

Stress busting

Identifying stress symptoms

First, identify what your stress symptoms or signals are. Everyone displays different symptoms of stress, but some common symptoms are listed below. Circle the symptoms that you personally experience when you feel stressed.

Physical	Emotional	Mental
Fatigue	Depression	Difficulty concentrating
Frequent colds	Anxiety	Boredom
Stomach-aches	Mood swings	Impaired memory
Sleeping problems	Irritability	Cynicism
Racing heart	Restlessness	Indecisiveness
Tight muscles	Isolation	Nightmares
Headaches	Loss of confidence	Negativity

Are there other symptoms you have experienced absent from the above list?

What do you think these symptoms are trying to tell you?

Identifying stressors

Now let's examine what is stressing you, ie, your stressors. List in the space below your current stressors:

Now, split this list into two categories. Firstly, list those things over which you have control, such as your filing system, class readings, household bills, etc.

Secondly, list those things over which you have little control such as ill health or family problems.

Have Control	Do Not Have Control

Knowing that we can control our stressors can make a big difference.

Over the next few weeks start crossing off the controllable stressors. Organise that filing system, blitz your class readings, and sort out your finances! While these activities may take some time initially, as you cross each one of the list you should find that your stress levels decrease and you'll end up with more productive time.

With your uncontrollable list, consider what could possibly be transferred to your other list. For example, a poor relationship with your tutor or supervisor is something that you may actually have control over, eg, be more assertive, discuss the problem, and find a solution.

Unfortunately, some stressors we really cannot control, such as illness in the family. If this is the case consider seeking advice, and/or taking on board some of the suggestions later in this exercise.

The following are some common sense tips to help keep the uncontrollable stressors at bay:

- Exercise
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Take care of yourself
- Incorporate rest breaks and time to yourself into your study schedule
- Be well prepared and organised
- Take a bath or shower to relieve stress
- Don't sweat the small stuff: <http://www.dontsweat.com>

Some further tips to help you 'bust stress' are listed below. Mark at least five of the tips to try out yourself over the next few weeks! There are spaces at the end to write in your own ideas.

	Get a hobby		Do one thing at a time – balance, don't juggle!
	Learn to relax		Do unpleasant tasks early in the day to get them over with
	Have a massage		Schedule realistic tasks each day
	Don't take on other people's stress		Make duplicates of all keys
	Make sure you take a lunch break		Reduce caffeine/alcohol consumption
	Go for a walk		Don't rely on your memory
	Learn to say 'no'		If you always rush in the morning, get up 15 min earlier
	Laugh!		Develop a weekly study schedule
	Get more rest		Count your blessings
	Learn to manage time more effectively		Do less. Simplify. Set priorities. Less is more!

Finally ...

If you're still having problems with stress, please talk to someone about it. The University of Auckland's Counselling services is a good place to seek further advice on managing stress.

www.auckland.ac.nz/counselling