

WEEK 4

Stress Management

*Continue tracking your sleep.
Continue changes that are helping you sleep.*

Stress Management

In Week 4, you will learn strategies for managing stress and for relaxing before bedtime. This section presents many techniques that you can use to relax. Some techniques may be better suited for you than others. Like any new behavior, learning to relax in a healthy manner takes practice.

It is not enough to only read about relaxation techniques. You must practice them. Commit to using relaxation tools throughout your day.

WEEK 4: *Stress Management*

Stress & Sleep

Stress is linked to more than 50 percent of all sleep-related problems. You face stressors daily. Common examples are work and family demands, traffic jams, and health problems. Some stress helps you to be more productive. Too much or chronic stress can cause damage to your body. High stress levels can cause, or worsen, many health issues. These include heart disease, diabetes, obesity, depression, gastrointestinal problems, muscle problems, headaches, and back pain.

Your Body's Response to Stress

- Heart rate and breathing speed up.
- Blood pressure rises.
- Blood moves to major muscles.
- Muscles tense.
- Sweating occurs.
- Blood sugar increases to supply the body with energy.
- Brain waves increase. You feel more alert and may have racing thoughts.
- Stress hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) increase. Adrenaline makes you feel “on edge” and amped up.

Cortisol is one of the hormones released when you are stressed. Cortisol increases your appetite, especially for sugar and starchy carbohydrates. Consuming these foods in large amounts promotes belly fat, high blood pressure, and diabetes. During sleep, your body attempts to repair the damage caused by stress. Sleep lowers cortisol (a stress hormone) and raises growth hormone (a repair hormone).

Without enough sleep, levels of cortisol in the body stay high. High cortisol levels keep the body alert, increase blood pressure, and continue to damage cells. This raises the risk for cardiovascular disease and stroke. You may feel like you are in a state of hyper-alertness. Even if you fall asleep, your brain does not enter deep sleep. When you wake, you do not feel rested.

When you do not get enough sleep, you are less able to cope with stress. Improving the length and quality of your sleep is one of the most effective stress management techniques.

Learn to Relax

Improving sleep will help you manage stress. Managing stress will help you improve your sleep.

Relaxation Techniques

- Help the body to relax when under stress. This minimizes the physical wear and tear from stress.
- Help the mind relax. Where the mind goes, the body follows.
- Help you to recognize body tension and work to reduce it. The more these techniques are practiced, the easier they are to do.
- Help you resist stress. The more you practice, the more relaxed your natural state will become.

Plan Relaxing Activities

Do leisure activities during your week. Plan a variety of activities. Include both short and long ones. Try to make at least one activity something you plan to do regularly.

Here are a few ideas of activities you can try. Place a check mark next to activities that you currently enjoy. For activities that are not part of your routine, write if and when you would like to try them.

Leisure & Recreation Activities	I enjoy this now!	Date I will try this:
Take a warm bath		
Read a book		
Look through photo albums		
Listen to music		
Write in your journal or a notebook		
Get a massage		

Relaxing Activities, continued.

Leisure & Recreation Activities	I enjoy this now!	Date I will try this:
Swim or play in a pool or lake		
Knit, sew, or do another hobby		
Watch a movie, especially a comedy		
Do yoga		
Meditate		
Take a few deep breaths		
Get a manicure or pedicure		
Ride a bike		
Go for a walk		
Play with your pet		
Play with animals at a pet store or pet shelter		
Go to a park		
Sit near water		
Sketch what you see		
Volunteer at a soup kitchen, shelter, or other place in the community		
Write a letter or a card		
My idea:		
My idea:		
My idea:		

Seek Downtime Daily

Downtime is idle time between activities. Examples are the moments you have waiting at a red light, the time spent riding in an elevator, and the extra time during a lunch break.

Idle time allows your brain to rest and process and store information (how you learn and form memories). If you've ever had a great idea come to you in the shower, you know how creative your mind is during this time.

Often, multi-tasking steals this time away. The resulting "addiction to activity" does not let your mind rest during the day. The result can be a feeling of being busy all the time. You may feel like you need "time to think." If you go all day without downtime, it can be harder to quiet your mind at night and go to sleep.

Practice letting your mind rest every day. If you are used to filling your time with multiple tasks at once, the following exercise may be eye-opening!

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***TRY THIS:** Sit in a room for 15 minutes and do nothing. Don't look at your phone or seek any other distractions. Let thoughts enter your mind.*
.....

Reflect:

How did you feel at the end of 15 minutes?

Natural Ways to Include Downtime Daily

- Turn off notifications on your phone. Set aside time for social media during the day—and avoid it at other times.
- Listen to music instead of the news or talk radio while driving. Or, sit in silence and let your mind wander.
- Set an alarm on your phone to remind you to take five minutes of "blank space" time in your day.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means you are fully aware of all aspects of what you are sensing in the present moment.

- You focus on current thoughts without judging them.
- You put past thoughts and what the future has in store out of your mind.



Mindfulness Exercise

- Set aside five (or more) minutes. Find a place with no distractions. Get comfortable.
- Focus on your breathing or anything in the present, such as the sounds you hear or an object in your sight.
- As thoughts pop up in your mind, let them go without judging them. Return your focus to what you see, hear, feel, or are doing in the moment.

You can also practice mindfulness while you listen to music, walk, run, garden, or with any activity.

Take a Rest from Your Emotions

Detach yourself from your thoughts and emotions. Imagine sitting on a hill and viewing your thoughts and feelings at the bottom of the hill. Observe your thoughts as they pass by. Or, you can stop and think about them. Tell yourself: *"I have control over when and how I think about a situation."*

Allow your emotional reactions to a situation or issue take a rest for a bit. This helps your mind use logical thinking.



Plan Problem Solving

Your worries and concerns take up time in your day. Many issues cannot simply be ignored or brushed aside. To avoid carrying these thoughts with you to bed, address them earlier in the day.

Steps to Address Your Worries

1. At least two hours before bedtime, write a worry at the top of a piece of paper.
2. Divide the paper into three columns:
 - a. What I can't do.* Recognize what is out of your control.
 - b. What I can do.* List possible actions that are within your control. Write things you know how to do and that are realistic actions for you to take.
 - c. What I will do.* Decide which action you are ready to take first. This action may not solve every part of the problem, but is a small step you plan to take. Write when you will do this.

My worry:

What I can't do:

What I can do:

What I will do and when:

Mind Dump

Use a small notebook or index cards to “mind dump” thoughts that come to mind before bed or during sleep. Write down concerns, ideas, or things you need to remember the next day. If you wake up during the night with concerns, write these down, too. Put the notebook out of sight and go back to sleep. Avoid dwelling on these issues while you are in bed.

Take a Step Back

Step back and look at your worries from an outsider's point of view. Imagine how others might handle these issues. You can also use this technique to look at your job or family duties.

Ask yourself these questions:

What can I expect of myself in this situation?

Are my expectations realistic, given my abilities, strengths, and weaknesses?

What do others expect of me?

What ideas would others have for me? When you imagine how someone else might respond to a situation, you may actually come up with helpful ideas!

Creative Imagination

This tool allows you to rehearse an event or thought in your mind so that you are better prepared to deal with it when it occurs.

Identify an upcoming event or challenge. Picture other people there, what you do, what you say, and how you react to challenges you know are likely to arise. Mentally practice your feelings and actions to increase your confidence. Identify and address gaps in your plan.

You can also use creative imagination to save thoughts for later. Take stressful thoughts out of your present mind to reduce anxiety and help you feel calmer. Try these techniques:

- Imagine your stressful thoughts in a fishbowl or behind thick glass. You can see the thought floating around but you cannot touch it or hear anything that is going on behind the glass.
- Imagine your thought is in a bubble floating away in the wind. The bubble dances in the breeze and eventually blows away.
- Imagine your thoughts are a baseball. Then imagine whacking that ball high into the sky, far away.
- Imagine your worries falling into the depths of the ocean.
- Imagine putting your ideas on a shelf to think about later.



Make it Real

Write your worries on an index card and put them in a shoebox. Put the box on a shelf, in the back of the closet, or in a drawer.

Say this: "I can retrieve these thoughts later, but now it is time to sleep."

Dispute Irrational Thoughts

Learn to identify and dispute irrational thoughts. The following strategies help you break down thoughts that cause anxiety and make it hard for you to fall asleep.

Shades of Gray: Banish Black & White Thinking

Thinking in all-or-nothing terms using words like "always," "never," and "every" can lead to seeing situations and people in absolute terms. This thinking can make it difficult to see options. Logical thinking looks at more than one option. People can act in different ways. Situations can have many outcomes.

If you notice you are thinking in absolutes, identify alternatives to your black and white thoughts.

Tips for Rational Thinking

Use these tips to decide if an alternate thought is helpful for problem-solving. You can allow your thoughts and actions to cause anxiety or view them as a part of everyday life that you can manage.

1. Ask: Is your thought based on facts?
2. Identify what you are trying to do. Know your purpose.
3. Consider many different outcomes and their effects.
4. View the situation from many perspectives.
5. Don't assume a situation will have the same outcome as it did in the past.
6. Have good evidence for a generalization before you make it.
7. Avoid assuming one event caused another just because they happened at the same time.

Banish Black and White Thoughts, Example:

Black & White Thought	Alternative Thoughts
<i>I always say the wrong thing when I'm angry.</i>	<i>I can learn to take a break before I say something I would regret. I can practice responding in an assertive way to people who anger me.</i>

Think of an “absolute” that you have said. Or, when one comes to mind, return to this and complete the following chart to practice banishing black and white thinking.

Black & White Thought	Alternative Thoughts

Control Catastrophic Thinking

Seeing the worst possibility or outcome in a situation can lead to anxiety and racing thoughts. Avoid focusing on the negative aspects of a situation or how these could be even worse. The unknown future can seem scary and full of negative potential. Dispute each irrational thought with a rational one. Challenge your “worst case scenario” with a “best case scenario” and options in between.

- What is statistically likely in this scenario?
- What is the best this situation could turn out?
- What can I do to reduce the chances of a situation getting worse?

Example:

Catastrophic Thought	Alternative Thoughts
<i>I need to give a presentation to a large group. I am going to forget everything I want to say. My boss is going to fire me if this presentation does not go well.</i>	<i>I can practice what I want to say. I have given presentations before that went well, even though I was nervous beforehand. My boss has realistic expectations of me.</i>

Think of a “mountain” that you build out of a “molehill.” Challenge your thought with rational thinking. Complete the following chart with three examples of your own.

Catastrophic Thought	Alternative Thoughts

Clean up Psychological Pollution

Skip the evening news. Watching or listening to the news can be stressful. Stories of crime, the economy, political battles, and community issues can be worrying and depressing. Stress hormones can make you feel more alert and less ready to sleep.

Avoid social media right before you go to bed, too. Positive or negative stories from friends and family may keep you awake. Add these to your “to-do” list if you need to follow-up. Give yourself a media curfew.



Practice Relaxation Techniques

Learn These Three Skills to Relax

1. *Relaxation Reflex*: Get rid of muscle tension.
2. *Mental Imagery*: Think of calm, restful places.
3. *Deep Natural Breathing*: Feel relaxed by breathing in more oxygen.

Plan Relaxation Time

If possible, use the hour before you sleep to wind down and prepare your body and mind for sleep. You can also do relaxation exercises as needed throughout the day. Relaxation techniques can help reduce stress-related health problems, such as high blood pressure, headaches, and pain. These tools also help you to exercise greater mental and physical control and reduce negative emotions.

How the mind can control the body:

- It can slow brain wave patterns.
- It can reduce heart and breathing rates.
- It can increase blood flow to your limbs.
- It can relax muscles.

Prepare for Relaxation

Remove external factors that could be causing your body and mind to be overly alert. Watching TV is ok, but avoid loud, violent, or exciting programs. Mindless programs are better. Dim the lights. Play a quiet game (though not on your phone or computer), read a book, or organize your sock drawer or the clothes in your closet.

A bath taken two hours before bedtime allows your body temperature to drop to a sleep-inducing level.

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Relaxation Reflex

This skill relaxes four basic muscle groups. Tightening and relaxing these muscles produces a soothing effect which helps you relax. Take slow deep breaths, drop your head, and place your shoulders forward to add to the effect.

Practice this every day for about five to 10 minutes. Divide the body into four muscle groups. Tense each group for five seconds, then release.

1. **Arms and Hands** – Lift your arms, bend them at your wrists and elbows, make fists, and tighten your upper arms.
2. **Face and Neck** – Squinch your eyes, nose, cheeks and brow. Stretch your mouth and grit your teeth. Point your chin down toward your chest.
3. **Middle Torso** – Push your shoulders back, tighten your stomach and the middle of your back.
4. **Legs and Feet** – Lift your legs off the floor and hold them straight out. Point your toes towards your face. Tighten your thighs.

Mental Imagery

Choose a peaceful scene like a beach, forest, or sunrise. You can even choose a place of fantasy. Then take an imaginary visit there and relax in the process. Imagine this place using the following 10 steps:

1. Find a comfortable sitting or reclining position.
2. Gently close your eyes.
3. Notice nothing but your own gentle breathing pattern.
4. Begin to think about your peaceful scene. Picture where you are and what you do when your mind and body are very, very relaxed. Pause to create and capture the image of your soothing place.
5. Pretend that you are really there in your special relaxing environment. Picture all the colors... Hear the sounds... Smell the aromas... Taste... Touch your surroundings as if you are really there... Enjoy... Relax...
6. Find the calm and peace. Allow yourself to feel good... Let your whole body relax and enjoy the moment.
7. Pause for five to 10 minutes and become filled with relaxation.
8. Allow the relaxation to re-energize your body and mind.
9. As you feel comfortable, slowly open your eyes, feeling totally refreshed.
10. Escape to your special place anytime you wish to relax, if even for a moment.

Deep Natural Breathing

An increased amount of oxygen allows your heart rate to slow down. This produces a calming effect.

1. Sit in a chair, arms at your sides, with your legs uncrossed.
2. Note any tension in your muscles.
3. Put one hand on your chest and the other hand on your abdomen.
4. Take in a breath slowly and deeply through your nose allowing your abdomen to expand and push up your hand. After your abdomen is full of air, allow your chest to expand, pushing up your other hand. This is one long steady breath.
5. Hold the air in for three seconds.
6. Purse your lips and exhale through your mouth making a relaxing, whooshing sound.
7. Continue to take long, slow, deep inhales through your nose and let out long, slow exhales through your mouth.
8. Focus on the sound and feeling of deep breathing. Continue for three to five minutes.
9. Your chest should feel less constricted. You should feel less stress and tension physically and mentally.



Biofeedback

Biofeedback is the process of getting information (feedback) about your biological (body) functions. Simple examples of everyday biofeedback devices include a thermometer, a scale, and a mirror. A thermometer provides feedback on your body temperature. A scale gives you feedback on weight loss or gain. A mirror can show you if you are pale or flushed.

Training with biofeedback tools teaches voluntary control over some bodily responses which are linked to stress.

Personal Biofeedback Tools

Pulse Rate. On your wrist, gently trace with two or three fingers from the base of your palm toward your thumb where a bone generally protrudes. Your fingers will gently slide into a slight groove where you should feel a pulse beat.

1. Count the number of beats in 10 seconds.
2. Multiply that figure times six to get your pulse rate per minute.
3. Take your pulse before and after practicing a relaxation technique. You should have a lower pulse rate after you successfully complete a relaxation exercise.

Stress Control Card or Stress Dot. This card that you hold or a dot that sticks to your skin measures the temperature of your hand.

1. The colors black, brown, and red report cold temperatures and indicate moderate to high levels of stress.
2. When you are more relaxed, the circulation to your hands and feet returns to normal and your hands should be warmer. Green, blue, or violet colors report low levels of stress.
3. Using this card before and after a relaxation technique can give you feedback on how well the technique is working for you.
4. The exact colors are not as important as being able to modify a color. This shows you have made a connection between your mind and your body.

Perceived Muscle Tension (PMT). This is a self-measurement of muscle tension using a subjective scale.

1. Ask yourself, “Where do I feel tension?” and “Where do I feel relaxation?”
2. This tension and relaxation inventory lets you know the difference between tension and relaxation in your body. It links a bodily feeling to the words tension and relaxation. The answer you give to the questions in step 1 above is your feedback.
3. You may even use a number to describe how relaxed or tense a body part feels.

Sample PMT Scale					
+3	+2	+1	-1	-2	-3
extremely relaxed	very relaxed	more relaxed than normal	more tense than normal	very tense	extremely tense

Biofeedback Training Record

Use this biofeedback training record to chart your own self-relaxation progress. Fill in the chart using the personal biofeedback tools and the relaxation techniques described in Week 4. Practice relaxation techniques daily as you learn to manage daily stress and quiet your mind.

Relaxation Technique	Pulse Rate	Stress Color	PMT (+3 to -3 scale)	How I felt afterwards

Review & Prepare

Look at your pattern of sleep over the past week. Compare it to your sleep patterns over the past few weeks of tracking.

I fall asleep more quickly now.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

I have more daytime energy.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

I wake up fewer times during the night.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If or when I do wake up, I am able to fall asleep again more quickly.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Relaxation techniques I practiced this past week:

How I responded to racing thoughts when I tried to sleep:

Are you ready for another week of attention to your sleep?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Shift Your Bedtime Again

Has your sleep continued to improve? If yes, you are ready to adjust your bedtime. Remember, only make a shift when your sleep quality is high.

Example Bedtime Shift

First bedtime set: 12 a.m.

First shifted bedtime: 11:45 p.m.

New bedtime for this coming week: 11:30 p.m.

This pattern will continue until you reach a length of quality sleep that gives you enough daytime energy and that you can maintain in the long-run. If you have a few poor nights of sleep, shift back to a later bedtime to increase your sleep drive.

My Bedtime Shift

First bedtime I set:

My first shifted bedtime:

Evaluation of my sleep trends:

My new bedtime for this coming week: