



HEALTH EDUCATION  
AND WELLNESS

TAKE  
A

DEEP  
BREATH

SURVIVAL GUIDE TO STRESS

**What is stress? ..... 3**

**Common sources of stress ..... 4**

**Activity 1: Where are you on the timeline? ..... 6**

**Academic stress..... 8**

**Activity 2: Stop and breathe..... 10**

**Symptoms of stress..... 12**

**Stress and performance ..... 13**

**Managing stress ..... 15**

**Activity 3: Guided imagery ..... 16**

**Activity 4: Working through your stress..... 18**

**Finding help ..... 20**

**Resources and helpful websites..... 21**

The information offered here is not meant to replace the advice of a physician or other medical personnel. If you have particular concerns, contact your physician.

Developed for you by the  
**Center for Health  
 Education & Wellness**  
 1800 Volunteer Blvd., Suite 201  
 Knoxville, TN 37996-3104  
 865-974-5725  
[wellness.utk.edu](http://wellness.utk.edu)

**WHAT IS STRESS?**

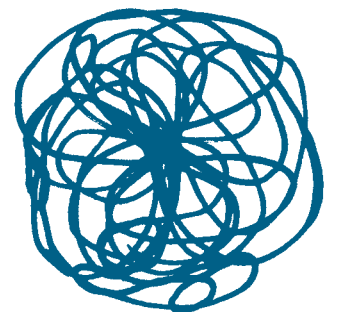
Stress is a natural part of life. In small amounts, stress is actually good— it pushes you to work hard and do your best, and it heightens your senses and reaction times. Without stress, we would never reach our full potential. However, long-term or overwhelming stress can be a barrier to success.

In addition to academic challenges, university life brings new sources of stress—moving to a new area, being separated from friends and family, establishing a new social network, managing your finances, and falling in and out of love. It also brings the opportunity to learn new ways to manage stress.

Our goals are to assist you at every step:

- Identifying the source of your stress
- Creating a plan to manage your stress
- Knowing how to ask for help

Remember, we are all Volunteers, and we look out for each other.



## COMMON SOURCES OF STRESS

Chances are you've been subject to stress in several (and maybe all) of these areas in the course of your college experience:

**Moving** Especially if you've never lived away from home or been separated from your parents, extended family, or hometown friends, you may have feelings of being disconnected or alone as you adjust to college.

**Finances** Maybe you are having to pay for college on your own or with little assistance from your family. Even if you're fortunate enough to have college paid for, there are still expenses to manage for books, food, and entertainment.

**Friendships** Making new friends is important, but it can be overwhelming.

**Housing** Living on campus is quite an adjustment, especially if you have a roommate. For many students, it's their first time sharing a room, and adjusting to daily life with someone who may have different values, beliefs, and attitudes can be difficult. Conflicting lifestyles can lead to problems.

**Pressure** The transition to college life can be stressful. Academically and socially, you have to make choices around what is appropriate for you in new circumstances. Remember that you are your own individual and that pressure from others does not have to dictate your college experience.

**Dating and sex** Dating in college is different than in high school. Relationships often seem more casual, which can make it harder to sort out expectations for new relationships. Are they committed or not committed, exclusive or not exclusive? Just like the pressures to use alcohol or drugs, sexual pressures in friendship and dating relationships may increase, and you may feel pressured to become sexually involved with another person.

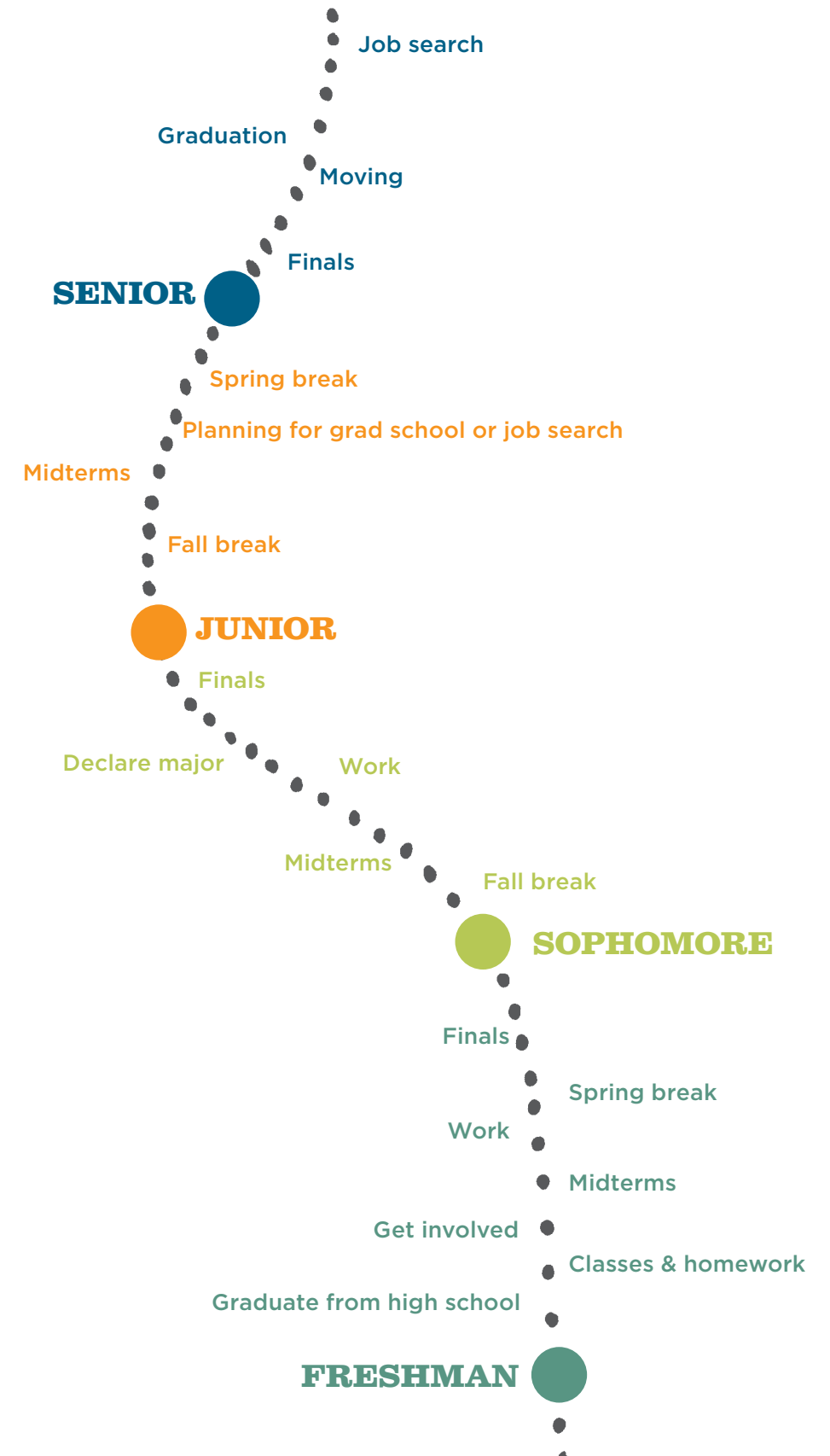
**Eating and nutrition** Learning to juggle coursework, a job, and a social life leaves little time for regular balanced meals. It's easy to grab a bite when and where you can—which often means eating fried, high-fat, or sugary foods.

**Social organizations** Many organizations involve an application, interview, or rush, which may be a source of nervousness and stress. Also, if you are not accepted into the organization of your choice you may feel lost.

**Sleep** You may find yourself sleeping less because of late nights studying or spending time with friends. Loss of a good night's sleep can leave you feeling tired, stressed, and frustrated—which in turn affects your study habits, school performance, and health.

**Time management** Learning to manage schedules and deadlines without parental support can be difficult—and procrastination, a common temptation, compounds the issue. It's challenging to maintain a balanced schedule of studying, class, and activities.

As you move through your college experience, some sources of potential stress stay the same while others change. It's important to be prepared for the path ahead.





## ACADEMIC STRESS: FROM THE UT STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER

You might expect a certain amount of stress at UT—life at a top research university isn't supposed to be easy. Still, you can reduce and manage your academic stress by increasing your skills in two critical areas: time management and test anxiety.

### Time Management

It's easy to see the connection between time and stress. We only have so much time, and the academic load here is challenging. This forces us—perhaps for the first time—to learn to use time with priority, purpose, and productivity. At the Student Success Center, time management tops the list of reasons why students come see our academic coaches.

### Goals

Time management begins with knowing what you want to do. If you have established clear goals, you can effectively manage even a busy schedule; if you do not have goals, you will often struggle with time management.

Of course, many talented students have trouble setting goals and picturing a life path. Sound familiar? A conversation with someone at UT's Center for Career Development can lead to a clearer vision for your future, more purpose in your current work, and less stress all around.

### Structure

The transition to college is difficult because the best aspect of it—a sudden increase in personal freedom—is also the most difficult to manage. In high school, life was structured; when the bell rang at the end of fourth period, you went to fifth period. If you find yourself longing for simpler days, that's probably a longing for structure—and it's relatively easy to add structure to your schedule. Here are some ideas:

- Explore your weekly routine, identifying realistic windows for structured study time in blocks no more than 60 to 90 minutes long.



- Remember, not every week is the same. Your daily task list gives you clarity, purpose, and power over that pressing feeling of having too much to do and too little time.
- Periodically expand your scope to view the entire semester. Review the syllabus for each class and plug key assignments into your calendar. With a clear view of the challenges on your academic horizon, you'll be able to make adjustments during high-demand academic weeks.
- Shift between weekly, daily, and semester-long views to keep yourself situated—resulting in more control, an increase in realistic structure, and a definite decrease in stress.

### Social Structure

Let's say you've scheduled reading for your history class every Tuesday evening from 6:30 to 8:00. The first few weeks of the semester you've successfully kept your promise to yourself, but then a friend says, "Hey, the big game is Tuesday at seven!" It's powerfully tempting. Your friend then adds, "The party doesn't start until you arrive!"—a statement as true as it is persuasive. What can you do to balance both worlds?

- Keep your promise to yourself first. Respect your own time, and the larger world will come to respect it too.
- Seek creative solutions, such as rearranging your schedule so you study from 4:30 to 6:00 on that particular Tuesday, always putting academic business first.
- Knowing what to say is half the battle, so develop language ahead of time for these

situations. The more often you say your own version of "Sorry, but I have to study tonight," the more fluid and empowering it becomes.

### Overload

Are you taking on too much? If you had a close friend who was trying to juggle the combination of financial, emotional, and academic pressures that you're currently facing, would you advise them to lighten the load a bit? If so, take that advice for yourself, right now. Meet with your academic advisor to explore options for the present and future semesters.

### Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is best managed with a combination of anxiety control and test preparation. For anxiety control, see the tips provided in the rest of this booklet, and schedule a visit to the Student Counseling Center if you need additional help. For test preparation, it's important to set proper expectations:

### Time

Do not underestimate the amount of time it takes to be truly prepared for tests and exams. Deep, layered study time can be achieved only with proper planning. This means keeping up with material and assignments in the weeks leading to an exam, not trying to catch up a day or two before.

### Setting

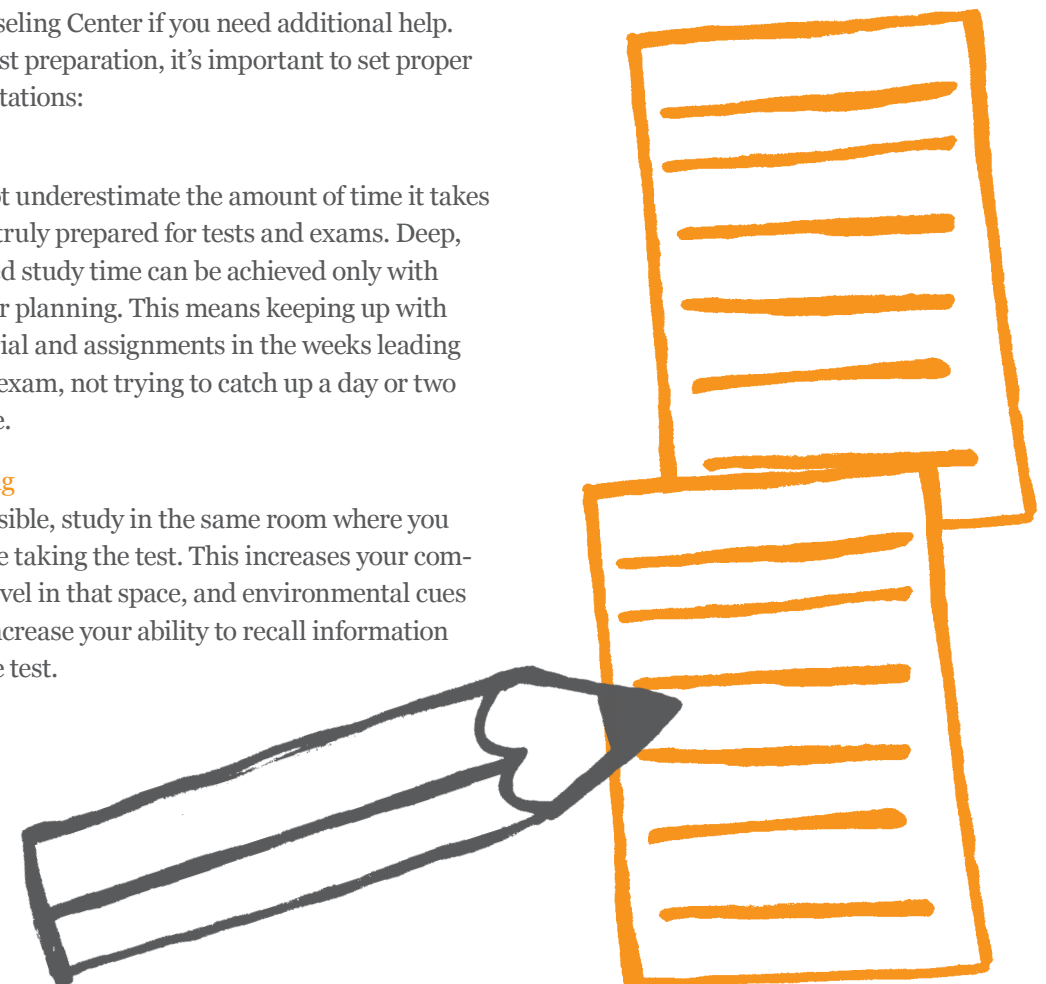
If possible, study in the same room where you will be taking the test. This increases your comfort level in that space, and environmental cues can increase your ability to recall information on the test.

### The Test Itself

Communicate with instructors and teaching assistants to accurately predict the test's scope (readings, lectures) and format (essay, case study). After the test, communication is just as vital, enabling you to learn from your performance and adjust your behavior and strategies for future tests.

### Process

The best way to learn the material is often to teach it. If you are studying in a group, teach key portions of the material to the rest of the group. You'll reduce your own anxiety as you move from acquaintance with the material to familiarity and then to immersion and ownership. Again, it takes time to learn deeply. Anything less, and your anxiety will understandably be heightened.



# Activity Two

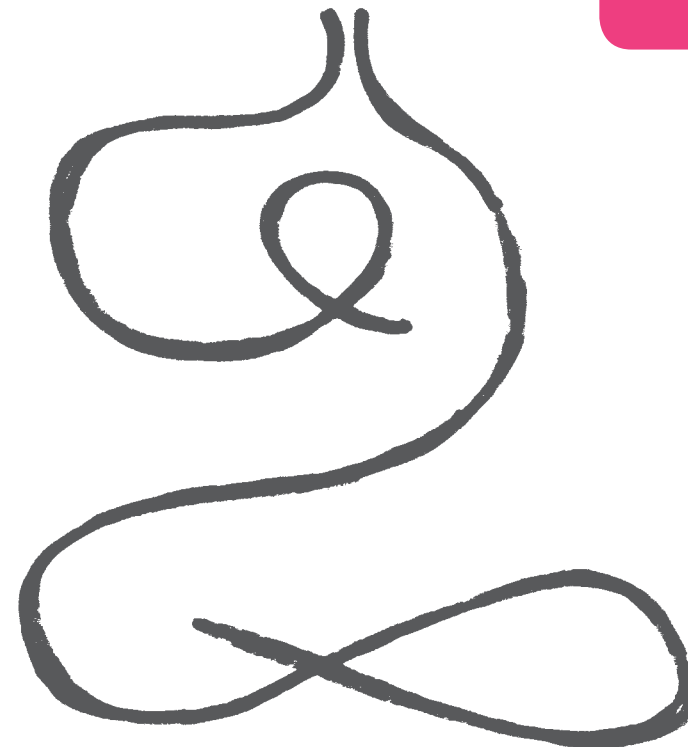


STOP AND BREATHE

Take a few minutes to disconnect from stress and take advantage of the calming effect that deep slow breathing can have on your mind and body. You can do this activity with your eyes either open or closed. Once you learn the technique you can do it anywhere—it's a great way to regain perspective and start fresh.

If you find this exercise helpful, you can engage in it as often as you like. If you find it to be challenging and would like some additional help learning to engage in relaxation exercises, you may want to call the Student Counseling Center or visit their Feel Better Fast workshop—a free hour-long program open to any student who wishes to drop in.

1. Sit comfortably in your chair, both feet on the ground.
2. Breathe slowly and deeply in through your nose until your lungs are full. Count the seconds if you wish.
3. Once your lungs are filled with air, hold your breath for a brief second.
4. Slowly exhale through your mouth until you have emptied your lungs completely. Count the seconds if you wish.
5. Continue this practice until you feel sufficiently at ease.
6. If you become distracted by your thoughts or something around you, simply let it go and return to your breathing.





## SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

### Physical Symptoms

Stomach problems, ulcers, muscular tension, high blood pressure, difficulty sleeping, fatigue, backaches, headaches, chest pains, acne, hair loss, and an increase in general illnesses are all possible signs of stress.

### Loss of Interest in Activities

Students who are stressed may stop participating in activities that used to bring them great pleasure. They may begin spending a lot of time online, watching TV, or sleeping instead of doing something they enjoy.

### Altered Eating Habits

When students are under stress, their eating patterns often change. Some overeat while others lose their appetites.

### Emotional and Cognitive Changes

Students who are under stress may feel nervous, depressed, angry, fearful, anxious, or overwhelmed. They may experience mood swings, forgetfulness, unwanted or repetitive thoughts, and difficulty concentrating.

### Altered Sleep Patterns

Stress sometimes leads to difficulty falling or staying asleep—or trouble staying awake.

### Relationship Problems

Stress-induced impatience and anxiety can cause problems in relationships with friends, family members, professors, and employers.

### “Is Life Worth Living?” Attitude

Students may become so frustrated with school, relationships, and extracurricular activities that they begin to question why they’re going to school and why they’re involved with the people and things around them. Nothing feels worth the effort.

### Increased Use of Cigarettes, Alcohol, and Other Drugs

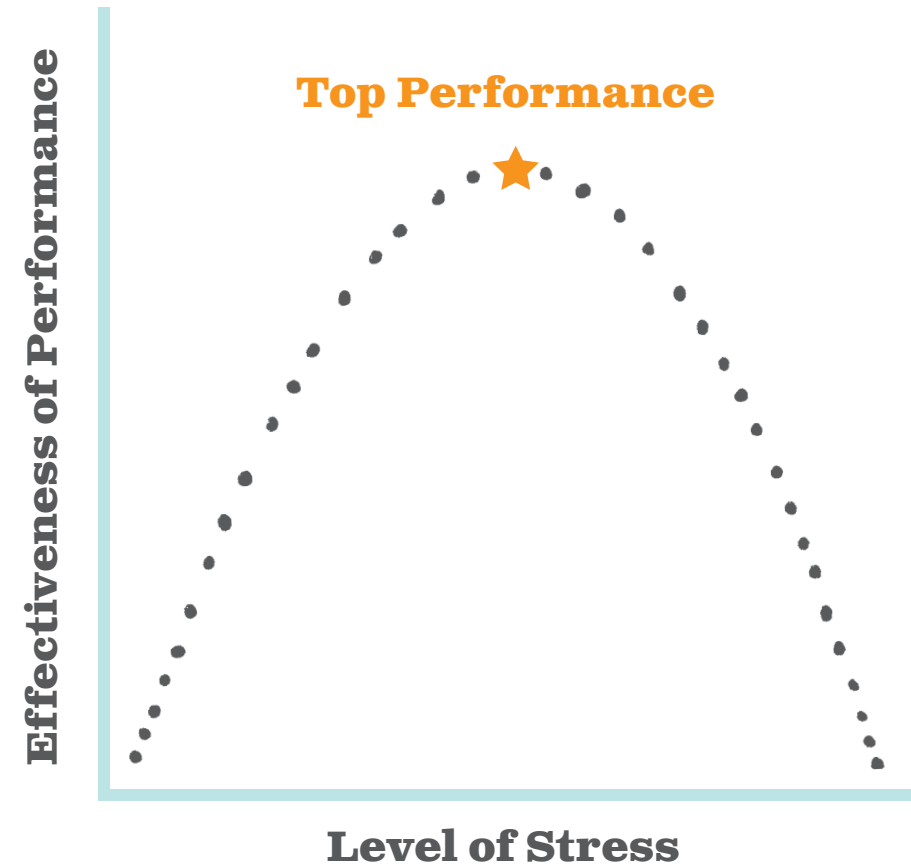
Students experiencing stress tend to increase their use of these substances—which, in turn, contributes to increased stress and depression.

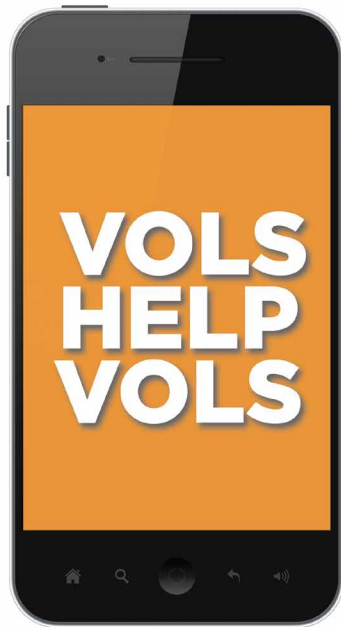
## STRESS AND PERFORMANCE

Some typical responses to chronic psychological stress

- Decrease in academic, physical, and psychological performance
- Poor concentration and memory
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Avoidance of tasks—loss of interest or lack of motivation
- Increased emotional intensity; feeling of being on an emotional roller coaster
- Anxiety, nervousness, depression, physical illness

## HOW DOES STRESS EFFECT PERFORMANCE?





# PUT US IN YOUR PHONE

## Need a ride?

T:Link  
[ridethet.utk.edu](http://ridethet.utk.edu)  
865-974-4080

## Worried about a friend?

865-974-HELP (4357)  
[wellness.utk.edu](http://wellness.utk.edu)

## Worried about safety?

UTPD  
[utpolice.utk.edu](http://utpolice.utk.edu)  
865-974-3114



## MANAGING STRESS

Here are a few ways to manage and reduce unwanted stress:

**Maintain a positive attitude.** Maintaining a positive attitude and eliminating self-defeating phrases such as “I can’t” will help give you the self-confidence to successfully manage stress.

**Practice relaxation.** On your own or in a group, find a way to regularly practice one or more of these stress-control techniques: breathing control, self-hypnosis, meditation, deep muscle relaxation or massage, or yoga.

**Exercise.** Take part in some form of exercise—preferably aerobic exercise—four to five days a week. Running, swimming, biking, and aerobics are all aerobic exercises.

**Stay clear.** Avoid cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, and caffeine—all of which affect your central nervous system and increase stress.

**Connect with your support network.** It helps to be understood. Family, friends, support groups, and mentors are all good sources for emotional support. Just discussing your problems with someone else can help relieve pressure and stress.

**Write it down.** If talking with others doesn’t work for you, keep an electronic journal or put your feelings on paper.

**Take time.** Set aside thirty minutes or an hour of personal time each day for reading, listening to music, sports, games, or enjoying whatever relaxes you.

**Take preventive action.** Stress results from feeling overwhelmed when many things need to be done at the same time. Manage your time to spread out your workload, and don’t be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

**Focus.** Concentrate on one thing at a time. If you have a lengthy task list, prioritize.



# Activity Three



## GUIDED IMAGERY

1. Get into a comfortable seated position, one you would use for meditation. Stretch your legs forward, then place your feet flat on the floor. With your hands on your lap, lift your shoulders to your ears and let them drop down.
2. Breathe from your diaphragm and close your eyes. Focus on breathing in peace and breathing out stress.
3. Once you get to a relaxed state, begin to envision yourself in the most relaxing environment you can imagine. This might be floating in the cool, clear waters of a remote tropical island, or it might be sitting by a fire in a secluded cabin deep in the snowy woods, sipping hot cocoa while wrapped in a plush blanket and fuzzy slippers—or anything in between.
4. As you imagine your scene, try to involve all of your senses. What does it look like? How does it feel? What scents are involved? Do you hear the roar of a fire, the splash of a waterfall, or the sounds of chirping birds? Make your surroundings so real you can almost taste them!
5. Stay here for as long as you like. Enjoy your surroundings, and let yourself be far from what stresses you. When you're ready to come back to reality, count back from ten or twenty, and tell yourself that when you get to one, you'll feel calm and alert and enjoy the rest of your day. When you return, you'll feel more calm and refreshed—it's like returning from a mini-vacation, but without leaving the room!

### TIPS

- You may want to use relaxing sounds that complement your imagery. They can help you feel more immersed in your environment, plus they obscure the sounds of real life.
- You may also want to set an alarm, just in case you lose track of time or fall asleep. You'll be better able to relax and let go knowing that your schedule won't be in jeopardy.



# Activity Four

WORKING THROUGH YOUR STRESS

Once you accept that stress is a part of life, you can continue learning ways to control and manage whatever stresses you're facing.

Think back to Activity 1, when you looked at the timeline and thought about the stress you're facing. How did you answer the question about how you deal with stress?

**What are you willing to do differently to improve how you deal with stress?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Who can help you?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**What can you do to take action and take control? Remember, you don't have to figure this out on your own. Vols Help Vols. Turn the page for key resources.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




**VOLS HELP VOLS**

Outside the classroom are challenges which can sometimes be overwhelming.

If you know someone who needs help, needs to talk to someone, or is acting in a way that makes you concerned for them or others.

**Call 865-974-HELP (4357)**

WE ARE ALL **VOLUNTEERS**.  
WE LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER.



### FINDING HELP

We're all Volunteers. We look out for each other. If you or someone you know is struggling with stress or other issues, seek help.

A short period of stress is normal and can often be resolved by talking to others and taking time to relax. Prolonged stress and anxiety, however, can seriously impair your academic performance and result in a lot of wasted effort. If you are suffering from long-term stress and anxiety, these feelings can be difficult to resolve alone. You may need prescribed medication, counseling, or a combination of both.

Our goal is for you to be successful. This plan was developed to help if you or someone you know is having a difficult time.

**VOLS HELP VOLS.**

### HAVE YOU OR HAS SOMEONE YOU KNOW

- behaved in an aggressive or out-of-control way?
- stopped talking or started spending a lot of time alone?
- started drinking more or using drugs to deal with feelings?
- talked about killing himself or herself or someone else?

### ARE YOU FEELING

- uncomfortable or uneasy?
- afraid for this person?
- scared of the person?
- worried something may happen?

### WHO DO YOU CALL?

- If there is an immediate threat, call 911.
- If the threat is not immediate but you are concerned, call 865-974-HELP (4357).

### Center for Health Education & Wellness

1800 Volunteer Blvd., Suite 201  
865-974-5725  
[wellness.utk.edu](http://wellness.utk.edu)

Provides assistance through 974-HELP and the distressed student protocol. Wellness coordinators provide education to individuals and student groups on stress and other wellness areas.

### RecSports

2111 Volunteer Blvd.  
865-974-0492  
[recsports.utk.edu](http://recsports.utk.edu)

Offers classes and programs that can help relieve stress. Early-morning individual workouts are a great way to start the day and help create a positive frame of mind.

### Student Health Center

1800 Volunteer Blvd.  
865-974-3648  
[studenthealth.utk.edu](http://studenthealth.utk.edu)

Students can make an appointment with a physician to address physical symptoms of stress.

### Student Counseling Center

1800 Volunteer Boulevard  
865-974-2196  
[counselingcenter.utk.edu](http://counselingcenter.utk.edu)

Provides assistance to students who are dealing with problems or have concerns relating to academic, work, personal, or social issues. Offers a wide range of services:

- Walk-in sessions  
10 a.m.–3:30 p.m. M–F
- Crisis intervention
- Group, individual, and couples counseling
- Feel Better Fast workshops  
M & W 4–5 p.m., Thu 3–4 p.m.  
Call 865-974-2196 or drop in

### American Institute of Stress

[stress.org](http://stress.org)

### Healthy Minds (an American Psychiatric Association site)

[healthyminds.org](http://healthyminds.org)

### Mental Health America

[nmha.org](http://nmha.org)

### National Institute of Mental Health

[nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

[samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)



The University of Tennessee is an EEO/AA/Title VI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA institution in the provision of its education and employment programs and services. All qualified applicants will receive equal consideration for employment without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical or mental disability, or covered veteran status. The university name and its indicia within are trademarks of the University of Tennessee. A project of the Center for Health Education & Wellness with assistance from the Creative Communications group of the UT Office of Communications & Marketing. Job 230659

**Big Orange. Big Ideas.®**