



# LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial



## Stress Management at University

LEAP Online

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## Stress Management at University

### Introduction

Welcome to our tutorial on managing stress at university, where we acknowledge that while university is undoubtedly a fun, exciting and enriching experience, it can also be accompanied by its fair share of stressors. From the anticipation of starting university to the pressure of exams and looming assignment deadlines, navigating this academic journey can often feel overwhelming. Additionally, studying in a new country or the prospect of living with unfamiliar roommates, together with uncertainties of the future can contribute to feelings of stress and anxiety.

In this tutorial, we aim to address these common stressors head-on and provide you with practical strategies to effectively manage and alleviate stress through your university experience. By recognising the challenges inherent in university life and equipping yourself with the necessary tools for stress management, you can cultivate resilience and ensure that your time at the University of Bolton is both fulfilling and rewarding.

## Aims and Objectives

The aim of this tutorial is to help you:

- Develop your understanding of time management
- Apply different strategies to help you manage your time effectively

By the end of this tutorial, you should be able to immediately apply the knowledge and skills learnt to your studies.

## Who Should Complete this Tutorial?

It is recommended that you should complete this tutorial if:

- You're a new student at the University of Bolton
- You're new to studying in the UK
- Undergraduate or postgraduate student
- You have been advised to complete this tutorial by a member of staff

## How Are You Doing?



### A self check-in

Take a moment from your busy schedule and check in with yourself. How are you feeling? Review the instructions below and check off any that apply.

- I often feel anxious, overwhelmed, or stressed out at university and/or my placement.
- I often question whether I'll be able to complete my work on time or meet my academic goals and expectations.
- I struggle to balance my work and family or personal responsibilities.
- I have trouble “disconnecting” from university. I'm always working on my work, even late into the evening, and rarely take breaks.
- University-related stress interferes with my ability to eat, sleep, or relax.
- I get headaches, stomachaches, or other physical symptoms due to workplace stress.
- I have little motivation to do my work.
- I dread coming into university. I've lost interest in the tasks I used to enjoy, take pride in, or find fulfilling.



Did you check a box or more than one? If you checked any of the boxes above, you may be experiencing high levels of stress



University stress is prevalent in the UK, with over one-third (37%) of students reporting they do not have enough time to study. As a result, nearly three-quarters (71%) of students claim they tend to feel anxious about their class and workload, more than half (54%) of students struggle to practice healthy habits, such as exercise and healthy eating, and nearly two-thirds (64%) of students state they do not get enough sleep (Center for Digital Learning, 2023).

### Good stress vs. bad stress

#### Good Stress (Eustress)

Stress is a natural feeling, which in small amounts can help you cope with challenging situations. Other distinguishing characteristics of good stress include:

- Improves your performance and fosters personal development and growth
- Enhances your contentment and improves your sense of well-being
- Makes you feel excited, engaged, motivated, inspired, fulfilled, or proud
- Is often short-term or fixed
- Is perceived as manageable or within your abilities and control
- Often results from challenging, but attainable, tasks

**For example:** It can push you to study hard and do your best, especially during an exam or delivering a presentation.

### Bad Stress (Distress)

In contrast to good stress, bad stress may make you feel anxious or overwhelmed, which can affect your academic performance. Other distinguishing characteristics of bad stress include:

- Decreases your performance and ability to concentrate
- Decreases your contentment and harms your health or well-being
- Makes you feel anxious, depressed, emotionally fatigued, or overwhelmed
- Is often chronic or long-term
- Is perceived as unmanageable or outside of your abilities and control
- Often results from unrealistic or unattainable tasks

**For example:** If you move out of your family home for the first time and/or your home country to start your studies at the University of Bolton, it can involve stressful changes. For instance, moving to a new area or country, meeting new people, and managing money on a tight budget.

### The bottom line

Good stress can make you feel excited and energised; it can improve your performance, increases feelings of contentment, and fosters personal growth. By contrast, bad stress may make you feel anxious or overwhelmed; it decreases performance, creates discontentment, and negatively impacts on your health.

In the next section, you'll learn more about the symptoms and impacts of excessive or chronic stress.

## Symptoms and Impacts of Stress

### How much stress is too much?

The “line” between good stress and bad stress can be difficult to identify and it may vary between people. A stressor that’s exciting and energising to one person may be physically or emotionally depleting for someone else. Explore the warning signs of too much stress below.

### Physical symptoms

- Sleep problems
- Tiredness
- Muscle aches
- Headaches
- Stomach ache
- Bite your nails, pick your skin or grind your teeth
- Snap at people
- Feel short of breath or breathe very fast

(NHS, 2023)

### Mental and Emotional Symptoms

- Irritable
- Anxious
- Overwhelmed
- Cannot switch off
- Cannot enjoy yourself
- Worried a lot
- Find it hard to concentrate
- Lost interest

### Early intervention is key

It's important to manage stress. Prolonged or unmanaged stress can lead to burnout. Learn more about what that means below.

#### **What is burnout**

Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion

(NHS, n.d.)

#### **How does burnout differ from stress?**

Stress is usually short-term, and the response felt by your mind and body about an event or situation. If stress is not managed effectively, it can lead to severe stress and burnout.

In the next section, learn research-based strategies for stress prevention and reduction.

## Identify the Source of Stress

“For every effect there is a root cause. Find and address the root cause rather than try to fix the effect, as there is no end to the latter.”

Celestine Chua

### Common causes of university stress

Identifying the source of stress at university can empower you to address the root of the problem. Common causes of stress at university include:

- Starting university or transitioning into a new academic year
- Moving to the UK to study
- University demands (e.g., long hours, heavy workload, or tight deadlines)
- Lack of academic literacy skills
- Family-related issues (e.g., childcare problems)
- Unexpected problems (e.g., coping with illness)
- Life changes (e.g., moving house, having a baby or bereavement)
- Personal problems (e.g., separation/ divorce)
- Work-life balance
- Money worries
- Loneliness or feeling unsupported

### Discuss with your tutor

You should discuss sources of stress, and look at solutions, with your Tutor. You could start by sending an email to your Module or Personal Tutor.

To help start the conversation and communicate your needs effectively, take a look at the example below:

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“Hi Graeme.

I hope you're doing well.

I wanted to take a moment to thank you for your guidance throughout this semester; it's been incredibly valuable to me. However, I wanted to discuss something that's been on my mind lately.

I've been feeling quite overwhelmed with the workload and other aspects of university life, and I'm finding it challenging to manage my stress levels effectively.

I thought it was important to communicate this to you because I value your input and guidance.

Do you have any advice or resources you could recommend to help me navigate this? I want to ensure that I'm performing at my best academically, but I recognise that managing my well-being is equally important.

Your support would mean a lot to me.

Yours sincerely,

David”



It's important that you set realistic expectations going into the conversation. For example, depending on the circumstance, your tutor may not be able to change a deadline but they could signpost you to resources to help you manage your time more effectively.

## Manage Your Workload and Expectations?

Students often experience stress because they are spinning lots of plates and holding themselves to unrealistic standards.

### 5 tips to manage your workload

#### Tip 1 – What’s stressing you out?

Figure out what is making you feel stressed. For example, do you have an exam coming up, are you struggling with money or are you having problems with a relationship? See if you can change your circumstances to ease the pressure you’re under.

#### Tip 2 – Make the most of your time

Develop your time management skills. Think about how you can plan your time effectively to help you keep track of your work. Break it down into manageable chunks and prioritise your tasks by urgency and importance. You can then identify tasks that can be postponed or deleted from your schedule.

For more information visit the ['Time Management'](#) LEAP Online section.

#### Tip 3 – A healthy lifestyle

Try to practice a healthy lifestyle. Eat healthy, sleep well, exercise regularly, cut down on alcohol, and take regular breaks from studying.

#### Tip 4 - You matter!

Are you part of a WhatsApp group with your peers? Do you often read messages where they share their progress or grades?

Do not compare yourself to your peers or worry about the future. Comparing yourself to peers or fixating on future outcomes can breed unnecessary stress and undermine your progress. Remember, each student’s journey is unique, and focusing on personal growth and learning experiences fosters resilience and a healthier mindset conducive to academic progress and success.

**Tip 5 – Breathe and ask for support**

Engaging in relaxation activities, such as [Breathing exercises for stress](#) or seeking support from a peer, your tutor or support services at the university can provide valuable outlets for managing stress and fostering a sense of connection. By incorporating relaxation techniques and open communication into your routine, you can cultivate resilience and maintain a balanced approach to your academic and personal life.

**In the next section, you'll learn about the importance of disconnecting from university by taking regular breaks.**



## Disconnect From Your Work



### Imagine this

You have been staring at your screen for hours, your eyes are glazed over, and your brain feels like it's taken a trip around the world and back...twice! Does this sound familiar? If so, it's time to step away from your screen, stretch your legs, and give yourself a gentle reminder that you're only human – not a caffeine-fuelled machine. Regular breaks are important in the fight against stress, burnout and maintaining your focus and motivation (Parker, 2017; Brazaitis and Satas, 2023). Therefore, don't feel guilty for taking a break – embrace them with open arms (or, as you know, open Netflix tabs).

See below to explore the benefits of taking regular breaks.

### Benefits of breaks

#### Improves performance

Taking regular breaks can significantly enhance your performance in several ways:

1. **Enhanced Focus:** Breaks will recharge your mental battery improving concentration when you return to studying
2. **Retention and Understanding:** Pausing during study sessions gives the brain time to process and consolidate information, leading to better comprehension and retention of material
3. **Prevents Burnout:** Continuous studying without breaks can lead to mental fatigue and burnout, hindering long-term academic success

## Boosts energy and creativity

Regular breaks will help you to replenish your energy levels and foster creativity:

1. **Physical Refreshment:** Moving around during breaks improves blood circulation and oxygen flow, revitalising both body and mind
2. **Fresh Ideas:** Breaks provide the opportunity to step away from studying and engage in activities that stimulate creativity, leading to fresh perspectives and innovative ideas
3. **Restores Motivation:** Breaks provide the necessary mental and emotional recharge to approach academic tasks with renewed enthusiasm

## Reduces stress

1. **Stress Relief:** Breaks provide a chance to step back from the pressures of university, reducing feelings of overwhelm and anxiety.
2. **Promotes Work-Life Balance:** Integrating regular breaks into study routines encourages a healthier balance between academic responsibilities and personal relaxation or leisure activities.
3. **Improves Mental Health:** Breaks provide moments of relaxation and enjoyment, contributing to better mental health and overall academic resilience.

In summary, incorporating regular breaks into your study routine can lead to improved performance, increased energy and creativity, and reduced stress levels.

“Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is relax.”

Mark Black

## The ideal break

It's important that you take regular breaks from studying. Some ideas to maximise your break time by combining them with other stress-relieving activities are shown below.

**Get outside and move your body.** Go for a 10 to 15-minute walk.

**Meditate.** Put on your headphones and listen to a guided meditation through your computer or phone.

**Grab a nourishing snack.** Reach for stress-combatting superfoods such as avocado, nuts, berries, citrus fruits, tea, and yogurt.

**Chat with fellow students.** Just make sure they're in a good spot to take a break too.



**Set a timer or calendar reminder.** Why not set a timer on your phone, or reminder on your calendar, to notify you when it's time to take a break?

### Don't just take time off!

Remember, as a student at the University of Bolton you must maintain your commitment to the 'Student Attendance and Engagement Policy.' If you need to take time off from university, visit the [Student Policy Zone](#) for more information.

### Allow time to unwind at home

It's important to unwind when you get home and disconnect from your work. Allowing time at the end of the day to wind down is crucial for students to promote relaxation, recharge mental batteries, and foster overall well-being. Read the information below to learn some best practices for the end of the day.

- **Sign off.** Close your emails and study-related apps on your computer and phone. Turn off notifications on your phone.
- **Create a list.** Jot down what you accomplished for the day, and write a to-do list for tomorrow. This can help you avoid thinking about your to-do's as you're trying to unwind at home.
- **Leave work at university.** Engage in activities, such as reading for pleasure. You can also engage in mindfulness exercises or spend time with friends as

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this can help you transition from the demands of academic life to a state of relaxation and restfulness.

Give yourself permission to unwind at the end of the day. This can mitigate the negative effects of stress, improve sleep quality, and enhance your ability to manage academic challenges effectively (Beiter et al., 2015). Moreover, carving out this time for relaxation will allow you to cultivate a healthy work-life balance, ensuring that you prioritise your mental health alongside your academic pursuits.

**In the next section, learn about lifestyle factors that can shield you from stress.**

## Adopt Stress-Busting Habits

### Protective factors that buffer against stress

Certain lifestyle factors create a protective shield against stress. Healthy habits like exercising, getting enough sleep, and eating well will give you a greater sense of well-being and equip your body with the resources it needs to handle stress.

- **Exercise:** Activities, such as going to the gym, for a run or walk can help to alleviate stress by triggering the release of endorphins, which are natural mood lifters.
- **Nourish your body:** Healthy eating can reduce stress by providing your body with essential nutrients that support optimal brain function and regulate mood, ultimately promoting a sense of well-being and resilience.
- **Get enough sleep:** Sleeping can reduce stress by allowing the body and mind to rest and recover, regulating stress hormones, and enhancing cognitive function, thereby promoting overall resilience and well-being.
- **Make time for activities you enjoy:** Activities can reduce stress by providing a sense of pleasure and fulfilment, triggering the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin that counteract stress hormones, and promoting relaxation and mental rejuvenation.
- **Go outside:** Nature can reduce stress by engaging the senses, promoting relaxation, and stimulating the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter associated with mood regulation and stress reduction, ultimately fostering a sense of calm and well-being.

“In times of life crisis, whether wildfires or smoldering stress, the first thing I do is go back to basics ... am I eating right, am I getting enough sleep, am I getting some physical and mental exercise every day?”

Edward Albert

[Nature and Mental Health: Sir David Attenborough \[YouTube\]](#)

Continue to the next section to learn how your thoughts can impact your experience with stress.

## Check Your Self-talk



### Imagine this

In her third and final year of undergraduate studies, Sarah finds herself grappling with an overwhelming sense of pressure and stress. As she navigates through the complexities of her assignment, impending graduation and moving into employment, the weight of academic expectations feels increasingly heavy.

Juggling multiple assignments and looming deadlines, Sarah finds little respite from the relentless demands of university life. Despite her best efforts to stay organised and focused, she feels as though the mounting workload is slowly engulfing her. With each passing day, the fear of failure looms larger, casting a shadow over her once vibrant enthusiasm for learning. Amidst the chaos, Sarah grapples with feelings of doubt and uncertainty, wondering if she'll ever find the strength to persevere through this tumultuous period.

See the thoughts running through Sarah's head below.

"I don't know what I'm doing. I can't handle this—I'm in over my head."

"If I mess up this assignment, I will ruin everything. My parents will be so angry with me - they'll probably not talk to me again!"

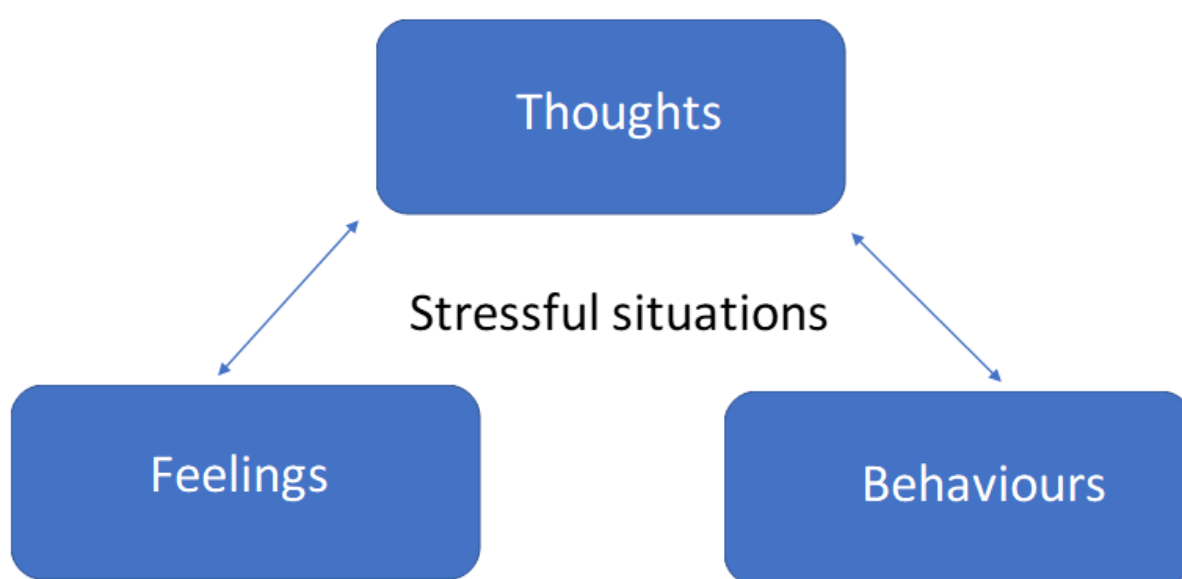
"I'm so stressed out. I have too many things to do. This is impossible!"

### Pause and reflect

Do you think Sarah's thoughts might impact on her stress levels? Will these types of thoughts increase or decrease Sarah's stress?

### The power of thinking

Using the diagram below you can see the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour. For instance, what you think drives how you feel. How you feel influences how you behave. Then, how you behave can perpetuate the cycle of how you think and feel.



The relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour plays a significant role in shaping a student's experience during stressful situations. When faced with stress, thoughts may become distorted, leading to negative self-perceptions, over-thinking, and exaggerated perceptions of threat. These negative thoughts can trigger intense emotions such as anxiety, fear, and frustration, which, in turn, influence behaviour. Students may then adopt avoidance behaviours, procrastinate, or withdraw from social interactions or worse, their programme, as a means of coping with their perceived stressors. Conversely, students who recognise and challenge negative thoughts, cultivate resilience, and employ adaptive coping strategies are better equipped to manage stress effectively. By fostering a positive mindset, seeking support, and engaging in proactive problem-solving, students can reshape their



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thoughts, regulate their emotions, and adopt behaviours that promote well-being and academic success even in the face of adversity.

### A real world example

Imagine this, Emily is struggling to balance her academic work with her part-time job and extracurricular activities. As the end of the semester approaches, Emily realises that she has a research project and viva due within a short timeframe. Emily experiences the following:

Thoughts	Emily begins to have thoughts of <b>impending failure</b> and <b>inadequacy</b>
Feelings	Emily's thoughts drive her feelings of <b>frustration</b> . She also feels <b>overwhelmed</b> and <b>anxious</b> about how she will manage to complete everything on time while maintaining her grades and fulfilling her other commitments.
Behaviour	In response to these feelings, Emily begins to <b>procrastinate</b> on her assignments, <b>avoids seeking help</b> , and experiences <b>difficulty concentrating</b> due to racing thoughts.

Alternatively, if Emily can shift her mindset to focus on her past successes, she might be able to:

Thoughts	Remember her <b>abilities</b> and <b>resources</b> , and <b>break down</b> her tasks into smaller, more manageable steps.
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Feelings	She may then experience feelings of <b>empowerment, resilience and determination.</b>
Behaviour	These positive thoughts can drive behaviours, such as <b>creating a realistic study schedule, seeking support, and practicing self-care activities</b> like exercise and relaxation techniques.

By exploring the chain reaction of thoughts, feelings and behaviours in both negative and positive contexts, you will be able to understand how your thought patterns impact your responses to stressful situations and identify strategies for cultivating a more adaptive mindset.

What all of this means for you is that changing the situation isn't the only way to eliminate or reduce stress. You can also reduce stress by changing your reaction or response to the situation. Change your thoughts to change your reality.

### Introduction to Cognitive Reframing

Cognitive reframing is a powerful technique that university students can use to replace stress-inducing thoughts and beliefs with more constructive and balanced alternatives. See below to find out more information.

#### Listen

Students should listen to their internal thoughts and become aware of negative and distorted thoughts that contribute to their stress. This self-awareness is essential for identifying patterns that fuel anxiety or feeling overwhelmed. For instance, thoughts such as, "I'll never be able to finish this essay on time; I'm such a failure!" may cross your mind from time-to-time.

#### Identify

Once you have identified these negative thoughts, you can examine them closely and pinpoint the underlying beliefs or assumptions driving them. This step involves recognising the triggers and patterns associated with the stress responses.

### Evaluate

You can then evaluate these thoughts by challenging their accuracy and examining the evidence supporting them. You can ask yourself questions like, "Is there another way to interpret this situation?" or "What evidence do I have to support this belief?" This critical evaluation will help you to identify alternative perspectives and reframes.

### Stop or Replace

Finally, you can actively step into or replace these negative thoughts with more positive and adaptive ones. This involves consciously redirecting your focus and behaviour toward more constructive interpretations of the situation. By practicing these new thought patterns consistently, you can gradually shift your mindset and reduce stress levels over time.

By following these four steps of cognitive reframing, you can gain greater control over your thought processes and cultivate a more resilient and optimistic outlook, ultimately enhancing your overall well-being and academic performance.

"Remember that stress doesn't come from what's going on in your life. It comes from your thoughts about what's going on in your life."

Andrew J. Bernstein

## Common cognitive disorders

Cognitive distortions are patterns of thinking that are irrational, biased, or exaggerated. They can contribute to stress-inducing thoughts by distorting reality and leading individuals to interpret situations in overly negative or inaccurate ways. These distortions often exacerbate stress by fostering feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and anxiety (Grinspoon, 2022).

### Example 1 – All-or-Nothing Thinking

This distortion involves seeing things in black-and-white terms, without considering nuances or the middle ground. In a university context, this might include:

1. Believing that only a first-class in your assignment constitutes success, while anything less is a failure.
2. I have nothing interesting to say in a group discussion.
3. Assuming you will never do well because of a past mistake.

### Example 2 – Overgeneralisation

This involves making broad, sweeping conclusions based on limited evidence. In a university context, this might include:

1. Failing one exam and concluding you're not good enough for university.
2. Feeling frustrated or discouraged.
3. Thinking, after failing an assignment, "I'm always going to fail at everything."

### Example 3 - Jumping to conclusions

This involves making assumptions without evidence. In a university context, this might include:

1. Assuming that, because your tutor hasn't responded to your email, they must be angry with you.
2. Assuming that you're going to fail the assignment or exam.
3. Assuming that, if a peer doesn't say good morning to you, that person dislikes you.

### Example 4 - Catastrophising

This involves magnifying the importance or implications of negative events. In the context of university, this might include:

1. Believing that failing one assignment, your entire academic journey and future career prospects are ruined.
2. Assuming one poor grade on your assignment will lead to you being kicked off your degree.

3. Catastrophising receiving critical feedback on your assignment, thinking that you'll never succeed in your discipline.

### Example 5 - "Should" Statements

This distortion involves imposing rigid expectations on yourself or others. In the context of university, this might include:

1. Feeling like you should always know the answer in class, leading to anxiety when you don't.
2. Feeling like you should always get the highest grade in the class, regardless of the difficulty or your current workload.
3. Believing you should never ask for support because it means you're not smart enough.

### Example 6 - Personalisation

This distortion involves taking responsibility for things outside of your control. In the context of university, this might involve:

1. Blaming yourself for failing a group assignment, even though other group members contributed.
2. Taking it personally when your tutor provides you with feedback on your assignment, feeling as though it reflects poorly on your intelligence and worth as a student.
3. Assuming that, if a peer doesn't want to study with you, it's because they dislike you.

### Example 7 - Emotional Reasoning

This distortion involves assuming that because you feel a certain way, it must be true. In the context of university, this might involve:

1. Feeling anxious about a presentation and assuming it means you'll inevitably mess up.
2. Believing that because you feel like you don't belong at university, it must be true, regardless of your academic achievements.
3. Assuming you're destined to fail your degree because you feel discouraged after one bad grade.

### Example 8 - Filtering

This distortion involves focusing solely on the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive. In the context of university, this might include:

1. Ignoring positive feedback on an assignment and obsessing over one critical comment.
2. Disregarding praise and fixating on negative opinions.
3. Focusing only on questions you got wrong on an exam and dismissing the ones you answered correctly.

#### The bottom line

By recognising and challenging these cognitive distortions, you can develop more balanced and realistic perspectives, reducing stress and improving your overall well-being.

## Develop a Support System



### What science says about social support?

Social science underscores the crucial role of social support in our lives, defining it as a network of individuals who provide emotional, instrumental and informational assistance (Drageset, 2021). Research by Chen and Bian (2023) demonstrates the profound impact of social support on stress management, particularly in university settings, claiming that students with robust social support networks experience lower stress levels and greater academic motivation and success. Conversely, isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and heightened stress levels, significantly impacting mental well-being (Stoliker and Lafreniere, 2015). However, cultivating strong social connections offers students numerous benefits, a few of which are listed below:

1. **Having a strong support network boosts resilience and the ability to cope with stressful situations.** A strong support network at university provides a vital cushion during challenging times, bolstering your resilience and capacity to handle stressors effectively. Through shared experiences and mutual encouragement, this network offers invaluable emotional support, enhancing your ability to navigate the demands of academic life with greater ease and confidence.
2. **Fulfilling relationships can contribute to higher self-esteem and better mental health.** Fulfilling relationships at university nurtures a sense of belonging and acceptance, which in turn can boost self-esteem and foster

better mental health among students. Positive social interactions provide a supportive environment for personal growth and emotional well-being, contributing significantly to your overall satisfaction and resilience in your academic journey.

- 3. Talking about feelings with others can alleviate their power and negative impact.** Openly discussing feelings with others at university can lessen your emotional burden and reduce your negative impact, promoting a sense of relief and validation. By sharing experiences and seeking support, students can gain perspective, build resilience, and develop healthier coping mechanisms to navigate academic and personal challenges more effectively.



Research shows that developing a strong social support network shields us from the negative impacts of stress. Friends, family, neighbours, community members, and your fellow student can all be part of your social support network.

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### How to grow and maintain your network

Building and maintaining relationships demands ongoing effort and consistency. See below to reveal tips for growing and maintaining your social support system.

#### Grow

Below are some tips to expand upon, aiding in the growth of your social support system during your time at university:



1. **Initiate Conversations:** Take the initiative to start conversations with classmates, roommates, and fellow students in various settings such as classes, at home, or events.
2. **Join Clubs, organisations and societies:** Clubs, organisations and student societies provide opportunities to meet like-minded students and form connections.
3. **Utilise University Resources:** Take advantage of resources such as the Life Lounge on mental health and well-being to connect with others facing similar challenges.
4. **Explore Shared Interests:** Explore shared interests and hobbies with your peers, whether it's playing sports, attending concerts, or engaging in creative activities, as a means to bond and strengthen relationships.
5. **Attend Workshops:** Attend workshops, sessions, or events hosted by the University of Bolton or Students' Union, providing opportunities to meet new people and expand your social network beyond your immediate circle.

### Maintain

Below are some tips to expand upon, aiding in the maintenance of your social support system during your time at university:

1. **Communicate Openly:** Maintain open and honest communication with your friends and peers, expressing your thoughts, feelings, and concerns, and actively listening to theirs in return.
2. **Schedule Regular Meetups:** Set aside time in your schedule to meet up with friends and peers regularly, whether it's for coffee, lunch, or a study session.
3. **Explore New Activities Together:** Try out new activities with your friends and peers, whether it's joining a student society, trying a new hobby or attending a workshop, fostering shared experiences and strengthening your bonds, while creating lasting memories.
4. **Support Each Other During Stressful Times:** Be there for your friends and peers during challenging periods, offering emotional support, encouragement, and practical help whenever needed.

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5. **Celebrate Achievements Together:** Celebrate each other's successes, whether it's acing an exam, landing a placement, or completing an assignment, fostering a positive and supportive environment.

### Talk it out

Talking about a stressful day can be cathartic and relieve stress. Try to avoid bottling up your feelings. Instead, reach out to a close friend, family member, or peer to talk it out.

### Seek Professional Support

The University of Bolton's Life Lounge can provide additional support and tools for managing stress.

- [University of Bolton Life Lounge](#)
- [Meditation and Sleep Made Simple - How to relax. 8 relaxation tips for your mental health](#) [youtube.com]
- [Headspace – Your everyday mental health app](#)

In the next section, you'll explore two powerful tools for reducing stress—meditation and mindfulness.

## Meditation for Stress Relief

### Introduction to meditation

Meditation is a simple technique students can use to reduce stress and improve their health in as little as three minutes a day. Better yet, you can meditate at any time – from any place – and it doesn't have to cost a penny, making it the perfect university stress-reduction activity for students.

“To meditate means to go home to yourself. Then you know how to take care of the things that are happening inside you, and you know how to take care of the things that happen around you.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

### The power of meditation

- Decrease stress
- Improved concentration
- Emotional Wellbeing
- Creativity
- Better sleep

(Mindworks, 2024)



Note that meditation is not about stopping or suppressing your thoughts and feelings. It's about observing your thoughts and feelings without judgment, and learning to be at ease with them.

### What do I need to start meditating?

Meditation requires no special equipment or space. Theoretically, students can meditate anywhere. However, certain elements make meditation easier for beginners.

#### A Comfortable Position

Being physically comfortable during meditation allows you to relax and focus your attention inward without distractions or discomfort. This promotes a sense of ease and facilitates the body's ability to remain still for an extended period, which is crucial for sustained concentration.

#### A Quiet Space or Noise-Cancelling Headphones

Minimising external distractions such as noise helps to create a conducive environment for meditation. A quiet space allows you to cultivate inner stillness and enhance your ability to tune into your thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. Noise-cancelling headphones can be particularly helpful in blocking out external sounds, allowing for a deeper level of focus and concentration.

#### An Open, Non-Judgmental Attitude

Maintaining an open and non-judgmental attitude towards your experiences during meditation is essential for cultivating mindfulness and self-awareness. By approaching thoughts, emotions, and sensations with curiosity and acceptance rather than judgment or resistance, you can develop a greater sense of inner peace, clarity, and calmness. This attitude fosters a compassionate relationship with yourself and encourages the exploration of the present moment with kindness and curiosity.

### Guided meditation

Unlike unguided meditation, which offers more flexibility, as it can be practiced without any resources, guided meditation provides more structure, making it easier for beginners to practice. The audio files have been uploaded to help meditate.

- [3-Minute relaxing music](#) [YouTube]
- [5-Minute meditation](#) [YouTube]
- [10-Minute meditation](#) [YouTube]

### Additional meditation resources

- [Beginners Guide to Meditation. Techniques to learn to sit](#)
- [Improved Concentration. Focus meditation: How to improve memory and focus](#)
- [Overcome Fear. How to live in the present](#)
- [Guided Gratitude Meditation. Benefits and how it works](#)

In the next section, you'll learn five ways to practice mindfulness techniques at university.

## 5 Simple Ways to Practice Mindfulness at University

### Choose your adventure

The following sections provide simple mindfulness techniques you can use when you feel stressed at university. You can experiment with different techniques and choose what works best for you.

“Mindfulness is a way of being present: paying attention to and accepting what is happening in our lives. It helps us to be aware of and step away from our automatic and habitual reactions to our everyday experiences.”

Elizabeth Thornton

### 1. Body scanning

Involves scanning your body for anything out of the ordinary, such as pain or tension. It can help you identify and release stress in the body.

- [Beginners Body Scan Meditation](#)

For more information and a 30-minute body scan audio for beginners.

### 2. Visualisation and self-affirmations

You can use visualisation and self-affirmation techniques to reduce stress, increase motivation, and enhance performance.

#### Picture Your Desired Outcome

Professional athletes, chess players, and other high-performing individuals use mental rehearsal and visualisation techniques to increase performance. You can reap the same benefits by imagining the desired outcome of a stressful situation.

**For example:** If you are anxious about giving an oral presentation, you may wish to mentally visualise your presentation delivery and success.

You may wish to:

1. **Set the Scene:** Begin by visualising the environment where your presentation is going to take place. Imagine the location, time of day, and any relevant surroundings.
2. **Visualise the Process:** Don't just focus on the desired outcome; visualise the steps you need to take to reach your goal. Picture yourself overcoming barriers and persevering through challenges.
3. **Be Specific:** Include specific details in your visualisation, such as faces, objects, or actions. The more specific you are, the more real the image will become in your mind.
4. **Practice Regularly:** Dedicate time each day to practice visualisation. The more you practice, the stronger your visualisation skills will become.
5. **Stay Positive:** Maintain a positive mindset during visualisation. Focus on success and positive outcomes, avoiding negative thoughts or doubts.
6. **Reinforce with Affirmations:** Pair your visualisation practice with affirmations or positive statements related to your desired outcome to further reinforce your belief in achieving it.

### Choose a Mantra or Practice Self-Affirmations

Mantras or self-affirmations can increase confidence and reduce stress. Remaining with the previous example of delivering an oral presentation, you could use the following:

- “I am capable. I am confident. I am resilient.”
- “I accept what I cannot change.”
- “I can achieve anything I set my mind to.”
- “I turn challenges and setbacks into learning opportunities.”

### Visualise for Relaxation

You can use visual or guided imagery to relax. Take 3-10 minutes to close your eyes during the day and imagine being in a relaxing place—such as a beach, garden, cozy retreat or grassy field. You can add additional prompts in the list below:

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- Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Imagine yourself in a serene natural setting. What do you see around you? Picture the colours, textures, and shapes of the landscape. Feel the warmth of the sun on your skin and the gentle breeze rustling through the trees. Allow yourself to fully immerse in this tranquil environment and feel a sense of peace washing over you.
- Envision a cozy retreat where you feel completely at ease. Imagine yourself lounging in a comfortable chair or hammock, surrounded by soft blankets and plush pillows. Hear the soothing sounds of nature or calming music playing in the background. Feel the tension melting away from your muscles as you relax into the moment. What scents are in the air? What sensations do you experience as you unwind in this peaceful haven?
- Transport yourself to your ideal relaxation spot, whether it's a secluded beach, a garden or grassy field. Visualise the sights, sounds, and sensations that make this place special to you. Picture yourself engaging in activities that bring you joy and relaxation, whether it's strolling along the shore, enjoying a good book in the garden, or a picnic in a field. Allow yourself to fully embrace the calmness of this space and recharge your mind, body, and spirit.

### 3. The STOP Mindfulness Technique

The STOP mindfulness technique can be a valuable tool for university students to manage stress effectively. STOP is an acronym that stands for Stop, Take a Breath, Observe, and Proceed. To learn more about how the STOP mindfulness technique can help reduce stress, read through the following for detailed instructions and tips on implementing this technique effectively.

#### S - Stop

Firstly, "Stop" prompts you to pause whatever you're doing and bring your attention to the present moment. This simple act interrupts the cycle of stress and allows you to regain control of your thoughts and emotions.



### T - Take a Breath

Secondly, "Take a Breath" encourages you to take a slow, deep breath. Deep breathing triggers the body's relaxation response, helping to calm the nervous system and reduce feelings of anxiety.

### O - Observe

Next, "Observe" prompts you to observe your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations without judgment. This mindfulness practice fosters self-awareness and helps you to recognise and acknowledge your stressors.

### P - Proceed

Finally, "Proceed" encourages you to proceed with more clarity and intentionality. By taking a moment to pause, breathe, and observe, you can make more informed decisions about how to respond to stressors in a healthier and more constructive manner.

## 4. Breathing exercises

Taking slow, deep breaths can lower your heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones. See below to learn about a few different breathing techniques for stress reduction.

### Diaphragmatic Breathing

Your stomach, opposed to your chest, moves with each breath, expanding while inhaling, then contracting while you exhale. This can be practiced by lying down on sitting in a chair

For more information, visit: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/learning-diaphragmatic-breathing>

### 4 7 8 Technique

Breathe in for 4 seconds,

hold your breath for 7 seconds,

exhale for 8 seconds.

For more information, visit: [4-7-8 Breathing: How It Works, How to Do It, and More](#)

### 3-Minute Technique

For more information visit: [3 min technique 3 Minute Breathing Space - Breathworks](#)

[YouTube.com]

## 5. Grounding

Grounding is a mindfulness technique that can help you to reconnect with the present moment by focusing on your immediate surroundings, such as your senses or physical sensations. By grounding yourself, you can reduce stress, anxiety, and overwhelm, promoting a sense of calm, clarity, and emotional stability amidst the challenges of academic life.

### 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

This method is a grounding exercise that aims to manage stress and reduce anxiety. Read through the steps below to learn more.

#### Grounding Step 1

##### 5 Things You Can See

Describe five things you can see. For example, it could be a pen on your desk, a picture on the wall or anything in your surroundings.

#### Grounding Step 2

##### 4 Things You Can Touch

Describe four things you can touch. For example, your hair, the ground under your feet or a cushion.

#### Grounding Step 3

##### 3 Things You Can Hear

Describe three things you can hear. For example, a dog barking, birdsong or any external sound.

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### Grounding Step 4

#### 2 Things You Can Smell

Describe two things you can smell. For example, fresh brewed coffee, dinner cooking or if you're outside, the smell of nature.

### Grounding Step 5

#### 1 Thing You Can Taste

Describe one thing you can taste. For example, that sandwich from lunch or chewing gum.

### The Bottom Line

It doesn't take much time or effort to practice mindfulness. Simply pause to scan your body, take a few deep breaths, pay attention to your senses, observe what is happening, or give yourself a positive affirmation can significantly reduce stress.

**Continue to the next section to discover students' top tips for managing assignment stress.**

## Students' Top Tips for Managing Assignment Stress



Based on recent feedback obtained by the University of Bolton Students' Union, here are some of the ways students manage assignment stress:

- Dancing
- Sleeping
- Watching comedies
- Seeing friends
- Listening to music
- Playing football games
- Eating [Healthy]
- Getting other people to help you
- Driving
- PS5
- Watching YouTube

Continue to the next section to check your understanding of how to manage stress effectively.

## Do's and Don'ts

Here are some do's and don'ts of stress management.

### Do

1. Exercise, get enough sleep, and make time for activities you enjoy
2. Practice mindfulness and meditation
3. Talk to your Module or Personal tutor or Life Lounge about feeling stressed

### Don't

1. Take work home with you to get ahead
2. Skip breaks and holidays
3. Ignore the symptoms of stress

## Summary

### Key takeaways

Effective stress management is crucial for maintaining your well-being and productivity. By learning how to identify, address and alleviate stress, you can enhance your mental and physical health, and achieve greater success in your personal, academic and career pursuits. Remember to manage your stress by:

**1. Recognising the Symptoms and Negative Impact of Stress:**

Understanding the signs and symptoms of stress is vital for early intervention. Chronic stress can manifest in various ways, including physical symptoms like headaches and stomach pains, as well as emotional distress like irritability and anxiety. Recognising these signs will allow you to take proactive steps to manage stress before you burnout.

**2. Identifying the Source of Stress:** Pinpointing the specific cause of university stress in your life is the first step towards managing it effectively. Whether you're starting an undergraduate degree, moving to the UK, have money worries or juggling life-related problems, identifying the root causes will enable you to develop targeted strategies for coping with stress.

**3. Managing Your Workload and Expectations:** Learning to manage your time effectively, looking after yourself, and seeking support can help to prevent stress and burnout and maintain a healthy work-life balance at university.

**4. Finding Your Stress-busting Habit:** Incorporating stress-reducing activities into your daily routine can significantly improve resilience and well-being. This may include disconnecting from your work, regular exercise, healthy eating, and relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or meditation. Cultivating these habits provides effective outlets for stress and promotes overall mental and physical health.

**5. Developing Your Support System:** Building a strong network of friends, and peers or seeking professional support from teams like the Life Lounge, can provide invaluable emotional support during times of stress. Having trusted individuals to seek advice from, or simply spend time with can alleviate feelings of isolation and provide a fresh perspective on challenging situations.



## Additional Resources

- [5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing](#) [NHS.org]
- [Breathing Exercises for Stress](#) [NHS.org]
- [Tips on Preparing for Exams](#) [NHS.org]



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