Stress Reduction Techniques: Relax, Get Centered and Improve Your Mindset

Leslie Pont, MA, NBC-HWC, NIH Wellness Program Manager
Tyler S. Smith, Associate Ombuds, NIH Ombuds Office
Dr. Alisa Turner Augustyn, Licensed Clinical Psychologist and NIH EAP Consultant
Let’s Share Experiences
Go to the Google Doc in the Chat
### What Is Stress?

#### The brain's response
- Interaction between you & your environment
- Perceived as threatening
  - Physical, emotional, behavioral responses

#### Triggers of stress
- Lack of sleep or exercise, illness
- Pressures: time, work, life changes, inability to say "no"
- Too much caffeine

### How Stress Manifests

- Not eating, or eating too much
- Feeling like you have no control
- Forgetfulness
- Headaches or back pain
- Lack of energy or focus
- Time management issues
- Trouble getting things done
- Short temper
- Poor self-esteem
- Trouble sleeping
- Upset stomach
What Stress Does to Your Brain

• When you sense danger, your brain tells your:
  – adrenal glands → release adrenaline
  – hypothalamus → excrete cortisol

• These hormones have an impact on your body
  – Increased heart rate
  – Pupils dilate
  – Digestion stops
  – Rapid breathing
Eustress vs. Distress

Performance Curve

Eustress
- Energetic
- Creative
- Stimulated
- Underachieving
- Boredom

Peak Performance

Distress
- Fatigue
- Distracted
- Exhaustion
- Disoriented
- Breakdown

increased stress

Performance Level

0

10

Copyright © 2009, GLC Pte Ltd
Identifying Your Stress

• Let’s explore how life situations and feelings trigger different degrees of perceived stress

• **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS):** Go to Google Sheet, go to “Ratings” tab to evaluate your perceived stress using the PSS Calculator.
Coping Skills to Manage Stress

MASTER STRESS

M: Maintain healthy eating
A: Avoid isolation
S: Stay informed, not obsessed
T: Talk to others
E: Engage in mindfulness
R: Relax, play, exercise
S: Start journaling
T: Take deep breaths
R: Rest and sleep well
E: Engage in gratitude
S: Step outside into nature
S: Seek support from friends, family, and professionals
Build Resilience to Manage Stress

• **What is resilience?**
  – Ability to cope with and recover from setbacks

• **A resilient person:**
  – Has strong coping skills
  – Utilizes their resources
  – Asks for help when needed
  – Uses skills & strengths to respond to life’s challenges
  – Regulates their emotions
  – Has an internal locus of control
  – Has good problem-solving skills
  – **Shows self-acceptance and self-compassion**
Types of Resilience

• **Physical Resilience**
  – How the body deals with change and recovers from physical demands, illnesses, and injuries.

• **Mental Resilience**
  – Ability to adapt to change and uncertainty

• **Emotional Resilience**
  – Able to regulate emotions during times of stress

• **Social/Community Resilience**
  – Ability of groups to recover from difficult situations.

• **Let’s Share:** Google sheet tab, “Question 2”


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Thought</th>
<th>More Helpful Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“It would be selfish to take a break from this work.”</td>
<td>“Taking an occasional break from this work will help me be more effective.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m okay, I’m fine, I’m not even tired.”</td>
<td>“Even though I feel fine I need to pace myself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The needs of those I’m supporting are more important than my own needs.”</td>
<td>“I can better care for others if I also attend to my own needs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m not doing enough.”</td>
<td>“I’m doing enough.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I can contribute the most by working all the time.”</td>
<td>“I can contribute the most by pacing myself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t want anyone to know how affected I am.”</td>
<td>“Letting someone know how affected I am can help me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Only I can do x, y, and z.”</td>
<td>“I can trust that others can fill in when it’s necessary.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• **What is Mindfulness?**
  – **The practice of** being present, non-judgmental.
  – **The quality of** being fully engaged with whatever you are doing.
  – **Practicing mindfulness** involves:
    • Breathing methods
    • Guided imagery, and/or
    • Other practices to relax the body and mind,
    • And help reduce stress
• What is a Growth Mindset?
  - A growth mindset comes from the belief that your abilities and intelligence are things that can develop and grow with effort.
Growth mindset

• According to Carol S. Dweck’s (PhD) research, people who have a growth mindset reach much higher levels of achievement and success.

VS

Fixed Mindset

• A fixed mindset comes from the belief that your abilities are unchanging, or you cannot get better at something.
# Pleasant Experience Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was the experience?</th>
<th>Were you aware of the pleasant feelings while the experience was happening?</th>
<th>How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?</th>
<th>What moods, feelings, &amp; thoughts accompanied this experience?</th>
<th>What thoughts are in your mind now as you write about this experience?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Go to the Google sheet for a copy!
What exactly causes you to switch from open to closed and then open again?
Reframe Your Thoughts to Manage Communication

- Defuses inflammatory language
- Recasts negatives into neutral or positive statements
- Refocuses the attention
- Acknowledges strong emotions in a productive way
- Translates communication so that it is more likely to be heard
- Recontextualizes or provides a broader perspective

1. Truth
2. Accusations
3. Blame
4. Judgments, Characterizations
5. Defending
6. Certainty
7. Past
8. Loss
9. Positions

1. Different Stories/Perspectives
2. Intent and Impact
3. Contribution
4. Feelings
5. Explaining
6. Curiosity
7. Future
8. Opportunity
9. Interests
Mindful communication involves applying principles of mindfulness to the way we correspond with others.

Principles include setting an intention, being fully present, remaining open and non-judgmental, and relating to others with empathy.
Mindful Listening

Let’s practice – go to Google Sheet Q3

Instead of...

- Multi-tasking
- Interrupting or defending
- Finishing sentences
- Judging what someone is saying before they finish
- Planning/rehearsing your response
- Only focusing on specific things (or wrong-spotting)
- Comparing your thoughts and experiences to others
- Ignoring your own "cues"

Try...

- Being fully present
- Bringing openness and curiosity to the interaction
- Giving people space
- Checking your intentions for interrupting
- Paying attention to internal thoughts/reactions
- Watching body language and listening for tone
- Reflecting back what you heard and asking questions
Mindful Speaking

Instead of...

- Rushing to share your thoughts (or shutting down)
- Reacting instead of responding
- Disconnecting from body/emotions
- Pushing your own agenda
- Trying to prove a point (or “win”)
- Using disclaimers
- Rationalizing and repeating
- Making potentially hurtful comments

Try...

- Taking a pause
- Taking the other person/people into consideration
- Acknowledging emotions and what they signal
- Being clear about your intentions
- Speaking from your own perspective (using “I” statements)
- Being concise, direct, and specific
- Communicating to clarify and learn (ask questions)
- Paying attention to the reaction of others
Mindfulness Loop

BASIC MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

start here:
set intention to pay attention to anchor

focus attention on the breath (or sound, or body)

realize mind has wandered

mind wanders -- memories, planning, worrying, etc.
4 MUST-KNOW FACTS ABOUT MEDITATION

It Increases GRAY MATTER

Brain scans of participants in a mediation study by Yale, Harvard and Mass General Hospital showed increases of gray matter in parts of the brain, and that meditation may slow natural brain deterioration.

The parts of the brain with increased gray matter thickness are related to attention and processing sensory input.

Source: https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2011/01/eight-weeks-to-a-better-brain/
Let’s Practice! Zones of Tolerance

Too Much, Excessive Risk

Awake, Challenge & Okayness

Zoned Out, Automatic, Falling Asleep
NIH EAP is a free, voluntary and confidential program that helps employees work through challenges that may adversely affect job performance, health, or personal well-being.

EAP Contact Information:

301-496-3164
www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/eap
NIH MAIN CAMPUS
BUILDING 31, ROOM B2B57
Role of NIH Ombuds

- The Ombuds Office is a resource for all members of the NIH community, including contractors and trainees.
- We provide support to people working through conflict at work.
- We are proactive, too; we help people gain conflict resiliency skills and mitigate common sources of conflict.
- We provide information about other support services, reporting mechanisms, and formal processes.
- Our services are free and there is no limit to how often you access it.

The Ombuds Office is...

- Confidential
- Impartial
- Informal
- Independent
- Voluntary

301-594-7231
ombudsman@nih.gov
ombudsman.nih.gov
Wellness at NIH Resources

Designed to help NIH employees support comprehensive well-being:
work, family & community

NEW! NIH Joins the Mindful FED Program.
Video: https://shorturl.at/wDJNQ
Link to flyer: https://go.nih.gov/FjU0CIH

Upcoming Campus Events – get outside with NIH!
• 16th Annual Take a Hike Day - all campuses – June 6
• Safety, Health and Wellness Day – Bethesda & hybrid sessions – June 18
Questions?
Comments?
Feel free to unmute or use the chat

Thank you!