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Study Factsheet Series - No 8

Relaxation Skills and Strategies to Reduce Stress

Stress is common in students, as you try to juggle the demands of study, work, and the rest of your life. Stress results in an increase of adrenaline in your body, which can lead to sleep disturbances, increased anxiety, irritability and difficulty concentrating.

Here are some simple tips which can help you reduce the level of stress and maintain your focus:

- > **Exercise** - surprising to some, but exercise is one of the great stress busters. Find what works for you – a walk, jog, gym, sport, swim or yoga. If you don't have time, set aside just 20 minutes a few times a week or schedule a half hour on the weekends.
- > **Sleep and eat well** - Try to keep your sleeping and eating patterns as regular as possible. Get at least 7 hours sleep at night, try to go to bed and wake up at the same time most days. Eat healthy foods when you can.
- > **Make a list** - not everything needs to be done today. List your tasks in priority then take one at a time, breaking each one down to a list of small steps and crossing it off as you do it. Make timelines realistic.
- > **Be your own coach** - give yourself a pat on the back or a treat every time you earn it, such as hand in an assignment or study for a set period of time. Talk to yourself in an encouraging and reassuring way. If you can't think of what to say, ask yourself: what would I say to a friend in this situation?
- > **Keep your balance** - make a weekly plan and try to have time for socialising, exercising, and just doing nothing as well as studying and other commitments.
- > **Use your own experience** - think about what you have done in the past that has helped you to feel calm, and try it again now. Was it listening to music, having a bath, reading a non-study book or talking with a friend?

Do a relaxation exercise every day - try these and see which one you prefer:

- > **Counting breaths:** Count your breaths from 1 to 10. Allow yourself to feel passive, and with each count feel your body getting heavier, softer and the cells pulling down with gravity. As you breathe out, let the tension flow away.
- > **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Sit quietly in a comfortable position and close your eyes. Allow your muscles to relax deeply, beginning at your head and working your way down to the feet. Breathe naturally and say the word 'relax' (silently or out loud) as you breathe out.
- > **Go to your special place:** When you relax, imagine yourself in a very calming place – perhaps a beach with waves lapping gently, or a peaceful garden or sitting on a mountain. Go through your senses, thinking about what you can see, hear or feel while you are there.

- > **Imagine air as a cloud:** Focus on your breathing and slow it a little if it feels too fast. As it becomes calm and regular, imagine that the air comes to you as a cloud. It fills you and goes out. You may imagine the cloud to be a particular colour.
- > **Be the sky:** Imagine that you are the sky and your stresses are clouds which are floating past you. Watch them as they come and go.
- > **Affirmations:** Pick one or make up your own:
 - > *I am calm and relaxed, ready for anything.*
 - > *I have the power to handle this.*
 - > *This discomfort will pass...let it go.*

And remember, your CIT counsellor is there to support you in lowering your stress and coping with the demands of study. Give us a call or send an email to make an appointment.

Phone: **02 6207 3290**

Email: citcounselling@cit.edu.au

Want to make an appointment with CIT Student Support staff? Call our reception on **(02) 6207 3290**.

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