



Dear WIC Employee:

Getting Started with Stress Management — Relax Your Way to Wellness will help you think about how stress affects your life and allow you to discover effective ways to manage your stress. The packet includes a stress worksheet, a tip sheet for managing stress, a “stress journal” page and a Stress Busters list.

Here is what you can do this month to control stress levels:

- 1** *Read* *Getting Started with Stress Management — Relax Your Way to Wellness*. Determine your main stressors. Find three new ways to cope with your stress while discovering ways to relax.
- 2** *Continue* your healthy eating and physical activity program. Making good food choices and taking time to be active are essential components of a stress-management plan.
- 3** *Participate* in a clinic-wide activity. Ask your clinic coordinator what is planned for everyone to try together.

Your clinic coordinator and The University of Texas Wellness Team are here to support you. Please tell them what you need to be successful.

Sincerely,

The University of Texas Wellness Team



Welcome to the third component of WIC Wellness Works: *Getting Started with Stress Management — Relax Your Way to Wellness*. Along the way you will learn how to identify your personal and work-related triggers for stress and ways to reduce them.

Stress management plays a big role in keeping you healthy and protecting you from many diseases and illnesses. Understanding and learning how to manage your stress can reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes, and stroke. As with any change you make in life, knowing where you are and where you're going are important.

What is stress?

Stress is a normal part of life and is required for growth, development and change. **Stress is defined as an emotional and physical reaction to a change in our environment.** Stress is our response to day-to-day challenges or major life events. It is an automatic response that has developed through years of evolution.

Stress can be both good and bad. Good stress can help us be aware of dangers and achieve our goals; it leaves us with feelings of exhilaration or excitement. Bad stress can cause fatigue, weaken our immune system, or damage our overall physical condition.

The physical effects of stress are real. Some people may experience a rapid or irregular heartbeat or chest pain. Stress may even lead to a heart attack or stroke. When your body is feeling run down, you are more susceptible to various illnesses, such as infections, flu, and colds adding to your overall feeling of being overloaded.





Signs of Stress

Your body cannot hide the signs of stress. Pay attention to these signs or changes in your life:

- *Appetite* — inability to eat or stop eating
- *Sleep patterns* — feeling sleepy or trouble sleeping
- *Attitude* — not getting much pleasure out of life
- *Moodiness* — often feeling irritable
- *Relationships* — not getting along with friends or family members
- *Physical* — not feeling well

What is Stressing You Out?

What ties *you* in knots may not bother someone else. What makes you feel tense could be the daily annoyances (work, traffic, or weather) or large-scale life situations (financial burdens, a sick family member, or changes in a relationship).

Look at the lists below. Circle the top stressors that have occurred in the last 12 months in your personal and work life. Take a minute to write down your own top stressors on the next page.

Top personal stressors

Health problems
Separation or divorce
Family problems
Single parenting
Death of a loved one
Child-care issues
Elder-care issues
Money problems

Name your own stressor:

Top work stressors

Overwork
Boredom
Losing a job
Conflict with a coworker or supervisor
Fear of layoffs or downsizing
Loneliness
Feeling of not making a difference
Lack of confidence in one's own abilities
Money problems

Name your own stressor:





List below those things that affect your life in a *major* way.

Top Two Stressful Situations In My Personal Life

1. _____
2. _____

Top Two Stressful Situations at Work

1. _____
2. _____

What is your stress response?

Check the items on the list below that apply to how you handle stress in your life

- I disregard it
- I avoid it
- I accept it because I know I can't change the situation
- I confront the problem and take direct action
- I seek help from friends, family, and people I trust
- I practice positive wellness behaviors (healthy eating, physical activity, etc. ...)
- I rely on medication, alcohol, and drugs to cope

Other: _____



General Tips for Managing Stress

Sometimes it is the small triggers in life that makes us feel stressed. For example, a particular coworker may have an annoying work style that is different from yours or the constant sound of noisy children can be stressful to you. Here are some helpful tips to ease that feeling.

✓ Check the items below that you are currently doing.

○ Circle the tips you want to integrate into your daily life.

Attitude Adjustment

- Take daily mental health breaks in a quiet space
- Think positively — make lemonade with life's lemons
- Blow bubbles at work and at home
- Listen to slow, easygoing music during my commute
- Plan one-on-one time with significant other



Time

- Go to bed earlier
- Get up earlier to make time for myself
- Decrease personal commitments temporarily
- Make a family "to do" list and ask everyone to help

Work

- Meet with my boss to discuss my job priorities
- Decorate my workstation with something bright and happy
- Leave work once my shift is over every day this week
- Listen to my favorite music on headphones at work



Physical Activity

- Exercise daily
- Take a kickboxing class
- Take a yoga class — even for one visit
- Go for a bike ride
- Kick a ball around with kids

Activities

- Visit a friend this week
- Read the comics and post my favorite at home or work
- Practice relaxation techniques such as controlled breathing
- Attend church
- Get a massage this week
- Find a good book and read it
- Plan a gathering of my best buddies and catch up
- Find a private place and have a good scream
- Rent a favorite movie



Healthy Eating

- Eat healthy foods throughout the day
- Increase my water consumption
- Eliminate caffeine for one week
- Eat 5 or more fruits or vegetables throughout the day



Ask yourself: “What would I do differently the next time I am faced with the same stressors?”

Stress Worksheet

Look back on page 4 at the top stressors you have identified. Select one major stressor from your *personal life* and one from *work* and break down the problem.

Personal

Stressful situation:

Specific stresses:

New coping options:

Work

Stressful situation:

Specific stresses:

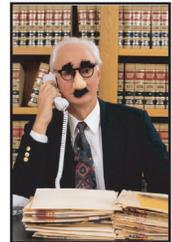
New coping options:





How to Add Humor and Playfulness to Your Life

Humor can be a powerful tool. It can lift your spirits, break the tension in a given moment, and help you make it through some serious times. Sometimes we forget to use humor when we need it the most. Take a moment and identify ways to add some fun to your life.



- ★ **Memory Recall:** Spend a few minutes remembering something that really made you laugh. It could be a good joke, an embarrassing moment, a clever commercial on TV, or whatever put a smile on your face. Now come up with a code word to say to yourself that will trigger that funny memory. When you are in the middle of something stressful, say that code word in your head and see if it relaxes you for a moment.

Situation: _____

Code word: _____

- ★ **Top Four Favorite Comedies:** Write down your top four favorite movies or TV shows that make you laugh. If you need ideas, visit your local video store and check out their comedy section. Don't forget that some video stores carry collections of TV comedies like *I Love Lucy*.

- ★ **Playtime:** List two fun things kids do and then go *do* them. Ideas include blowing bubbles, using a hula-hoop, making faces into a mirror, playing charades, etc.

- ★ **Top Three Favorite Books:** Write down your top three favorite funny books. This might be more challenging but, if you visit your library or a bookstore, you will find lots of ideas. Books by Erma Bombeck or Bill Cosby, or characters like Garfield or the Peanuts gang — even a collection of joke books can bring out some chuckles.



FIVE-MINUTE STRESS-BUSTERS

Most psychologists agree that some stress is good, providing you don't get more than you can handle. These exercises can help you handle the stress that's part of your busy and productive life.

WHEN I TRIED THIS, I FELT:		
	MENTALLY	PHYSICALLY
<p>Deep Breathing. Inhale deeply, feeling your stomach expand. Hold your breath for a few seconds, then slowly exhale, visualizing tension leaving your body.</p>		
<p>Meditation. Close your eyes and mentally follow your breathing. As you exhale, mentally repeat a simple or soothing word with each breath. Or visualize a peaceful scene. Do this for at least five minutes or, for more benefit, up to 30 minutes.</p>		
<p>Self-Talk. Replace negative mental responses to stress such as "I can't cope" with positive ones such as "Everything is going to work out" or "I know I can do it."</p>		
<p>Laugh. Just laugh out loud or do something that will make you laugh such as reading a joke book or watching a comedy on TV.</p>		
<p>Progressive Muscle Relaxation. While sitting or lying in a relaxed position, tense the muscles of your feet as much as you can; then relax them and notice the difference in feeling. Tense and relax the muscles in your legs, arms, stomach, back, neck and head, one region at a time. When finished, remain in a state of complete relaxation for a few minutes.</p>		
<p>Stretching. Sit in a chair with your upper body resting forward on your lap. Slowly roll up, starting at the base of your spine, until your back is straight. Stretch neck muscles by tilting your head to the right and slowly rolling your head down and to the left. Repeat a few times in both directions.</p>		
<p>Self-Massage. Sit with your shoulders relaxed. Use your right hand to massage your left shoulder and neck, working your way up to the scalp. Repeat, using the left hand for the right shoulder.</p>		