AdvantageResilience

Group Wellness Coaching

# Stress Less Workbook

**Mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder. It is a state of wellbeing in which one realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.**

## Foundation to Mental Wellbeing: The 5 Pillars

**Sleep:** Lack of sleep can negatively affect one's mental health. Go to bed and wakeup at the same time every day, even on weekends. Avoid all screens 60 minutes before bed to avoid brain stimulating blue light that's emitted from screens and dim the lights 1 - 2 hours before bed. Both of these steps will allow your body to produce melatonin - the sleep hormone. Are you sensitive to sounds? Try a white noise sound machine. Create a cool (60 - 67 degree) and dark environment (try blackout shades to reduce as much light as possible). Stop drinking caffeine after 12 p.m. Limit (or avoid) alcohol. Caffeine can increase feelings of anxiety. Avoid drinking alcohol at least 4 hours before bed. Not only can alcohol cause depression, alcohol turns into a stimulant as its processed in the body and often results in the 3 a.m wake up many experience. Create a relaxing bed time routine. Ideas include warm bath, meditation, deep breathing, reading, stretching or journaling.

**Hydrate:** In one 2018 study of over 3,000 adults, those who drank more water had a lower risk of anxiety and depression than those who drank less water. Though the connection between dehydration and depression was stronger, researchers found that anxiety was higher in those who didn't drink enough water. Being dehydrated throws off the delicate dopamine and serotonin balances in the brain, natural chemicals that can increase/affect depression and anxiety. One of the fastest and easiest ways to improve your mood is by drinking a glass (or two!) of water. Watch caffeine and alcohol intake - both dehydrate the body. **Try to drink between half an ounce and an ounce of water for each pound you weigh, every day**. For example, if you weigh 150 pounds, that would be 75 to 150 ounces of water a day.

**Eat More Plants:** 95% of serotonin is made in the gut. This neurotransmitter helps regulate sleep, pain and mood. The digestive system don't just help you digest food, but also guides emotions. Many studies have found that diets high in sugar not only increase inflammation, but also mood disorders including depression. **Eat a diet high in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains, and fish and seafood, and to contain only modest amounts of lean meats and dairy**. Research tells us that plant-based diets are associated with healthier mood states. The more fruits and vegetables people eat, the happier, less depressed, and more satisfied they are with their lives.

**Move Your Body:** Regular exercise can have a profoundly positive impact on depression, anxiety, and ADHD. It also relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and boosts your overall mood. Studies show that exercise can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication—but without the side-effects, of course. It relieves tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy, and enhances well-being through the release of endorphins. Exercise is a powerful depression fighter for several reasons. Most importantly, it promotes all kinds of changes in the brain, including neural growth, reduced inflammation, and new activity patterns that promote feelings of calm and well-being. Doing **30 minutes or more of exercise a day for three to five days a week** may significantly improve depression or anxiety symptoms. But as little as 10 to 15 minutes at a time may make a difference.

**Connection:** One landmark study showed that lack of social connection is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure. People who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression. Moreover, studies show they also have higher self-esteem, greater empathy for others, are more trusting and cooperative and, as a consequence, others are more open to trusting and cooperating with them. In other words, social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being. Setting a goal of calling two people each day, joining an online support group, or scheduling a coffee date with a friend.
**Connecting to something bigger than yourself:** If you feel connected to something larger than yourself, you're driven by the very highest level of achievement, greater than the people around you, whether that means God, spirituality, or a set of values you live by. In short, something that will outlast and outlive you.

**Choose 1 - 3 of the Mental Wellbeing Pillars below and set a goal that is relevant and important to YOU:**

**Sleep:** _____

**Hydrate:** _____

**Eat more plants:** _____

**Move your body:** _____

**Connection to others:** _____

**Connection to something bigger:** _____

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## How Stress Shows up in the Body

### BODY

headaches, muscle tension, frequent illness, fatigue, diarrhea, breathlessness, skin irritation

### MIND

Worrying, inability to concentrate, indecision, brain fog, negativity, sinical, nightmares

### EMOTIONS

Insecure/loss of confidence, irritability, depression, anger, apprehension, anxiousness

### BEHAVIOR

Over/under eating, drinking more, loss of sex drive, insomnia, restlessness, smoking more, accident prone, withdrawn

How does stress show up within YOU?

Body: _____

Emotions: _____

Mind: _____

Behavior: _____

"When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened."

– Winston Churchill

# Real-time Techniques: Using the Body to Work With The Mind

Activate Calm

helps with sleep & relaxation

**Activating Calm - Physiological Sigh/ Double Inhalation**

- Double inhale: Deep inhale then mini inhale (nose)
- 3x's longer exhale.
- Repeat 1 - 3x's to reduce stress.
- Repeat 10 - 15x's to help with sleep.

Activate Stress

helps with procrastination & energy

**Activating Energy/Stress - Tummo Breathing, Super Oxygenation Breathing, Wim Hoff Breathing, Owaken Breathwork**

- Inhale breath through nose, exhale through mouth (without pause)
- Effort on the inhale followed by soft, effortless exhale
- 10 breaths, hold at the bottom of the 10th exhale for 10 seconds.
- Complete 3 rounds.

Avoid if you're pregnant, have epilepsy or very high blood pressure. Do not drive while do this technique, and be seated when doing this breath.

**Combining mindfulness & breathing techniques.**

Pause for a moment. Which breath do you need more right now? An energizing breath or a calming breath?

It's important to practice these breathing techniques often so they become part of your regular tool-kit for working with your stress and energy levels. For one day, notice how you're feeling 4 times throughout the day.

**For one day: Jot down your energy level, which breath you used, and how you felt before/after.**

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# The Stress Cycle: How will you complete it?

**Breathing:** Deep, slow breaths down-regulate the stress response, especially when the exhalation is long and slow and goes all the way to the end of the breath so your belly contracts. Breathing is most effective when your stress isn't that high or when you just need to siphon off the very worst of the stress so you can get through a difficult situation.
**Try it:** Breathe in to a slow count of 5, hold that breath for 5, then exhale for a slow count of 10, and pause for another count of 5. Do that 3x's and then see how you feel.

**Moving:** Exercise not only releases feel-good chemicals called endorphins, but also boosts our mood and reduces stress while allowing us to get into flow. "Exercise has also been studied as an alternative treatment to the traditional antidepressant medications and cognitive-behavioral therapies used for depression. The Cochrane Review (the most world-renowned review of its kind) has produced a landmark meta-analysis of studies on exercise and depression. Twenty-three studies were rigorously selected amongst a pool of over 100 studies. Based on collective evidence, it was concluded that exercise has a 'large clinical impact' on depression," (www.pursuitofhappiness.org).
**Try it:** Do whatever you enjoy! Walk, bike, play with your kids.

**Connection:** Think positive social interaction. Casual but friendly social interaction is an external sign that the world is a safe place. People with more acquaintances are happier. Reassure your brain that the world is a safe, sane place, and not all people suck. It helps!
**Try it**: Next time you're at coffee shop or grocery store, offer a genuine compliment to an employee or another customer. Call a friend. Schedule a coffee date with a friend.

**Laughing:** Laughing together, and even just reminiscing about the times we've laughed together, increases relationship satisfaction. We mean belly laughs – deep, impolite, helpless laughter. When we laugh we use an ancient evolutionary system that mammals have evolved to make and maintain social bonds and regulate emotions.
**Try it:** Watch a comedy or funny videos with a friend or loved one.

"Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes...Including you."

– Anne Lamott

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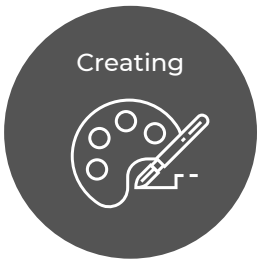
## The Stress Cycle: How will you complete it? (cont.)

**Affection:** Sometimes, a deeper connection with a loving presence is called for. Most often, this comes from a beloved person who likes, respects and trusts you, whom you like, respect and trust. It doesn't have to be physical affection (though physical affection is great). A warm hug in a safe and trusting context can do as much to help your body feel like it has escaped a threat as jogging a couple of miles, and it's a heck of a lot less sweaty.
**Try the "20 second hug"** while both of you are standing over your own centers of balance. This kind of hug can change your hormones, lower your blood pressure and heart rate, and improve mood. What matters is you feel the stress easing.

**Crying:** Have you had the experience of just barely making it inside your home – or bedroom – before you slam the door behind you and burst into tears for 10 minutes? Then you wipe your nose, sigh a big sigh and feel relieved from the weight of whatever made you cry? You may not have changed the situation that caused the stress, but you completed the cycle. **Try it:** Have a favorite tearjerker movie that makes you cry every time? Going through that emotion with the characters allows your body to go through it, too.




**Creative expression that sparks joy:** Engaging in creative activities today leads to more energy, excitement, and enthusiasm tomorrow.
**Try it:** Play your favorite sport or do an art project – including painting, sculpture, music, theater and storytelling in all forms – create a context that tolerates and even encourages big emotions. Arts of all kinds give us the chance to celebrate and move through our big emotions. Think about other things that boost your joy and practice it. Maybe that's taking time to create, cook, garden, dance, write, or organize your closet.

**How do you want to end your Stress Cycle? Choose 1 - 3 activities to try.**

**Breathing:** _____

**Moving:** _____

**Connection:** _____

**Laughter:** _____

**Affection:** _____

**Crying:** _____

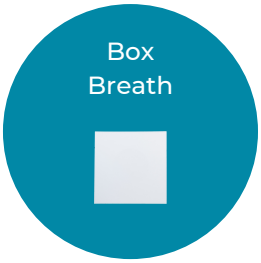
**Creating:** _____

# Stress Reduction Techniques: Reduce & Prevent Stress

**Come To Your Senses: Grounding into your body**

Inhale for 2 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds. Repeat. Next, mindfully notice the following:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste




**Box Breathing:**

- Inhale count of 4
- Hold count of 4
- Exhale count of 4
- Hold count of 4
- Repeat 3 - 4x's

**Body Scan:**

- While sitting or laying down, close your eyes. Bring awareness to the body breathing.
- Move your attention mindfully from your feet up toward your head noticing different sensations.
  - Sensations may include: buzzing, tingling, pressure, tightness, temperature or neutral. Tune in to what's present **without judgement**.
- Be curious and open to what you are noticing, investigating the sensations as fully as possible, and then intentionally release the focus of attention before shifting to the next area to explore.
- If you're attention wonders (and it will), simply bring it back to the body until you've finished the full body scan.
- At the end of this exploration of bodily sensations, spend a few moments to expand your attention to feeling your entire body breathing freely.

**Progressive Relaxation: Helpful for anxiety and insomnia**

- While inhaling, contract one muscle group (for example your upper thighs) for 5-10 seconds, then exhale and suddenly release the tension in that muscle group.
- Give yourself 10-20 seconds to relax, and then move on to the next muscle group (for example your buttocks).
- While releasing the tension, try to focus on the changes you feel when the muscle group is relaxed. Imagery may be helpful in conjunction with the release of tension, such as imagining that stressful feelings are flowing out of your body as you relax each muscle group.
- Work your way up the body contracting/relaxing muscle groups.

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# Stress Reduction Techniques: Reduce & Prevent Stress (cont.)

## Mantra Meditation

- Repeat a meaningless word (not an affirmation) in your mind silently.
- When your mind drifts off, gently return to the mantra
- Common mantras: Om, Ah-ham, So-hum
- Begin with 5 minutes, work up to 15-20 minutes twice a day

## Decluttering:

The outer space around you is a reflection of your inner self, your mind. Clutter can increase the feelings of stress (and increase cortisol - the stress hormone). Organization is not the best answer. Declutter items in your house/work space before you attempt to organize.

## Gratitude:

- **Good:** Gratitude Journal - Write down a few things you're grateful for every day
- **Better:** Read/watch a story of someone receiving help from someone else & recall this for 1 - 3 minutes a few times each week.
- **Best:** Write a letter/text/email to someone who has impacted your life and tell them that. Recall (or reread) specific conversations, emails, letters where someone has told you how YOU impacted their life.

## Digital Detoxing:

- **Create No Phone Zones:** May include the bedroom and kitchen during meals. Many studies have shown that people who keep phones in their bedrooms sleep more poorly.
- **Turn off Notifications**
- **Turn on Do Not Disturb Every Evening**
- **Take a Full Day Detox Weekly:** Weekends may work best for this. Can't do a full day? Do a half day or whatever works for your schedule.
- **Limit Scrolling to 20 Minutes Per Day:** Treat screen time as if it were a piece of candy that you occasionally allow yourself to indulge.
- **Remove Social Media Apps from Phone:** Try this for a period of time. Consider using your phone for calls and text messaging only for a period of time.
- **Track Your Usage:** See how much time you are spending on various apps, and set goals to reduce your time every week.

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# GOAL SETTING: Stress Reduction Techniques

Choose 1 - 3 of the Stress Reduction Techniques below and set a goal that is relevant and important to YOU:

Coming to our senses: _____

Box Breath: _____

Body Scan: _____

Progressive Relaxation: _____

Mantra Meditation: _____

Decluttering: _____

Gratitude: _____

Digital Detoxing: _____