Managing Stress & Anxiety
Wellness Workshop
Student Wellness Services
We acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes

the Blackfoot Confederacy (the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut’ina First Nation, the Stoney Nakoda (the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations), and Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

The University of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River. The traditional Blackfoot name of this place is “Moh’kins’tsis.”
Learning Objectives

- Learn the typical behaviours, thoughts, and physical sensations associated with anxiety and stress
- Develop an increased self-awareness of our personal experience of anxiety and stress
- Learn strategies to improve relaxation and build resilience to stress
- Learn about additional support and resources for anxiety management
Anxiety is a state of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a realistic or imagined threatening event or situation.
What is Stress?

- Stress is our body’s response to pressure.
- Stress is typically associated with external pressures.
- Many different situations or life events can cause stress. It is often triggered when we experience something new, unexpected or that threatens our sense of self, or when we feel we have little control over a situation.

(Mental Health Foundation UK, n.d.)
The Anxiety Cycle

1. Sense a danger/threat; see self as vulnerable.
2. Experience thoughts and imagery that are catastrophic.
3. Behave in ways that avoid anxiety triggers; seek safety.
Anxiety is a part of life!

- Normal and Inevitable
- Adaptive
- Safe
- Temporary
- Anonymous

71.2% of UCalgary students report that they felt overwhelming anxiety at some time during the last 12 months (National College Health Assessment, 2019)
Anxiety and stress become a problem when they start to interfere with our daily functioning.
Factors That Contribute to Managing Anxiety

There are many different factors that may impact how or how well you cope with anxiety and stress, including:

- Genetics
- Early Life Experiences
- Personality
- Social Support
- Economic Status

With the right tools and supports, anyone can learn to manage or reduce symptoms of anxiety and stress!
Anxiety and Performance

Eustress (Optimal Performance)

Too Little Stress
Low arousal
Boredom
Low drive/motivation

Too Much Stress
High Arousal
Too many demands
Fatigue, overwhelmed

Performance/Well-being

Stress Level
Physical Reactions

Fight or Flight Response

Parasympathetic Nervous System
Self-awareness is an *essential* first step in managing anxiety.

- What situations do you generally experience anxiety in?
- Where in your body do you feel stress or anxiety?
Anxious Behaviours

- Avoid
- Control
- Distract
- Mask
Anxious Thoughts

Over-estimating a Negative Outcome

Under-estimate your ability to cope

= ANXIETY
Self-awareness is an essential first step in managing anxiety.

- When you feel anxious:
  - How do you generally behave?
    - (Keep in mind avoid, control, distract, mask?)
  - How does anxiety show up in your thoughts?
Tools and Strategies

- **Relaxation**
  - Calm Breathing
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Visualization
  - Mindfulness

- **Change**
  - Challenging anxious self-talk
  - Catch, Check, Challenge
  - Developing a stress-positive mindset
Calm Breathing

- Delivers oxygen to the brain and triggers the parasympathetic nervous system
- **Diaphragmatic breathing** aka “belly breathing”
Definition:
“paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”
(Jon Kabat-Zinn)
Practice: 3-Minute Breathing Space
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Systematically tensing and relaxing muscle groups to help “cue” a relaxed state at the first sign of muscle tension that comes with anxiety

- Steps:
  - Find a comfortable position and take a few deep breaths
  - Focus on a target muscle group, squeeze the muscles as hard as you can for 5 seconds
  - Release the tension and exhale, remain in relaxed state for 15 seconds and move to next muscle group
• “Imagining something powerful in your head for a few minutes that can make you feel better afterwards” (Anxiety Canada, n.d.)

• Visualizations help us:
  — Take “mental vacations” to increase feelings of calm and safety
  — Build confidence or mentally rehearse scary situations
  — Get a new perspective
Challenging Anxious Self-Talk

Speak in Positives

Present Tense

First Person

Believable

Identify what you’ll do
Challenging Anxious Self-Talk

Challenge your anxious self-talk by:

- Examine the evidence
- Am I looking at the whole picture?
- What are the odds?
- Ask, is this permanent?
- Answer the “what if” question
Identify a situation where you noticed anxious thinking. What happened?

What thoughts, emotions, and physical feelings resulted?

What are some more realistic and balanced ways to think about this situation?

Repeat this revised way of thinking over to yourself a number of times for different situations.

With time and practice you can learn to think in a more healthy way.
Rise to the challenge – Focuses attention, heightens senses, increases motivation, mobilizes energy

Connect with others – Activates prosocial instincts, encourages connection, dampens fear and increases courage

Learn and grow – Initiation of recovery process, restores nervous system balance, helps the brain learn and grow

McGonigal, K. 2015. The Upside of Stress
Developing a Stress-Positive Mindset

- **Threat Response**
  
  Primes for self defense
  
  Goal: avoid harm
  
  - Physiological response to protect and heal body from injury
  
  - Common emotions include fear, anger, self-doubt, shame
  
  - Heightened attention and vigilance to signs that things are going poorly. Sensitive to other potential threats
  
  - Rewiring strengthens areas of the brain that detect threats and trigger survival coping

- **Challenge Response**
  
  Primes for success
  
  Goal: go after what you want
  
  - Physiological response to provide body with energy to perform
  
  - Common emotions include anxiety mixed with excitement, enthusiasm, and confidence
  
  - Attention is more open and ready to engage with environment and use your resources to go after what you want
  
  - Rewiring strengthens areas of the brain that suppress fear and enhance positive emotion during stress

McConigal, K. 2015. The Upside of Stress
Developing a Stress-Positive Mindset

Creating a Mindset Shift:

- What are the personal skills and strengths I have that can help me through this?
- What have I done to prepare for this situation that will benefit me?
- Have I overcome similar challenges in the past?
- Is there anyone who can help me with this?

View your stress response as a resource, rather than a sign that things are not going well!
Reflection Prompt #3

- Make a commitment and plan!

  - What strategies will you use moving forward?
  - When and how will you use these strategies?
Resources for Further Information

- Anxiety Canada (www.anxietycanada.com)
- Frantic World (http://franticworld.com/)

Student Wellness Services:
- Anxiety Self-Help videos and worksheets
- Anxiety Management group
- Single session counselling
Earn the Conflict Management Digital Badge

Conflict management is a key skill for relationship building and achieving success

Increase your confidence in your ability to manage conflicts at school, work and in other parts of your lives. Training within the Conflict Management Digital Badge includes learning about conflict styles, navigating conflict in relationships, and intercultural communication.

Get a virtual LinkedIn badge to show your skill development in this area!
Check out our other wellness workshops:

- Healthy Thinking
- Motivation & Time Management
- Boosting Self-Compassion
- Pushing Past Perfectionism

For the most up-to-date information on our resources and services, visit our website!

https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellness-services
References

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress

National College Health Assessment: Alberta Canada Reference Group. Executive Summary: Spring 2019


https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/visualizations/