



Your Recovery Workbook:

**Coping and
Relaxation**

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YOUR RECOVERY WORKBOOK: COPING AND RELAXATION

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A Coping Story:

A woman was worried about her boyfriend’s unhealthy choices and had a lot of stress at work. She noticed headaches and tight muscles in her neck. She began focusing on her own wellness, using lavender essential oils instead of perfume, and learning to do yoga. She decided to let go of the unhealthy and stressful relationship, and then felt relief as well as some sadness. At work, she took stretch breaks and did deep breathing. She stopped bringing work home and was able to get some tips from her co-workers on how to manage the workload better. The headaches went away as she was able to manage her stress and the neck aches improved with some massages. Her problem-solving and coping took some time, but it was successful.



1. INTRODUCTION



- Stress is a fact of life. Everyone has stress, but some people seem to have more than others.
- People with a lot of stress may have doubts about being able to really enjoy life with the stress, anxiety, depression, or pain that doesn't seem to go away.
- Built-up stress is unhealthy, and it can even seem like it is controlling you. But you can learn to control it.
- Instead of blaming other people or waiting for someone to take away your problems, you can take an active role and avoid letting stress overwhelm you.
- Find support and take care of yourself as you learn to cope and relax.
- Your health care team can provide the right kind of treatment and counseling for physical or emotional pain, mental illnesses, or other illnesses that you may have.
- Not all of the techniques in this workbook will help you, but some of them will. Try them to find out which ones work for you.
- Your personal treatment plan of relaxation and coping “tools” can help you have a successful recovery and/or improve your wellness.
- This workbook can be your guide for better coping, healing, and for being more comfortable.

WELLNESS IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS OF BECOMING AWARE OF AND MAKING CHOICES TOWARD A HEALTHY AND FULFILLING LIFE. "... A STATE OF COMPLETE PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING—NOT MERELY THE ABSENCE OF DISEASE ..."

2. UNDERSTAND STRESS AND COPING



What is stress? *(Mark the ones you may have had)*

- Our body's reaction to the challenges of daily living.—Anything that is exciting or uncomfortable can cause stress.
- A physical response that includes the release of brain chemicals and stress hormones.—It is not just an emotional response.
- Having “stress emotions” such as anger, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, or envy can be triggered by stressful situations. (You can choose to react with different emotions.)
- If you believe your problems can't be managed, your stress seems worse.

Positive stress is like being involved in sports, events, holidays, or new roles. But, having too much stress for a long time can be harmful.

Negative stress can include worrying about school, family problems or money, being left out, having too much to do, fearing violence, or being concerned for people who are sick.

What is coping? *(Mark the statements below that you agree with)*

- How we think and behave as we manage stress in our lives
- Changing or adapting to help us get through tough times in a healthy way
- Thinking about the situation, what it means, and how to improve things
- A skill that takes strength, courage, and may include asking for help

To be able to cope with stress, you first need to know what your problems are and focus on the things you can realistically change or control.

Even if you can't avoid stress, you can get support and practice coping skills.

Watch YouTube video **Managing Stress—Brainsmart-BBC** (2:26 minutes) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpQrMqDoqE>

2. CONNECT YOUR MIND AND BODY



In holistic health care, there is no false division between your mind and body. They are connected because stress and discomfort affect your body. Stress can come from many personal factors and emotional factors. *(Mark below what you think may be affecting you)*

What you expect of yourself and others	Feeling threatened or under pressure
Your self-esteem	Suffering a loss or having been harmed
Your mood	Feeling a lack of control
Your body's hormones	Believing you lack ability or knowledge
Genetics or family history	Believing you lack support or resources
Having a history of trauma	Feeling overwhelmed or confused
Having beliefs or history of injustices	Feeling vulnerable or uncertain
Your coping style (or lack of coping)	Going through a life transition
Modified from Caudill, M. A. (2009). (3rd ed.). Managing pain before it manages you. New York: Guilford Press.	Modified from www.stresscourse.tripod.com

Life transitions can include starting school, moving home, reaching puberty, starting college, starting a career, getting married, becoming a parent, losing a spouse (through death or divorce), and retiring. *(Circle the transitions you are in)*

What are ways you want to keep your mind and body connected? *(For example, having a healthy lifestyle, thinking positively, or staying focused on wellness and coping)*

YOU DON'T HAVE TO CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS; YOU JUST HAVE TO STOP LETTING THEM CONTROL YOU.

~ DAN MILLMAN

DESCRIBE YOUR STRESS



Draw a picture, write a poem, or pen a story about your problems:

A large, empty rectangular box with a double-line border, intended for drawing, writing a poem, or penning a story about the user's problems.

*"DON'T LET YOUR MIND BULLY YOUR BODY INTO BELIEVING IT
MUST CARRY THE BURDEN OF ITS WORRIES."*

~ ASTRID ALANDA

KNOW YOUR STRESS LEVEL



Sometimes you aren't aware of how much stress is affecting you.

Score each statement below and total it. 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, and 3 = Often.

A score of 36-45 = High Stress, 25-35 = Medium Stress, and 1-24 = Low Stress.

- I often get really frustrated with things at work, school, or home.
- I say and do things like I am in a hurry when I feel stressed.
- I am afraid that my life is too hard.
- I do what I am told to do.
- I am angry or aggressive.
- I either drink alcohol, smoke, drink a lot of coffee, or over-eat.
- I often feel nervous or upset.
- My muscles feel tight or cramped during the day.
- I wake up with muscle cramps during the night.
- I feel tired and exhausted, for no apparent reason.
- I have more than one or two bad headaches each week.
- It usually takes more than an hour for me to fall asleep.
- I often wake up in the middle of the night or very early in the morning.
- I have painful stomach aches more than once or twice a week.
- I feel nervous and can't keep still.

List other ways your behavior shows your stress level. _____

Modified from a quiz by an unknown author. Please send a message if you know who should be given credit for it.

Total Score =

WARNING SIGNS OF TOO MUCH STRESS



If you let stress build up, it can cause health problems and affect your relationships. (*Circle the signs of stress below that describe you*)

Having sudden anger, or being angry a lot	Feeling like you don't have enough time
Having a lot of colds, headaches or stomach aches	Not taking care of yourself, or "letting yourself go"
Having trouble sleeping and feeling tired all the time	Having high blood pressure, stress related pain or other health problems
Crying easily, with small problems	Feeling discouraged about a lot of things in your life, or feeling "stuck"
Feeling unable to stop worrying	Feeling sad or lonely, but turning down social activities
Having people say you are moody or "not yourself" lately	Not having fun, and not caring about things anymore
Having trouble concentrating	Not being able to think through or handle situations

Modified from a handout by an unknown author. Please send a message if you know who should be given credit for it.

If you have 2 or more of the warning signs above, you need to learn how to reduce and manage your stress. If you have 4 or more, talk about stress with your health care provider and get some help. You can bring this form with you to help describe your signs of stress and how intense they are.

Because your stress and anxiety effects are unique to you, so are the ways you can reduce and manage them.

3. ADD TO YOUR COPING “TOOLBOX”



Sometimes people say, “Relax,” or “Deal with it,” as if it is an easy thing to do. But, it isn’t easy to cope with stress, anxiety, pain, or other problems.

Sometimes you don’t even know why things bother you until you think about it later, or “sleep on it.” Something else (like traumatic memories from the past) could trigger an extreme reaction. You need some tools to help you manage the anxiety.

Think of having several “tools” or ways of coping that can be pulled out and used quickly when you need them. They won’t all work for every problem, but you can usually find one that helps. It may take some time to figure out which one works for which kind of problem.

Being aware of what has helped in the past, while adding new tools, and identifying the source of your stress can help you to find the best tools for coping.

For example, a tool that might work when struggling with a difficult decision is to list the pros and cons on paper, then put a star by the most important things. By reading and comparing the lists, you can feel more sure of decisions (and less stressed).

Write down one or more tools you already use for managing stress:

Relaxation is a coping tool that is part of mindfulness-based stress reduction.

- Mindfulness can reduce stress and anxiety from daily life or from chronic illness as it trains the mind to be thinking minute-to-minute.
- Mindfulness brings the mind to a higher awareness by keenly observing thoughts and emotions, but not judging them.
- It lets thoughts and emotions pass without being immersed in them. For example:

*When you watch the sky on a clear day, clouds and birds move through your vision, negative thoughts pass through your mind **but they don’t stay.***

4. TRY RELAXATION SKILLS



Deep breathing can reduce stress. When you feel tense or anxious, your body often has a faster heartbeat and irregular, shallow breaths. Deep breathing can decrease the stress response by increasing the oxygen you breathe and soothing your body and mind. It is best to use your diaphragm, which expands your stomach rather than your chest.

How to use deep breathing for relaxation:

- ❑ Sit in a chair or lie on your back
- ❑ Clear your mind. Forget the things you have to do. Let go of any thought that pops into your head.
- ❑ Improve your posture. – If sitting, sit up straighter but release any tension in your body.
- ❑ Breathe in through your nose slowly and evenly.
- ❑ Count silently starting from “one” as you inhale about 3 seconds. Notice your hand moving up and down on your belly with each breath.
- ❑ Breathe out through your mouth slowly and evenly, counting silently.— Exhaling should take about twice as long as inhaling. (Try to breathe out for 5-6 seconds.).
- ❑ Repeat 5 times or more. — If you feel dizzy, try to breathe slower.

Watch the YouTube video **Passive Muscle Relaxation** by Joanne D’Amico (12:41 minutes) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcjTF5BxKdo>

Try doing gentle stretches, or practice yoga to improve fitness, flexibility and balance along with connecting your mind and body.

Progressive muscle relaxation is another way to help control stress and anxiety, problems falling asleep, and some kinds of chronic pain. It is based on simply tensing or tightening one muscle group at a time, followed by some warm, relaxed time.

TRY PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION



Sit in a chair with arm rests or lay on your back. Tense and release muscle groups as described below. When tensing, feel the muscles pull hard and tight, then let them go. Notice them feeling warm, heavy, and limp. Breathe slowly and deeply.

Tense this body area:	Hold for:	Release:
Hands—Make a tight fist	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Upper arms by making a fist and bringing the tension up to your shoulders	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Shoulders by bringing both shoulders up toward your ears	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Upper part of your face by wrinkling your forehead and lifting your eyebrows as high as you can	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Middle of face by closing your eyes very tight and scrunching up your nose	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Neck and chest by pulling chin down toward your chest	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Stomach by making your stomach hard	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Upper part of legs by squeezing your muscles as hard as you can	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Lower part of legs by pulling your toes up toward the ceiling	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds
Chest, shoulders, and upper back by taking a deep breath, holding it, and at the same time pulling shoulders back	Count of 7	Let go and relax for 30 seconds

USE POSITIVE IMAGERY



Positive imagining or guided imagery often uses words and music to promote well-being. It can promote relaxation and shift attention away from what is going on around you. It could be a long, guided meditation, or as simple as this:

- Sit or lay comfortably and quietly, breathing deeply. Close your eyes if you want to.
- Think about a place in your past that you really liked, and that made you happy. (You can go back to childhood memories if you want to.)
- Imagine that you are in that place (for example, a beach, woods, fishing hole, celebration, home, or wherever you want to be).
- Use all of your senses to experience it. - See, hear, smell, touch, taste, and enjoy it for at least 10 minutes.
- When you are ready, open your eyes, and think positive thoughts for a few more minutes before getting up.

There are many ways to do guided imagery.—You can purchase CDs or DVDs for relaxation. You can use YouTube or websites for free meditations, voice recordings and engaging imagery or music. These websites have a variety of good resources that are free to use:

Instant Mindfulness at http://www.dbtselfhelp.com/html/instant_mindfulness.html

The Mindfulness Solution at <http://www.mindfulness-solution.com/>

**“ALL CHANGE BEGINS IN THE MIND—WITH
A SINGLE THOUGHT.”**

~ ALBERT EINSTEIN

5. USE GROUNDING TECHNIQUES



Grounding (getting back to solid ground) can be a helpful coping skill for flashbacks, feeling disconnected from reality, for cravings, for high anxiety, or for panic attacks.

If you don't want to accept unwanted or intrusive thoughts, there are ways for your brain to control them.

You can replace those thoughts with other thoughts (for the moment), but you will want to think about them later and “process” them.

Use your 5 senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste to connect to the “here and now.”)

Write down what triggered the distressing thoughts and what was helpful. Try these ways to help you feel like you are on solid ground:

- ❑ Firmly hold a piece of ice, or splash cold water on your face.
- ❑ Bite into a lemon or eat something good.—Focus on its taste, sound, smell, and how it feels.
- ❑ Describe something in the room with great detail, using all your senses.
- ❑ Say the alphabet slowly or count backwards from 20.
- ❑ Listen to loud music, hum a song, or think of lyrics to a song or poem.
- ❑ Think to yourself, or say aloud, “That was then. This is now. I am safe here.”
- ❑ Focus on your breathing and follow it with your mind.
- ❑ Feel the ground under your feet. Press your heels to the floor.
- ❑ Feel the sensations of your skin. Rub sweet-smelling lotion on your hands for soothing comfort.

6. USE POSITIVE SELF-TALK



Thoughts go through our heads all the time. Self-talk is short phrases we tell ourselves in our minds. But, many people have negative self-talk from doubt or from blaming themselves. It can make you sad or anxious.

Changing your inner voice to positive helps you to cope. The following statements can be used for positive self-talk. *(Mark the ones you like, and say them often)*

- I am a good and valuable person. I deserve to be kind to myself.
- I am not perfect, and that's OK. No one else is perfect, either.
- I can bounce back quickly from setbacks.
- I am responsible for my life and my health. I will set realistic goals.
- I am not bothered by what other people think. I will just keep doing my best.
- It is OK to do first things first, one step at a time.
- I'm going to be all right. I will get through this.
- I don't like the situation I'm in, but, "It is what it is." If it can't be changed, all I can do is make the best of it.
- I am feeling stressed out. I will try to relax and calm down. I will be fine.
- My anxiety is too much. I will feel better if I do something. I think I'll take a walk.
- I've felt overwhelmed like this before. I am going to do some deep breathing and keep on going.
- Things will look better after a good night's sleep.
- I am slowly learning how to cope and be more in control of my emotions. Sometimes good things can come from hard times.

CHALLENGE ANY NEGATIVE THINKING



Is your self-talk based on reality? *Notice what you are thinking and ask yourself, "Is it true?"*
_____ You may be seeing things worse than they really are. If you find that your thoughts are not true, your emotional response can change.

Clarify the problem and what you can do about it:

What is the problem? _____

Why is it a problem? _____

What can you do? _____

What do you need? _____

How do you feel? _____

Another technique is called Vertical Arrow or "So What?" (by David Burns). Think about a negative thought you are having, as if it was true. Ask yourself, "Why does it upset me?" Then ask "So what? What is the worst that could happen?" Write down your answer and draw an arrow pointing down from what you have written.

Next, ask yourself the same questions about what you just wrote down. Under the arrow, write down another answer and draw another arrow. Continue this until you have gone as far as you can,. This may uncover irrational or distorted thoughts and fears behind your negative thoughts.

Burns, D. (1999). *The feeling good handbook* (New York: Plume) in Caudill, M. A. (2009). (3rd ed.) *Managing pain before it manages you..* New York: Guilford Press.

"... HUMAN BEINGS, BY CHANGING THE INNER ATTITUDES OF THEIR MINDS, CAN TRANSFORM THE OUTER ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES."

~ WILLIAM JAMES

7. WRITE IN A JOURNAL



Keep a journal or diary to help prevent feeling “stuck.” Expressing experiences and emotional distress can be soothing. You can write stories or letters, dreams, ideas, poetry, drawings, pictures, stickers, letters, etc.

Stories are simpler when you write them down.—You get a clearer picture of how you react to stress. By putting things into words, they are processed differently in the brain. You may have insight into hidden emotions and possibilities.

To get started, choose a pen or pencil, notebook, diary, or a computer to type with.

- Decide when to write. – In the morning? At night? (Try for 20 minutes a day.)
- Find a quiet place, and just start writing. Start with a story, a list, random thoughts, or, “I did _____ today.” Keep on writing quickly.— Whatever comes into your head is OK. Keep your journal private if you want to.
- Wait a few weeks before reading your old journal entries, then look to see what problems you have solved, and what you still need to work on.

What Should A Journal Be?

- Small steps toward discovering things about yourself
- A rewarding, enjoyable experience
- A place to reflect on your life and what you want to see
- A guide for action (not an end in itself)
- A tool to help you heal, using mind-body interaction

Writing can also tap into a deeper wisdom.—Painful learning experiences may be later described as “soul-making” experiences.

Day, A. L. (2001). The journal as a guide for the healing journey. *Nursing Clinics of North America*. 36, 131-142

Journaling is not meant to be complaining, and should not be done instead of problem solving. It can identify a starting point for a successful recovery “journey.”

If you write about stressful or traumatic events in a journal or diary, powerful healing can happen. As you continue to write, you can make sense of what happened and bring meaning to the painful experiences.

8. BE PHYSICALLY AND SOCIALLY ACTIVE



Take a walk or get some exercise to manage stress or to “let off some steam.” Even though your body likes movement, don’t over-do it. Exercise can help by:

- Reducing tension and increasing your energy
- Allowing clearer thinking by getting away from the situation for a while
- Moving and distracting yourself—Not dwelling on problems
- Producing endorphins (natural chemicals produced by the brain) that can improve your mood, relax you, and energize you)
- Letting you observe the beauty of nature if you go outdoors (bringing you closer to your spiritual side)

Find a proper balance of activity, rest, and good nutrition. *What physical activities do you think would help you cope?* _____

Laugh off stress. Try to “shake it off.” Some people say, “If I didn’t laugh, I would cry.” You could take a “comedy break” by watching TV, videos, or a funny movie. Put on some music and dance or sing along.

Social and leisure activities can be fun and relaxing.—Both people and pets can be good to spend time with. One idea that can combine social time, walking and being out in nature is geocaching, a fun sport or hobby using a GPS device to find hidden things.

What do you plan to do for fun? _____

You can express yourself and gain insight by talking about your problems. But also listen when the other people give you their opinions. Remember, you may be seeing things with a distorted view. If a person you trust tells you that you should see your health care provider, you should do it.

If there is an emergency or crisis, don’t rely on only coping skills.— Get help.

9. HAVE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE



- Focus on wellness and take steps to be healthier. Spend time with people who have positive attitudes. Celebrate successes and small gains.
- Eat balanced, nutritious foods and limit the use of caffeinated or alcoholic drinks. Drink plenty of water. Be physically active.
- Even if smoking seems to relax you, it makes your health worse. Also, being dependent on nicotine makes you more anxious overall. Don't smoke.
- Make time to calm your body and mind. Consider doing yoga for holistic healing.
- Make time to sleep because it can help you cope. Use relaxation techniques if you can't seem to fall asleep. Instead of having anxiety from tossing and turning in bed, get up to do quiet activities in a comfortable chair until you are tired enough to lay down again.
- Stay active and do fun things. But don't over schedule activities. Say "no" to new activities or demands on your time, unless you really want to do them.

Manage your time. *(Fill in about how much time you spend daily on these activities. Discuss how you want to save time or spend more time in these areas and write down your ideas)*

_____ Sleep

_____ Work (including driving time)

_____ Food related time

_____ Household tasks and chores

_____ Personal care (showering, dressing)

_____ Social time with family and friends

_____ Leisure activities (TV, reading, computer)

_____ Community (including church or volunteer work)

_____ Total hours (24)

EXPLORE AND USE YOUR RESOURCES



- Find someone to support and help you (like a trusted friend, family member, or health care provider).
- Find the community resources you need. — Call 211 for information and referral, or call the crisis line if you need to.
- Ask for help when you need it. Some people may not know how to help you or don't understand what you need. Keep asking until someone helps you.
- Community support programs may be able to help provide housing, employment, legal aid, social activities, and support networks.
- Build on your personal strengths and set realistic goals as you try new things.
- Solving even small problems can help you feel more motivated, in control, and knowledgeable about resources in your area.
- Be patient with larger problems since problem solving takes time.
- Handle stressful situations directly to avoid prolonged waiting and worrying.
- Consider attending support groups in your area. If there are none, spread the word about unmet needs in your community.

Life is full of changes and challenges. Use your resources, be more flexible, and find your way to wellness and recovery. What resources do you need?

“STRESS RESIDES NEITHER IN THE SITUATION NOR IN
THE PERSON, IT DEPENDS ON A TRANSACTION
BETWEEN THE TWO.”

~ DR. RICHARD LAZARUS

10. FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE



- If you feel “lost” during life’s ups and downs, spirituality can help you find your way. Its emotional strength and hope can help you overcome barriers.
- Religion and spirituality are different, but they can overlap. They give structure and meaning to human values, behaviors, and experiences. Many people who don’t join religions still have spiritual beliefs.—It may be as simple as having awe or love for the beauty of nature.

Prayer can give benefits similar to meditation. Studies have shown that increased spiritual involvement is related to better health outcomes and seems to decrease the risk of substance abuse.

Spirituality often causes a decreased stress response, less anxiety, a lower blood pressure, and a slower heart rate.

Mueller, P. S., Plevak, D.J. & Rummans, T. A. (2001) Religious involvement, spirituality, and medicine: Implications for clinical practice. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 76, 1225-1235.

“Peaceful feelings” are often described by people with faith they can “hold on to” in troubled times. Social support from spiritual connections can also help you cope.

Which positive effects does spirituality have on you? *(Circle the ones you noticed)*

Hope	Faith	Love or compassion
Courage	Patience	Endurance
Identity	Purpose	Comfort or inner peace
Connection	Wholeness	Security or reassurance
Inspiration	Gratitude	Being part of something larger

Think of ways to nurture or tend your spirituality. Write down your life purpose or what gives your life meaning? _____

Watch and listen to YouTube video by Louie Schwartzberg called **Gratitude HD: Moving Art™** (6:09 minutes) about exploring and living with gratitude in your life. And watch **Eric Whitacre’s Virtual Choir - “Lux Aurumque”** (6:21 minutes). The first 33 seconds are silent. The song lasts about 4 minutes.

11. PRACTICE COPING SKILLS



What do you do for coping? *(Circle ways you have tried. Star the ones you want to try)*

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Deep breathing or guided imagery | Taking a warm bath or shower |
| Positive self-talk | Progressive muscle relaxation |
| Muscle stretching or exercise | Laughing or joking around |
| Reading or being in a quiet place | Problem solving |
| Listening to music, or dancing | Finding someone to talk to (or text) |
| Going online for support | Watching TV or a movie |
| Self-care, nutrition and sleep | Meditation or prayer |
| Taking a walk or bike ride | Doing hobbies, crafts, or enjoyable work |
| Using essential oils | Getting a massage |

What coping or relaxation skills do you like the best?

In what kind of situation does it help you relax?

How often do you use relaxation skills?

What makes them hard for you to do?

What would make it easier for you to use relaxation or coping skills?

When you try relaxation skills, keep track of when you used them and if they helped you or not. If it doesn't seem to work the first time, try again.

Do what it takes to practice your coping skills and add more tools to your coping "toolbox."

FOCUS ON COPING



**Draw a picture, write a poem, or pen a story about your coping,
and what you plan to do about your stress:**

A large, empty rectangular box with a double-line border, intended for the student to draw a picture, write a poem, or pen a story about their coping and stress management plans.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary B. Knutson is a Registered Nurse with a Master's Degree as a Nurse Educator. She has worked to improve the patient education resources in academic settings and in a clinical research. She also worked in long-term care facilities, hospitals (including psychiatric units), and community health care agencies with the goal of empowering people and helping them toward better self-care. More health education resources can be found online at www.healthvista.net.

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