

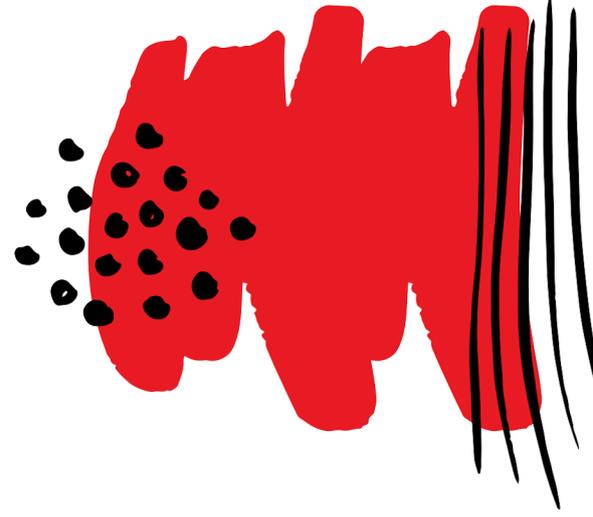
STRESS BUSTERS

Learn how to effectively manage your stress through 6 key stress busters.



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This toolkit is designed to help you learn about each of the key stress busters, while providing tips and tricks to help manage your stress and improve your overall health and wellness.



What is stress?

Stress is a **normal part of daily life**

and it can be defined as a natural response to situational pressures or demands [4]. Feeling stressed causes the body's hormones to be released which can make people sweat more, breathe quicker, tense their muscles and prepare to take action [4]! However, while small amounts of stress are normal and can be helpful (ex: to encourage one to start studying for a test), **long term stress can be harmful** [4]. This is because long term stress can affect numerous aspects of the body such as hormone regulation, the immune system, blood pressure, etc [14]. These changes are all associated with **chronic health conditions** and can lead to **mental health issues** as well [14]. Therefore, it is critical to find ways to properly manage stress and ensure that it is not having a long lasting effect on the body!



What are stress busters?

Stress busters are key resources and interventions that can regulate your stress response. The idea is that when you are feeling overwhelmed and stressed, implementing elements from **each of these 6 categories** of stress management can **mitigate the impact of stress on the body!**



For example, eating nutritious foods, being physically active, having a restful sleep, staying connected to your social supports, practicing mindfulness and getting mental health care are all ways to decrease stress and improve your overall health!

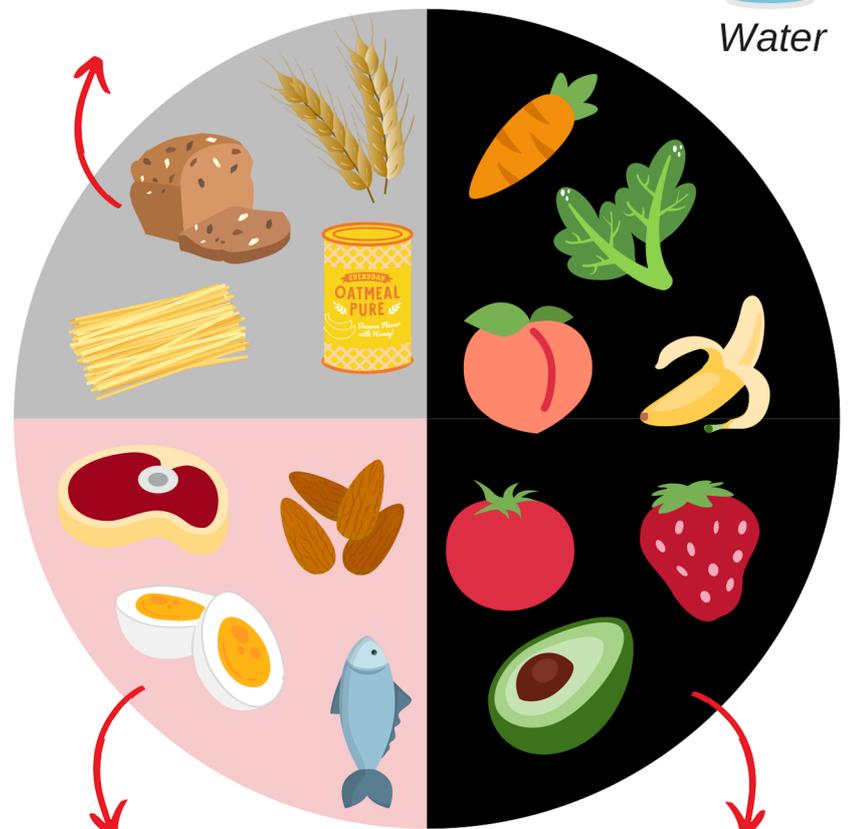
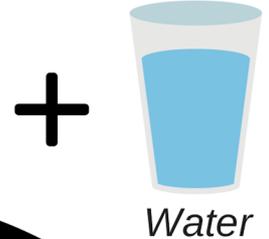
#1 - Balanced Nutrition

Stress can significantly impact one's eating habits. For instance, it can cause one to potentially overeat foods that are high in sugar and fat, or even under-eat, depending on the person and the nature of the stressor [2].

However, just as stress can affect nutrition, nutrition can also affect stress [2]! This means it is important when you are feeling stressed to balance your diet and focus on eating healthy and nutritious foods, rather than unhealthy cravings! Think of your plate as having 3 main sections, with fruits and vegetables taking up at least half of the plate. This balance is essential as studies have shown a direct association, specifically between eating fruits and vegetables and reduced levels of stress [5].

Also, remember to stick to regular mealtimes instead of snacking all day! Here are some resources to help plan your meals, as well as heathy recipes to make while on a budget!:

25%
Whole Grains



25%
Protein

50%
Fruits & Vegetables

Some examples of stress fighting foods to try incorporating into your meals include: eggs, whole grains, avocado, spinach, fish and nuts [7].



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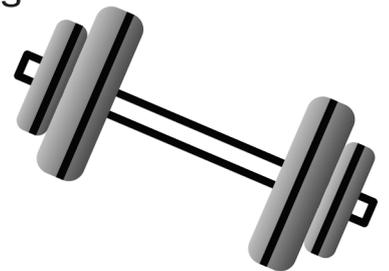
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#2 -Physical Activity

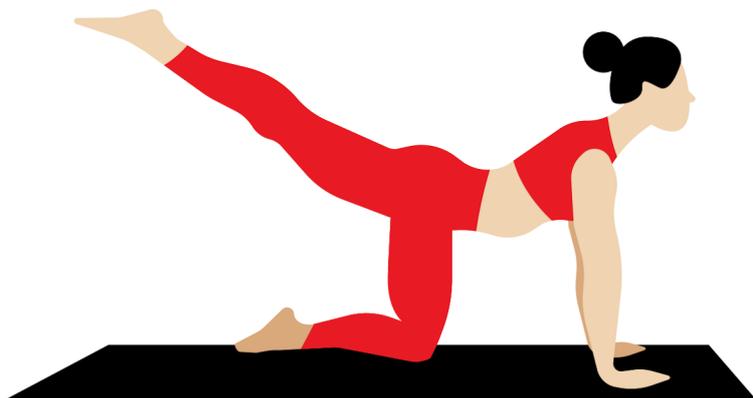
Physical activity has been shown to be **protective against the negative consequences of stress** [3]. This is because research has found that exercise releases **endorphins** which are the brain's feel-good neurotransmitters [6]. Therefore, by exercising regularly, this can significantly **improve your mood** and result in **emotional resilience** to stress [3]!

As a result, it is imperative to find ways to incorporate exercise into your daily routines. **The Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines** for adults ages 18-64 recommends each week [15]:

- at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activity
- several hours of light physical activity
- muscle strengthening activities at least twice a week



It is important to remember that in order to achieve stress relief and the overall health benefits of regular exercise, it does not necessarily have to be done at the gym. The key is to **get your body moving** by doing whatever works best for you, whether it is a dance party in your room, going for a walk, yoga exercises before bed, or even filming a TikTok dance! The goal is to be creative and move your body to help burn off the stress.



Be sure to check out these online resources which include **at-home workouts**, as well as **yoga exercises!**



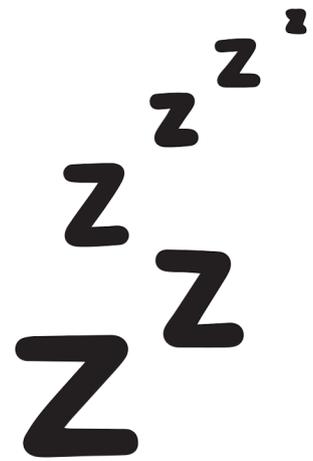
#3 - Quality Sleep

Sleep is a **powerful stress reducer**! Having a good night's sleep (at least **7-8 hours**) with consistent bed and wake up times can clear your mind and significantly reduce the burden of stress [15].

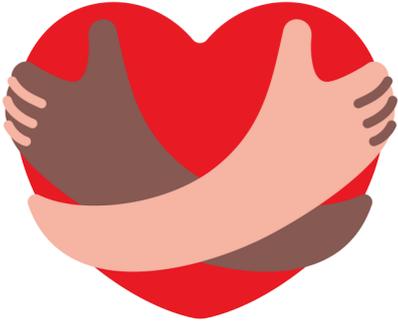
Sleep hygiene refers to the **behaviours that promote good sleep** [12]. Examples of **ways to practice good sleep hygiene** include:

- Maintaining a regular sleep routine
- Avoiding naps throughout the day
- Turning off electronics at least 30-60 minutes before bed
- Avoiding caffeinated drinks in the evening
- Having a comfortable sleeping space (ex: comfortable bedding, good temperature, no light, etc.)
- Not lying in bed awake - try listening to soft music or read a book to calm your mind before trying to fall asleep again

Sometimes getting a good night's sleep can be quite difficult if you are already feeling stressed! Thus, finding ways to **promote relaxation** is the key to ensure that sleep is not compromised. One tip to help promote relaxation is **sleep hypnosis videos**, which can help you relax and change the negative thoughts associated with sleep through hypnotherapy techniques [13]. Another method is to try **drinking tea** which can help to induce relaxation and improve sleep quality!



#4 - Supportive Relationships



Having **supportive relationships** with friends, family, co-workers, and even pets can help **significantly reduce stress levels** and improve overall health and well-being. This is because the hormone **oxytocin** is released when we bond with others, which helps to subdue the stress response [8].

The idea is that having that a social support network available to you can bring a **sense of security**, allowing one to feel resilient when dealing with a variety of stressors [8]. Social support can look differently in various situations, whether it is by reassuring someone of their worth (**emotional support**), giving advice (**informational support**) or even baking someone a cake (**tangible support**) [9]. No matter how you receive/give social support to others, having people to rely on can counteract the negative effects of stress.

Some ways to help **maintain** and **build healthy social connections**:

Take care of your current relationships:

- ask a friend to go for coffee
- tell a family member you love them
- ask a friend about their day

Don't be afraid to reach out

- plan a study date with someone new in your class
- call or text someone that you have lost contact with and let them know you're thinking about them

Avoid relationships that are no longer serving you

- put more focus into friendships that make you feel good about yourself



#5 - Mindfulness Activities

Mindfulness means to be **present and fully aware of what we are feeling and doing in the moment**. The way we do this is by paying attention to our thoughts, feelings, body sensations and surrounding environments [1]. Mindfulness brings about various positive psychological effects and has been proven to significantly **reduce our response to stress** by changing pathways in the brain that are associated with emotion and attention, counteracting the response to stressors [1].



Practicing mindfulness does not have to be for long! Even just taking **10 minutes** each day to check-in with yourself and how you're feeling in the moment, can greatly reduce your stress levels and provide numerous other health benefits as well [16].

Here are a few **ways to practice mindfulness**:

- write your thoughts in a daily journal, **online journal prompts** are a great way to help guide your thoughts
- self-guided & **guided mediation**
- **practicing gratitude**
- going a nature walk
- also try checking out **mindfulness apps** (which provide access to guided meditations, podcasts, etc.)



Next time you find yourself extremely stressed with your thoughts racing, try to calm yourself down and stay in the present moment using the **STOP** technique [11]:

- **S**top what you are doing and put things down for a moment
- **T**ake a breath
- **O**bserve your thoughts, feelings and emotions
- **P**roceed to do something that will support you (ex: going for a walk, talking to a friend, etc.)



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#6 - Mental Health Care



Mental health includes **emotional, psychological, and social well-being** [11]. It affects how we think, feel, act, make choices, and relate to others. Since long term and chronic stress can severely impact mental health and wellness, it is extremely important that we seek ways to support our mental health, which can **lower stress levels** [11].

Practicing self-care to support your mental health can look a lot like many of the other stress busting strategies that were mentioned above. For example: eating healthy, getting regular exercise, making sleep a priority, seeking social support, and practicing mindfulness through meditation. However, it is important to recognize that if these methods are not helping to relieve your stress or improve your overall mental health, other strategies such as talking to a professional, as well as online supports do exist to help care for your mental health.

Below are a few **mental health resources** that are **available at Carleton**:

individual (one-on-one) Support:

- [Carleton Counselling Services](#)
- [Counselling Connect](#).
- [Empower Me](#)

Workshops:

- [Here For You](#)
- [KORU Mindfulness](#).

Online Support

- [TAO Online Therapy](#)

Below is a checklist to help manage your stress levels by implementing aspects of each of the 6 stress-busting interventions into your daily routines!



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WEEKLY STRESS-BUSTING CHECKLIST

Check *at least 2 goals* that you are choosing for yourself this week from *each of the 6 stress busters* or write in new ones that work better for you!

BALANCED NUTRITION

- Drink water instead of juice with my meals
- Choose whole wheat bread instead of white bread
- Eat at least 5 vegetables and/or fruits a day
- Remember to eat 3 meals a day, rather than snacking only
- Other: _____

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Go for a walk at least 3 times this week
- Try a new online workout video
- Film a tiktok dance
- Play a new sport that I enjoy
- Other: _____

SLEEP QUALITY

- Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep each night
- Go to bed and wake up around the same time every day
- Don't drink caffeine after 5pm
- Turn off all electronics at least 30 minutes before bed
- Other: _____

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

- Make time to call or FaceTime a friend
- Spend quality time with family or a loved one
- Ask a friend to go for coffee
- Invite a new friend to study together
- Other: _____

MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES

- Follow a guided meditation video
- Practice breathing techniques when I feel stressed
- Write down at least 3 things a day that I am grateful for
- Check-in with myself twice a day to notice how I am feeling physically and emotionally
- Other: _____

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

- Plan at least one self-care activity each day
- Learn about the services that are available to me to support my mental health
- Ask for help if I feel I need extra support
- Other: _____

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