alert while your body will be calm and will enable you to do whatever needs to be done in a relaxed manner. If you are under a doctor's care or taking medication, discuss your relaxation program with your doctor.

## **What else can you do to help manage your stress level?**

**Exercise.** It's important to get away from study for a while and do something physical. This might include walking or cycling or something else you enjoy doing. Plan time for this in your study routine. It will increase the effectiveness of your study time.

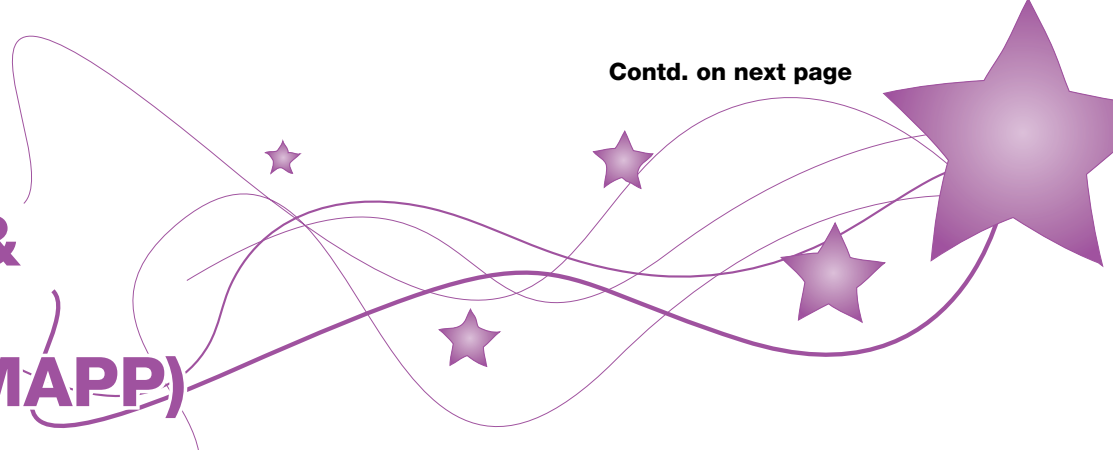
**Eat proper meals** containing a variety of foods from the fruit, vegetable, meat, cereal, and dairy product ranges.

**Drink sensible beverages.** When under pressure, many people increase their intake of caffeine in the form of coffee, tea or Coca Cola. Caffeine, if taken in sufficient amounts, will increase your heart rate, make you feel more 'hyped up' and interfere with your sleep patterns. Minimise the consumption of these stimulants.

## **Monitor the instructions you give yourself.**

When you hear the voice in your head telling you that you are just bound to fail, or make a mess of the task you are working on, firmly yell "Stop!". Take a few long, slow, deep relaxing breaths and recall something you have done well. Perhaps someone else told you it was done well, perhaps you felt satisfaction in yourself when you had accomplished the task. Remember how good you felt, in as vivid detail as you can, making the memory as real as you can. When you have the feeling of pleasure firmly back in place, continue with your task, knowing that you succeeded before and there is no reason why you shouldn't do so again.

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# Maximising Academic & Personal Potential (MAPP)

# Managing Stress



## **When you are actually in the exam room.**

Don't watch what other people are doing. If you feel panic rising, close your eyes and take several long deep, relaxing breaths, allow your body to relax, your mind to rest, ignore what others are doing and allow your own knowledge to surface as you take the pressure off for a moment or two.

If the worst happens and your mind goes blank and none of the questions make sense to you, apply the techniques described above. When you feel a little calmer, open your eyes and read the question again; it might make more sense. If you then write down, on a spare piece of paper, all the things you know about the subject, whether they are directly relevant to the question or not, the required pieces of information might then begin to surface and you can complete answering the topic.

## **Some other ways of dealing with stress**

Sharing problems with family, friends, a professional, such as a counsellor, a priest, or someone else you trust is always helpful. Talking problems through can take a lot of the anxiety out of them and can give you a different, more manageable perspective. Some other helpful ways to reduce stress include:

- Listening to your favourite music.
- Developing your artistic talents by drawing or painting your problems or solutions.
- Reading a book for enjoyment.
- Borrowing a relaxation tape from the library and giving yourself the time to enjoy using it.

**Above all, be kind and caring in regard to yourself. Behave towards yourself as you do towards your best and closest friend.**

**Assistance in this area and many others can be obtained from the RMIT Student Counselling Service.**

The RMIT Counselling Service offers free and confidential counselling to all RMIT students. Counsellors may help you to explore your concerns, both personal and academic.

Finally, should it be required, the counsellor can refer you to other staff, such as Careers Counsellors, or the Study and Learning Centre, who are able to provide you with additional professional assistance.

The Counselling Service can be contacted at the following locations between 9am and 5pm:

### **City Campus**

Building 43  
54 Cardigan Street  
9925 4365

### **Tivoli (Bourke St)**

Building 108  
Level 4  
9925 4365

### **Brunswick**

Building 514  
Level 2  
9925 4365

### **Bundoora**

Building 202  
Level 3  
9925 4365

You can also find further information and resources to assist you in your studies on our website at [www.rmit.edu.au/counselling](http://www.rmit.edu.au/counselling)

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