

Reducing Stress and Anxiety

Stress is a response to something outside of the self (Ross 2018). For example, students may feel stress due to an upcoming exam, an essay deadline, or having too many things to do in a limited amount of time. People may also feel stress due to experiences of racism, sexism, transphobia, heterosexism, or homophobia; because of financial concerns; or due to work or family responsibilities. Anxiety, on the other hand, refers to internal psychological reactions to stress, often characterized by "persistent feelings of apprehension or dread" (Ross 2018). Here are a few strategies for minimizing stress and anxiety.

1) Plan

Since stress comes from external sources, taking direct action can help. At the beginning of the semester note each assignment due date, figure out how long each one will take to complete, and dedicate time in your schedule to completing them. Each week make note of the tasks you must complete for school, work, and home, and allot time in your schedule to complete them. If possible, break tasks into smaller, more manageable steps, what author Anne Lamott (1994) calls doing it "bird by bird", referring to the advice her father gave her younger brother when he was overwhelmed by writing a report about birds. Prioritize tasks by importance. If possible, allow extra time to complete a task and do not wait until the last minute. Avoid over-committing yourself. Try to find a balance between work, school, family, and self, including self-care. At the end of the day, focus on what you accomplished rather than what remains to be done.

2) Body

- **Exercise.** Get regular exercise. If you feel stressed or anxious, exercise can directly help in that moment. Take a walk and actively notice the world around you. Notice your breathing and the sound of your footsteps. Do some yoga. Play an active game.
- **Unbend.** Take a moment to square your shoulders, reach your hands up to the sky, bend to the left, the right, gently back, and then bend over at the hips and shake your arms out.
- **Eat.** Slowly. Pay attention to what you eat. Notice the way the food tastes. **Hungry?** Go to the ASI food pantry, University Union, Room 1246, <https://asi.csus.edu/asi-food-pantry>.
- **Sleep.** Make sure you leave time to sleep. Avoid caffeine later in the day if possible. Try to shut down screens an hour before bedtime. Try not to work or study in bed.
- **Breath.** Concentrate on your breath. Breathe deeply. Feel the breath entering your body. Imagine it exiting your body, taking with it all of the negative feelings.

3) Mind

- **Accept that you cannot control everything.**
- **Be mindful about your goals and your abilities.** Aim for your personal best rather than absolute perfection. Know your limits.
- **Be mindful of your attitude.** If you find yourself thinking negative thoughts, try to reframe the situation in a more positive way.
- **Write** about your feelings, emotions, frustrations, fears, and stressors. Or talk to a trusted friend.

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4) Get help, get connected

- **Spend time with people who bring you joy.**
- **Find a supportive community!** Join a student club; check out the PRIDE Center, Women's Center, or Multicultural Center; form a study group; join an intramural sport at The Well.
- **Counseling.** "If you are in crisis, please ask to meet with the urgent care clinician rather than scheduling an appointment. Please walk-in to the Urgent Care department at Student Health and Counseling Services, on the first floor of the Well." If you are not in crisis, you can make an appointment for student health and counseling services by calling 916-278-6461 or online at <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/>.
- **CARES** Crisis Assistance & Resource Education Support. "The Sacramento State CARES office provides support to students who are in crisis or experiencing unique challenges to their education. . We coordinate referrals to campus and community resources and offer follow-up support to address a variety of issues" including financial, food, housing, transportation, physical and mental health & wellness. University Union, 1st Floor, Room 1260, Mon - Fri, 8am - 5pm. Phone: (916) 278-5138, email: cares@csus.edu, Website: <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/>

Calm your mind: Relax your body.

Flame meditation. Light a candle and concentrating on the flame. Clear your mind of thoughts. If thoughts enter your mind, accept them without judgement, then let them pass from your mind.

Body meditation. Find a comfortable place to sit or lay, close your eyes, and attend to your body: first, listen to your breath; then starting at your feet, imagine all of the tension leaving your body: your toes, your feet, your ankles, your calves, your knees, your thighs, your buttocks, your belly and lower back, your torso, your shoulders, your arms, your wrists, your hands, your fingers, your neck, your head.

Breathing meditation. Using your thumb and ring finger: Close your left nostril and breath in slowly and deeply through the right nostril, then close your right nostril and breath out slowly through the left; then breath in through the left, and out through the right, again slowly and deeply. Repeat 10 times.

Sources

Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2020) <https://adaa.org>

Lamott, Anne (1994) *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions in Writing and Life*. Anchor Books; New York.

Ross, Franz (2018) USA Mental Health First Aid

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/external/2018/06/stress-vs-anxiety/>