UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Stress Management Toolkit

Welcome to the Stress Management Toolkit. We recognize that stress happens. Sometimes life doesn't go as planned. That can create a lot of stress for our campus community members. Still, wellness can exist even during these tough times. So, we've created a resource called the Stress Management Toolkit. This toolkit provides practical ideas on how to be well during challenging times. By using the menu below, you can access practical information in the following areas:

- Staying Healthy
- Making Ends Meet
- Managing Time and Work
- Coping with Stress and Uncertainty

Table of Contents

Staying Healthy 3

Attitude Is Everything! 3

Managing Wellness 3

Fitting Fitness In 4

Nutrition 4

Making Ends Meet 6

Plan On The Unexpected! 6

Dealing With A Reduced Income 7

Additional Resources 7

Managing Time and Work 9

Conflict Management 9

Use Your Time Thoughtfully 10

How To Understand And Help Employees Cope With Budget And Staff Reductions 11

Coping with Stress and Uncertainty 14

Anger Management 14

Controlling Stress 17

Building Social Support 18
Managing Time and Work 21
Coping with Stress and Uncertainty 21
Staying Healthy 22

Staying Healthy

It is easy to put our own health aside as we deal with the everyday hassles, demanding job duties, and deadlines. Not to mention balancing all of this with the pressures from home from time to time. Often times we sacrifice sleep, nutrition, and physical activity and place our energies on life's demands.

The truth is, it is a matter of life and death that we take care of ourselves. As we face challenging times, it is important to call to mind the following facts about what everyday "stressors" can do to our health, and remember the importance of taking care of ourselves first:

- Stress contributes to heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes, and other illnesses in many individuals.
- Stress affects the immune system, which protects us from many serious diseases.
- Stress contributes to the development of alcoholism, obesity, suicide, drug addiction, cigarette addiction, and other harmful behaviors.

The question then becomes, how do we keep in mind the importance of staying healthy and allow that concept to remain a point of priority and focus?

Attitude Is Everything!

Justin O'Brien states in his book The Wellness Tree, "the working rule, however, is that your body's reactions take their cue from your mind."

Attitude plays a crucial role in affecting that reaction. Suzanne Segerstrom, PhD also says that people who focus only on negative information to the exclusion of more positive information will perceive more stress and, therefore, suffer more serious consequences in their mental and physical health.

Managing Wellness

The definition of wellness or health must stretch beyond physicality, beyond simply the absence of disease, and include the complex, intertwined ideas of body, mind, and consciousness. Often, small lifestyle changes in the physical dimension catalyze a quest for total wellbeing in other dimensions: social, spiritual, occupational,

emotional, and intellectual. But the door to wellness opens differently for every individual.

Fitting Fitness In

"You don't have to go to a gym to get the wide range of health benefits of exercise," says Steven Blair, PhD, professor of exercise science at the University of South Carolina.

Fitting in just 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activities—walking, gardening, even doing housework, substantially reduces the risk of chronic diseases, according to the latest federal physical activity guidelines. Building and maintaining muscle strength may take a little more ingenuity. One option: learn a set of basic calisthenics that include push-ups, sit-ups, deep knee bends, and leg lifts. Another alternative: buy an inexpensive set of stretch bands, which can be used to do dozens of strength-building exercises.

Exercise can also inspire creativity. We always have those "aha" moments in the shower. A good brisk walk can be just as stimulating!

Nutrition

A limited food budget and a lack of time are no reason to reach for junk food. "Some of the healthiest foods out there are actually the least expensive," says Kathy McManus, PhD, director of inpatient nutrition services at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. A few examples:

- Beans
- Peanuts
- Homemade breakfast cereal
- Make-them-yourself beverages
- Frozen vegetables

Cooking at home instead of eating out is another way to save money and stay healthy, especially when you skip processed foods and cook from scratch. Home-cooked meals tend to be lower in fat and salt than what you may find at restaurants. Surveys show that people who eat at home are less likely to be overweight or obese.

The good news is that all foods can be part of a healthful diet. Simply balance the foods you eat and engage in regular physical activity. For example, eat a wide variety of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Making Ends Meet

Plan On The Unexpected!

Financial planners always say to save money for the unexpected. I think we should just admit that the unexpected expenses will always happen—that's just life! We may not be able to predict just what the unexpected expenses will be...but something will need to be repaired or replaced. Whether it's a flat tire, an appliance that breaks, or something else, unexpected expenses happen to everyone.

How can you plan for "unexpected" expenses? You need to build up a savings fund in either a savings account or money market account from which you can withdraw money easily. If you need help finding money to save, visit University of Illinois Extension's Plan Well, Retire Well website. Saving tips and strategies at this website can help you get started.

Lately I have been having "unexpected" home repairs that need to be done. How much should you save for home repairs? A good rule of thumb is to save 1 to 2 percent of the purchase price of the home for annual maintenance and repairs. If your home or the appliances are older, you may need to save an even bigger amount.

Plan ahead for major purchases and estimate when you might have to purchase something new. According to industry officials, the average life span for the following appliances is estimated at:

- Roof: 20 – 25 years
- Heating system: 25 years
- Refrigerator: 20 years
- Freezer: 20 years
- Clothes dryer: 18 years
- Range/oven: 18 years
- Room air conditioner: 15 years
- Clothes washer: 13 years
- Water heater: 13 years
- Central air conditioner: 12 years
- Dishwasher: 12 years

Do you have a savings fund for those unexpected expenses that we can all expect? If not, now is the time to start building it up!

Source: Kathy Sweedler, Consumer and Family Economics Educator, University of Illinois Extension

Dealing With A Reduced Income

At various times in our lives some of us may find ourselves needing to live on less. Examples include reduced income due to retirement and added expenses such as medical costs, home repairs, or putting kids through school. What can a person do? The best step is to take action now to make changes in how you manage your money.

Track your expenses. Keep track of all the money you spend, on little things as well as big bills, so that you can make informed choices about your spending.

Change your spending. Research shows that families with reduced incomes who quickly made changes in their spending habits were happier with how they were managing their finances. Families who didn't make changes felt more out of control and more dissatisfied. Start by looking at your flexible spending: those items that vary month to month. It's easier to change expenses such as entertainment, food costs, etc., than fixed expenses such as rent or mortgage payments.

Avoid using credit to pay bills. Borrowing or using credit to pay bills often brings only temporary relief and can be more expensive in the long run. Research studies show that for families who did increase their use of credit, the more they borrowed the unhappier they were with their financial situation.

Talk to family members. Living in uncertain times is stressful. At the Getting Through Tough Financial Times website, you can learn more about identifying sources of support and friendship and communicating under pressure with your children and other family members.

Source: Kathy Sweedler, Consumer and Family Economics Educator, University of Illinois Extension

Additional Resources

- Getting through Tough Financial Times: Designed specifically to help families facing reduced income and financial challenges.

- Managing Debt: This website provides help in designing a budget plan that will work for you. How to use credit wisely and save money is also covered.
- Building Credit: A series of fact sheets about credit card topics such as selecting the right credit card, checking your credit report, managing your debt, and credit card laws that protect the consumer.
- Plan Well, Retire Well – Your How-To Guide: A good resource on how to save money effectively. The website features money saving tips, information about tax-deferred retirement savings plans, and how to choose investments.

Managing Time and Work

Conflict Management

Thanks to the McKinley Health Center for providing permission to adapt and reprint this article from the McKinley Health Center website.

Many people believe that conflict is unhealthy, undesirable and needs to be avoided at all costs. It is assumed that conflict is abnormal and a result of personality problems or differences. This is entirely untrue. Conflict can be healthy and can produce desirable outcomes. Conflict is also very normal and inevitable. It is also important to remember that conflict should not always be avoided, but managed. When we begin to understand conflict, we are able to preserve and strengthen our relationships, improve our own productivity by reducing the time and energy spent on handling conflict, reduce stress in our own lives, and get better results from the conflicts we do have.

Prevent Conflict

- When angry, separate yourself from the situation and take a break.
- Attack the problem, not the person.
- Focus on the issue, not your position about the issue.
- Work to develop common agreement with the individual.
- Communicate your feelings assertively, not aggressively.
- Focus on areas of common interest and agreement instead of areas of disagreement and opposition.
- Accept and respect that individual opinions may differ, don't try to force compliance, work to develop common agreement.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions or making assumptions about what another person is thinking or feeling.
- Listen without interrupting and ask for feedback, if needed, to assure a clear understanding of the issue.

Manage Conflict

- Be impartial—strive to be fair.
- Ask each party to state what they think the problem is and not side-track to other issues.

- Each party should restate what the other said, which helps people put themselves in the other's shoes.
- Each party should confirm the accuracy of the re-statement, which gives the opportunity for corrections or clarifications to further the understanding of the other party.
- Identify mutual needs or goals that each party previously identified.
- Ask each party for a sincere, practical solution now that they understand the other's side better.
- See if the parties can agree to one of the offered solutions. If not, try an alternative solution to see what works better.
- Set a review date to make sure the accepted solution is working and to see if each party is living up to its agreement.

Use Your Time Thoughtfully

5:00 p.m.—did you get everything done at work that you thought you'd do today? At times it seems like we just don't have enough time to do all that needs to be done. What can we do to manage our time AND our stress from feeling like we have too much to do?

Managing your time can help reduce your stress and improve your overall wellness. "It takes a conscious decision to take control of your decisions and time," says Kathy Sweedler, University of Illinois Extension Educator. Asking yourself these questions can help you:

Just what do you do with your time every day? Track your time (15 minutes or longer segments) for a couple of weeks. Are you spending time on what's important to you?

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT		
NOT IMPORTANT		

Are you spending time on important tasks or on urgent tasks? Often the tasks we know are the most important for our job are not the most urgent; however, the

urgent tasks are the ones that seem to get done. Covey, Merrill and Merrill (1994) suggest using a table like the one shown to categorize your tasks. Thinking about our task's priority can help us choose which tasks to not do (for example, those which are neither urgent nor important) as well as which ones to focus upon.

What is the most productive time of day for you? Are you a morning person or do you do your best thinking in the afternoon? Mark out your productive time for your important tasks.

Do you have unscheduled time in your day? One rule of thumb is to limit scheduled time to about 75% of your day. You need time for creative activities such as planning and thinking. Plus, we all need time to deal with the unexpected events that occur.

Is clutter getting in your way? Not being able to find important papers or other tools can waste time, and clutter can be distressing for some people as well. When possible, try to handle each piece of information (paper, email message, etc.) just once. Decide if you want to 1) throw it away, 2) delegate it, 3) act on it, 4) file it to be "followed up," or 5) file it permanently. U of I Extension's website Dealing with Clutter, has many good ideas for organizing your workspace and home.

Source: Kathy Sweedler, Consumer and Family Economics Educator, University of Illinois Extension

How To Understand And Help Employees Cope With Budget And Staff Reductions

Reducing staff can be one of the most difficult challenges that managers face. Employees may experience issues of grief, loss, and uncertainty during the change process. It is crucial to treat all employees with respect and compassion. The following describes aspects of this process:

Denial. Initially, people may have a need to deny that something is changing, is lost, or is uncertain. Give the employee time and space to move through denial. This may include:

- Denying the meaning of the facts involved
- Numbing one's feelings or being "in shock"

- Some may detach or distance themselves, while others may throw themselves into work or other projects

Grief and Loss. Some employees cope with feelings of denial, sadness, irritability, and depression through isolation. They may believe they are alone or that there is no place for such feelings in the work setting. As isolation occurs, there is a breakdown in the connection among coworkers, which can increase interpersonal conflict and communication problems. Opportunities to understand and discuss these feelings allow employees to work through their experiences. It's not talking about loss but pretending it doesn't exist that stirs up trouble.

Loss of control. Many employees will experience change or loss as a threat to one's sense of control. Opportunities for input or planning and defining work assignments with goals and objectives can help to create some control over the uncertainty. Maintain the inner stance that you are acting, as best you can, in the long-term interests of the university.

Other reactions. Many other feelings and behaviors may result from change, including anger, apathy, lethargy, and physical symptoms. People experience varied reactions depending on life experiences and circumstances. These reactions are normal and part of the process. If these reactions worsen or do not appear to resolve, refer the employee to the Faculty/Staff Assistance and Well-Being Services program.

Here are some things supervisors and managers can do to help:

Seek consultation and provide support. Seek consultation regarding employees of concern by contacting your HR department and the Faculty/Staff Assistance Program. Offer resources for career transition and future employment opportunities.

Offer clear communication. Communicate early and often. Be open and honest. Keep all employees informed of changes to reduce rumors, gossip, etc. Be familiar with how decisions were made to keep or cut programs or personnel.

Attend to morale. Make people feel important by expressing appreciation and recognizing accomplishments.

Maintain an open-door policy. This encourages employees to discuss their concerns and feelings. Acknowledge the difficulty of these times and understand that problems and conflict will occur. This fosters permission for employees to address their own experience.

Take care of yourself. Practice stress management by recognizing your feelings and needs and making yourself a priority. Attend to self-care issues so that you can offer the best of yourself. Remember, you can't control all outcomes; know your limits.

Promote support systems. Support systems can break down isolation and promote healthy work relationships. Support systems can also facilitate problem solving and provide community. Sometimes group experiences can decrease the risk of personalizing the losses associated with budget and staff reductions.

Coping with Stress and Uncertainty

Anger Management

Thanks to the McKinley Health Center for providing permission to adapt and reprint this article from the McKinley Health Center website.

Anger is a normal emotion. It is common for people to experience anger in everyday life. When anger is expressed in a controlled manner, it is healthy for a person to communicate their feelings. When anger takes over and a person loses control, anger may be expressed in a negative and hurtful manner. It is important to watch for signs of uncontrolled anger and learn to manage this anger so that your feelings are communicated in a healthy, appropriate way.

Signs Of Anger

- You say or do things when you get mad that you later feel bad about.
- You hang on to your anger for a long time—you won't or don't let go of it.
- You hit, shove, slap, pinch or threaten when you get angry.
- It feels like you're almost always angry about something.
- Sometimes you can't stop arguing even when you want to.
- Your anger is "all or nothing." You're either furious or calm; you're never just a little angry.
- You always have to get the last word and win every battle.
- You've been suspended from school, lost jobs, have been arrested, or gotten kicked out of your house because of your anger.
- You often hate yourself and do things to hurt yourself.
- You believe other people are the cause of most of your problems.

Rate And Record

When you begin to feel anger building, rate your level of anger from one to ten. Your anger will be more or less intense in different situations. Your own thoughts and perceptions of a situation can cause Level 2 anger to increase to Level 10. Take note and record the instance so you understand that you have different levels of anger at different times of the day.

Preventing Your Anger

- Change your environment.
- Schedule time for yourself when you know you will be encountering stressful situations. Remove yourself from a situation so you can have the time to think about what you are really upset about.

- Find alternatives to your daily routine that are more soothing. Breaks throughout the day can help you stay focused and relaxed.

Cognitive Restructuring—Change The Way You Think

- Have a positive outlook. Remember that it is not the end of the world and that getting angry is not going to fix the problem. Utilize "positive self-talk" to restructure how you are thinking about the problem.
- Remember that getting angry escalates the situation and heightens emotions. Logic can overcome anger. Give yourself time to think through the best solution to the problem, rather than just reacting.

Improve Your Communication Skills

- Don't let your anger build. Slow down and rethink the first things that come to mind when a heated discussion takes place. Your choice of words is very important.
- Attack the problem not the person. Listen carefully to what they have to say and try not to argue.
- Take a few moments and decide the best course of action. Be patient with the other person and avoid putdowns. Compromise may be an option and lead to an amicable resolution.
- Respect each other and recognize when to quit. When it is over, let it be over.

Managing Your Anger

- Use simple relaxation techniques to calm yourself if you feel your anger might get out of control.
- Take slow, deep diaphragmatic breaths. These will help slow down your body's reaction and help you relax.
- Use imagery to relax and escape. Use your memory or your imagination to visualize a relaxing experience.
- Try exercising or engaging in non-strenuous exercise like yoga.
- Focus on finding a solution(s) to the problem. Avoid taking your anger out on someone. Place that energy into developing a plan that will resolve the situation and put it into action.
- Use humor to dissolve some of your pent up feelings. Reducing your rage through humor can bring a more calm and settling atmosphere and help you attain a more balanced perspective.

Controlling Stress

Unexpected income changes are among the most stressful events a person can experience. Unemployment, a disaster, divorce, or the death of someone you love can be personally devastating and can trigger the same reactions.

Personal Crises Are Stressful

In a personal crisis, you may feel tense and angry. You may have mood swings and find yourself lashing out at others. Feelings of frustration can lead to family arguments. Or you may feel depressed and discouraged. These feelings may be normal and common. Other family members usually share some or all of your emotions, either directly or indirectly. While sharing your feelings of loss and despair, they may also have to deal with your depression, frustration, and anger.

Allow yourself and other family members to express feelings. Don’t talk about "snapping out of it." This denies the seriousness of someone's feelings.

A personal crisis may force you to make rapid changes in your life. It can disrupt your habits and normal routines and give you too much or not enough free time. Maintain your daily routines as much as you possibly can. Try to fill your time in satisfying and rewarding ways.

Unemployment may mean you can spend time with your children, spouse, or other family members. Work on household projects that you haven’t had time to do. Read about a topic you’ve wanted to learn more about.

Every member of the family feels stress during tough times. Support and communicate with one another. Some roles and responsibilities may need to be changed until the crisis is over. Be flexible and willing to try new things. Studies show that families who meet challenges head-on are the most likely to successfully cope with crises.

Change can be difficult, but all family members need to pull together during a crisis.

Building Social Support

Question: What is one of the best predictors of whether or not a person will successfully improve a health habit such as managing stress, stopping smoking, or changing their eating patterns?

Answer: Social support

Social support is believed to protect people from disease, and has been strongly linked to better health practices. In addition, social support has been associated with better coping ability, reduced anxiety and higher perceived well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness.

Types of Support

There are several types of social support. Most of them fall into one of the following three categories:

- Informational: People who offer informational support provide factual information specific to your situation. Sometimes people who provide informational support are professionals (e.g., wellness coaches, financial advisors); sometimes they are people who have been through similar circumstances and have gained knowledge from their experiences.

- Emotional: When people give emotional support they bolster your emotional wellbeing. They may listen to you and allow you to express your feelings. They may give you a hug or call to see how you are doing.

- Practical: People providing practical support help with specific tasks that enable you to take better care of yourself. These can be things like running errands, helping with work tasks, or watching children.

It's a good idea to cultivate several kinds of support. Most people find that the type of support they need varies depending on their circumstances. Also, you may find that different people in your life are better suited to provide different types of support. As a single mother of a young child, I am greatly indebted to the family and friends who provide support. But everyone doesn't provide all forms of support. My sister for instance, is a great source of informational support—she has raised three daughters and is the voice of experience for me. But she lives in North Carolina, so she is not able to provide practical support. Fortunately, some of my in-town friends graciously help out by doing things like picking up a few items at the store when my child is ill or picking him up at daycare if I have to work late. These friends are lifesavers for me, but they don't all have children, so they can't provide the kind of informational support that my sister does. Then there is the friend who is there to listen to me when I feel overwhelmed—no judgment, no advice, just a shoulder to lean on and an ear to hear.

Finding, Asking for Support

Sometimes people are hesitant to seek out support. This may be due to concerns about rejection or not wanting to appear weak. Remember that everyone needs help from time to time. You have probably helped others in the past and will do so in the future. The following may help you reach out and ask for the support you need:

- Write down the things that you need help with. Be specific.

- Write down the names of people who might support you in different ways. Your list might include your partner, children, other family members, friends, support group, co-workers, clergy, neighbors, or health care providers.
- Look at your two lists. Think about who you can ask to help with each of the things you need assistance with.

- When asking for support, be open and direct about what you need.

- Compliment each person on any support they already provide. Then suggest any new or different approaches that would be helpful. Tell each person exactly what he or she can do to help you. You might ask one person to be available to listen when you are upset. You might ask someone else to help with a chore and another person to provide factual information.

- Follow up: Most people are happy to help out. Be sure to follow up by thanking your support team and sharing any progress you are making on your goals. Tell them specifically how their support has helped you. People like to know that they are helping others—hearing that their support is having benefits will be encouraging to them.

Help Others, Help Yourself

Research shows that being of service to others also benefits your own health. Studies have identified the following health enhancing effects of volunteering:

- Lower rates of mortality
- Better physical and mental health
- Stronger social ties
- Greater self-worth and trust
- Protection from social isolation
- Greater sense of purpose
- Enhanced life satisfaction
- Lower levels of depression

So, whether you are seeking social support from others, providing support through service, or simply spending more time in social activities, make an effort to get a regular dose of "social." Your health depends on it!

Resources

Managing Time and Work

- Books**:** *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* by David Allen (2002)
- Mind Tools: Practical articles and web tools to help people manage their time better. Resources include: template prioritized to do lists, activity logs, action plans, scheduling and goal setting tools, and more.

Coping with Stress and Uncertainty

- Books
    - *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, by Thi Naht Han, Bantam reissue, (1992).
    - *The Places that Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times* (2002), by Pema Chodron.
    - *Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion*, by Pema Chodron.
    - *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, by Jon Kabat Zinn.
    - *Full Catastrophe Living*, by Jon Kabat Zinn.
    - *The Three Minute Meditator*, by David Harp, published by New Harbinger Publications.
    - *Quiet Mind, Fearless Heart*, by Brian Luke Seaward, published by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
    - *Staying Well with Guided Imagery*, by Belleruth Naparstek, published by Warner Books.
    - *The Breakout Principle: How to Activate the Natural Trigger That Maximizes Creativity, Athletic Performance, Productivity, and Personal Well-Being*, by Herbert Benson.
    - *Love and Survival*, by Dean Ornish.
    - *Let Your Body Win: Stress Management Plain and Simple*, by Jacquelyn Ferguson (2009).
    - *Stress Management: A Comprehensive Guide to Wellness*, by Edward Charlesworth (2004).
    - *The Happiness Project: Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean my Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun* by Gretchen Rubin (2009). *book is part memoir, part self-help.

- Web Resources
  - American Institute of Stress: A clearinghouse of information and resources related to stress management. Topics addressed include: what is stress, effects of stress, work stress, stress and disease, stress reduction.
  - Authentic Happiness: (University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center) Questionnaires, tools, and resources for increasing optimism, resiliency, meaning, and life satisfaction.
  - Mind Tools: Useful section on work stress and cognitive restructuring.
  - Positive Psychology: (University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center)
  - Psychology Today: Tips to reduce stress.
  - UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center: guided meditations online.
  - Whole Person Associates: Good source for relaxation CDs, DVDs, audiotapes, videotapes, calming music, etc.

Staying Healthy

- Sleep
  - American Academy of Sleep: The site features: sleep quiz and info on sleep hygiene, exercise and sleep, depression and sleep, menopause and sleep, pain and sleep, etc. The site also outlines info on common sleep disorders such as snoring, restless legs syndrome, and more.
  - National Sleep Foundation: The site features: scientific data on sleep, ask the expert section, sleep topics fact sheets, online community for sleep support, information on how to find a sleep professional.
  - Mayo Clinic: A list of tips on improving your sleep.
  - Sleep Clinics: Services for people with clinical sleep problems such as sleep apnea and restless leg syndrome.
    - Carle Sleep Medicine
    - Christie Sleep Center

- Physical Activity and Healthy Eating
  - Healthfinder.gov: This site provides reliable information on how to improve your health habits. Guidance is provided in areas such as physical activity, healthy eating, preventive screenings, and avoiding risky behaviors.

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: This site features information in areas such as nutrition for all phases of life, eating for disease management and prevention, healthy weight, tips for eating out healthfully, savvy food shopping, how to read food labels, and more.
- Active Living Every Day and Healthy Eating Every Day: These programs help people improve eating and become more physically active in ways that fit their lifestyles. The programs are scientifically based and focus on providing practical lifestyle skills. Each program can be personalized to meet individual needs.