1. Practice **time management skills** to manage your academic schedule, social activities, and time for yourself.
2. Set and implement specific goals for yourself that will improve your mood and help you reduce stress. Start by implementing one small change at a time.
3. Avoid procrastination! Procrastination can create more mental and physical stress. If you have trouble staying on task, consider downloading apps that will help keep you off things that are distracting or moving the source of distraction (or yourself) until the task is done.
4. **Exercise** regularly. Physical activity can help you burn off the negative thoughts and energy generated by stress.
5. Practice good sleep habits to ensure that you are well-rested. Sleep deprivation can cause many physical and mental problems and can increase stress.
6. Try mindfulness meditation. Attend a guided meditation or try some YouTube meditations.
7. Limit (or eliminate) the use of stimulants like caffeine, which can elevate the stress response in your body.
8. Pace yourself throughout the day, taking regular breaks from work or other structured activities. During breaks from class, studying, or work, spend time walking outdoors, listen to music or just sit quietly, to clear and calm your mind.
9. Journal. Many people find journaling to be helpful for managing stress, understanding emotions, and making decisions and changes in their lives.
10. Realize that you have limits. Learn to work within your limits and set realistic expectations for yourself and others.
11. Recognize the role your own thoughts can play in causing you stress/distress. Challenge beliefs you may hold about yourself and your situation that may not be accurate. For example, do you continuously fall short of what you think you “should” accomplish? When our minds continuously feed us messages about what we “should” achieve, “ought” to be, or “mustn’t” do, we are setting ourselves up to fall short of goals that may be unrealistic, and to experience stress along the way.
12. Find humor in your life. Laughter can be a great tension reducer.
13. Seek the support of friends and family when you need to “vent” about situations that bring on stressful feelings. But make sure that you don’t focus exclusively on negative experiences; try to also think of at least three things that are going well for you, and share those experiences.

**Relaxation Techniques**

Research has shown that relaxation techniques are an effective way to reduce not only stress but many of the symptoms associated with mental illnesses. Try one or more of the following techniques for relaxing your mind and body and reducing the physical and psychological tension associated with stress. Take the time to experiment with these techniques to find out which ones work best for you.

**Breathing Exercise:** Place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your rib cage. Inhale slowly through your nose, drawing a deep breath into your lungs. Your chest should move only slightly, while your stomach rises, pushing your hand up. As you exhale, just let yourself go and imagine your entire body becoming loose and limp. It should take you twice as long to exhale as it does to inhale. Practice three times per day for two to three minutes.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Pay a “mental visit” to your muscles, stopping at each area of the body from head to toe (or toe to head), paying attention to individual areas where tension exists. As you pause at each area, tense and relax each muscle, trying to release unnecessary tension. Spend a few more minutes on those areas that seem to be holding the most tension.

**Visual (Guided) Imagery:** Imagine tension flowing out of your body from top to bottom. Visualize tension draining down your shoulders and arms and out through your fingertips into the air, down your thighs and legs, and out through the soles of your feet into the ground. It’s also helpful to take a mental “vacation,” imagining yourself in a pleasant, relaxing place such as on the beach or in the woods. This can be a place where you’ve been or a place you’d like to be. Take time to imagine the specific details of what you see, hear and feel in this place.

**WHAT IS STRESS?**

Stress is a part of everyday life and can be helpful. A fire alarm is intended to cause the stress that alerts you to avoid danger. The stress created by a deadline to finish a paper can motivate you to finish the assignment on time.

Your body reacts to stress by releasing hormones that help you cope with the situation, which in turn takes energy away from the other functions of your brain, like concentrating or taking action to complete a task/activity.

When experienced in excess, stress has the opposite effect. It can harm our emotional and physical health, and limit our ability to function at home, in school, and within relationships.

Since we are responsible for bringing about much of our own stress (internal), we are also equipped to do many things that can help us manage stress. Read on for more techniques and stress-reduction strategies.

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**Are you experiencing too much stress?**

**Common indicators:**
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased worrying
- Trouble completing assignments on time
- Not going to class
- Short temper or increased agitation
- Tension
- Headaches
- Tight muscles
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes in sleeping habits

People with mental illness are more likely to notice that their specific symptoms re-emerge or grow worse during stressful times. In many cases, stress can act as the “spark” that ignites a mental health episode. But this does not mean that every time you are busy or face a difficult challenge you will have a mental health episode.

Not everyone responds the same way to potentially stressful circumstances. For example, during final exams many students feel very overwhelmed and anxious, while others are able to keep their stress under control. If you, like many others, struggle with managing stress during difficult times, there are some helpful tips on this page that can help.

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**See reverse side for more information on these stress management ideas:**

- Avoid procrastination
- Goal setting
- Exercise
- Improving sleep habits
- Mindfulness/meditation activities
- Reduce caffeine and other stimulants
- Take breaks during the day
- Drink water!
- Journal
- Thought stopping
- Relaxation techniques such as breathing & muscle relaxation