



ACT Now Coaching Presents

Your Holistic Stress Guide



STRESS, WHAT IS IT?

The transactional stress model defines stress as “experienced when an individual faces a situation that is appraised as important and challenging and is perceived as exceeding one’s coping resources.”

Stress responses are adaptive - we respond to situations we perceive to be threatening by triggering our fight-or-flight mechanism. In fight-or-flight mode, our breathing shallows, pain perception drops, and heart rate increases. Remaining in this state long-term can make us feel on edge, anxious, burnt out, exhausted, and can even disrupt our G.I. system.

For this reason, recurrent and long-term stress can put us at a higher risk for developing physical and mental disorders. Managing stress is essential for maintaining overall well-being.

This guide provides helpful information, holistic tips, and space for self-reflection to help you identify, manage, and reprogram your stress responses.



STRESS SYMPTOMS

Stress can elicit a wide range of physical, emotional, and behavioral responses. Recognizing your stress responses and implementing effective stress management techniques can help mitigate these effects and promote overall well-being. Some of our typical responses to stress include:

PHYSICAL

Muscle tension - especially in head, neck, shoulders, and back

Increased heart rate

Fatigue

Insomnia

Stomach aches

EMOTIONAL

Anxiety

Racing thoughts

Irritability

Depression

Fear

BEHAVIORAL

Cognitive distortions (catastrophic thinking, rumination, negative thought patterns)

Procrastination

Overeating or not eating enough

Substance abuse

SOCIAL

Withdrawal/isolation

Unwilling to ask for support

Hostility in relationships

Difficulty communicating

STRESS RESPONSE

Identification

Use the spaces below or write on a separate piece of paper.

What does your stress response look like?

Do you immediately recognize when you start to have a stress response, or does it go unnoticed for a while?

Thinking & Self Talk

PHASE ONE

You're now aware of your own stress responses. Now ask yourself, what thoughts accompany them? What could be underneath these thoughts? Is there a conversation that needs to happen, or a short / long term change I need to make?

PHASE TWO

Depending on how you answered the previous questions, can you make any of those changes now? If not, can you practice acceptance for the time being?

PHASE THREE

Can you replace your stressful thoughts with something else? Consider the following questions:

What if it all works out for me?

What if it works out *even better* than I imagine it?

MINDSET SHIFT

Smart Stress Worksheet

Print this out or write your answers in a journal or mobile device.

S	Specify What am I stressed out about?	
M	Manage What about this situation is in my control?	
A	Accept What about this is out of my control? Can I accept it?	
R	Reprogram With what positive thoughts can I replace my negative ones?	
T	Take Stock What do I need in order to handle this better? What do I already have?	

Exercise

A new study on exercise found that physical activity is 1.5 times more effective at reducing mild-to-moderate symptoms of depression, psychological stress, and anxiety than medication or cognitive behavior therapy.

Shorter, moderate to high intensity workouts on a regular basis have been shown to improve overall health and stress levels.

Prolonged vigorous and high-intensity exercises have actually been shown to induce stress responses. Moderate intensity and low-impact workouts had the opposite effect.

Studies show that exercise in nature may be even more beneficial. Exercise in nature was found to improve the overall health of the microbiome-gut-brain axis (MGBA) - which has been shown to have a synergistic relationship with psychological stress: the MGBA produces neurochemicals that regulate cognitive function, including mood, stress, and behavior. Conversely, stress negatively affects the microbiome (microorganisms like bacteria that inhabit a particular site in the human body) and can even trigger changes in gut structure, potentially leading to the development of GI illnesses. This evidence suggests that balancing one may help with the other.

STRESS COPING TOOLS

Yoga

Yoga, somatics, and neuroscience all subscribe to the idea that the body stores emotions in certain areas. Stress is believed to be stored in the hips, neck, shoulders, hands, and feet. Where do you feel stress in your body? Is there another emotion attached to it?



Upward Salute:

Opens the chest, shoulders, and neck (frontside)



Child's Pose:

Releases the neck, back & hips (backside) and opens the heart



Forward Bend:

Releases the neck and shoulders. Provides lower back relief.

NERVOUS SYSTEM RESET

Breathwork

Controlled breathing techniques activate the body's relaxation response, calming the nervous system and reducing stress. Deep breathing increases oxygen to the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for regulating thought, action, and emotion.

Deep Belly Breathing

- 1** Place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen.
- 2** Inhale deeply through your nose, allowing your abdomen to rise as you fill your lungs.
- 3** Exhale slowly and completely through your mouth, allowing your abdomen to fall.
- 4** Focus on the rise and fall of your abdomen, keeping your chest relatively still.
- 5** Repeat for several breaths, gradually extending the duration of your inhalations & exhalations.

Tip: This is also practiced as a “cleansing breath” - great to begin your day with and for a quick reset as needed.

Alternate Nostril

- 1** Use your right thumb to close off your right nostril and inhale through your left nostril.
- 2** Close your left nostril with your right ring finger, release your right nostril, and exhale through it.
- 3** Repeat for several breaths.

Tip: Inhale through the left nostril only for relaxation. Inhale through the right nostril only for energy.

Box Breathing

- 1** Inhale through your nose for a count of 4.
- 2** Hold your breath for a 4 count of 4.
- 3** Exhale through your nose or mouth for a count of 4.
- 4** Pause and hold your breath for another count of 4.

Tip: Box breathing is especially helpful for anxiety. Try it during the day and/or right before bedtime.

Try setting an alarm in your phone for 3x a day - morning, afternoon, and evening. Hit snooze and perform one breathing exercise until the snooze alarm rings.

BONUS TIP

Listen to Music

Music has been proven to have transformative psychological effects. Next time you're faced with a stressful task, try listening to music. It has the ability to re-wire your perception of the task, from something unpleasant to something novel, fun, or agreeable.

Fun fact:

The song "Weightless" by Marconi Union has been shown to induce a 65% reduction in anxiety. In a study by The British Academy of Sound Therapy, the song was found to induce 6% more relaxation than a massage. It is so effective at calming the mind, that experts advise against listening to it while driving.

Want Extra Support?

Learning how to manage and respond to stress is essential for a successful life and career. A.C.T. Now Coaching offers effective, research-based tools and strategies for living a more relaxed, balanced and impactful life.

To sign up for a complimentary coaching call, please visit our [contact page](#).

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