

**Career  
Life  
Work**

# **Dealing with Stress**

## **Workbook**

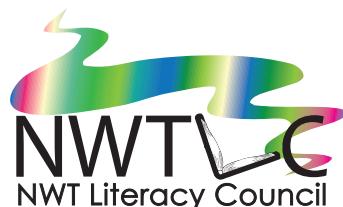
## Acknowledgements

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There are 10 manuals and workbooks in the *Career – Life – Work* series. You will find a list of them on the last page of this workbook. You can find the whole series online at [www.nwt.literacy.ca](http://www.nwt.literacy.ca) under the adult resources section. If you would like print copies, please contact the NWT Literacy Council.



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## **About this Workbook**

The subject of *stress* has become a common topic of conversation. We often hear friends, classmates, coworkers, and family members talk about the problems they have in managing the stresses of everyday living. We say we feel burned out, stressed out, overwhelmed, angry, irritable, depressed, anxious, and on the verge of losing it.

Stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand. It can be caused by both good and bad experiences. When people feel stressed by something going on around them, their bodies react by releasing chemicals into the blood. These chemicals give people more energy and strength, which can be a good thing if their stress is caused by a burning fire and they need to get out of a building quickly. But this can also be a bad thing, if their stress is in response to something emotional and there is no outlet for this extra energy and strength.

To successfully relieve stress it's important to understand it's not the things on the outside that do us harm; it's how we handle these situations. Emotions, or feelings, have a powerful impact on the human body. Emotions like frustration, insecurity and depressing feelings can be very harmful to us. Positive emotions like appreciation, care, and love not only feel good, they promote health, performance and well-being.

This workbook will help you evaluate your own stress levels and give you some tools to manage your stress.

## **What is Stressful for You?**

Public speaking is the number one fear for many people. In other words, it stresses them out. What do you find stressful?

**Your Turn!** Check off the things that you find stressful below.

Stressor	✓	Stressor	✓
Work/job		Finances	
School work		Mental health	
Relationship with partner		Relationship with family	
Relationship with friends		Career direction	
Childcare		Physical health	
Trauma		Legal matters	
Work or school/life balance		Attitudes and thoughts	
Appearance		Living situation	
Public speaking		Being organized	
Housework and/or messy house		Interview for a job	
Time (lack of)		Exams	

What else stresses you out?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Did You Know?<sup>1</sup>**

Too much continued stress can seriously affect our physical and mental well being. It can interfere with our normal daily activities, lower our self-esteem, hurt relationships, and hurt work and academic performance. Stress can lead to self-blame, self-doubt, feeling burned out, or becoming very anxious or depressed.

Here are some important facts about stress:

- 43% of adults experienced adverse health effects from stress.
- People with high stress are twice as likely to develop colds as those with low stress.
- 75-90% of visits to a physician's office are for stress-related conditions and complaints.
- Stress has been linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.
- The United States National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health has declared stress a hazard of the workplace.
- In the workplace, stress may be related to lost hours due to illness, reduced productivity, and claims for worker's compensation benefits.



**Your Turn!** How does stress affect you?

<sup>1</sup>Source: The Stress Solution by Lyle H. Miller, Ph.D., and Alma Dell Smith, PhD.

## **What Roles Do You Play?**

What are all the different roles that you play in your life?

**For example:**



**Mother:** I take care of my children 24/7, feed, clothe, love, nurture, educate, discipline, drive, take them to school, or daycare, etc.

**Student:** I am expected to arrive at school on time, do my assignments, be a role-model for my children and other family members, etc.

**Son:** I am expected to hunt, fish and provide for my parents and other family members as they get older.

### **Your Turn!**

Write down the roles that you play and all the responsibilities you have with that role.

## **What are Some of the Challenges You Face?**

What are some of your challenges to be successful in school or at a job?

**For example:**

- No vehicle
- Illness
- Disability
- Single parent
- Limited budget
- Expensive daycare

Just  
another  
example

**Your Turn!** What are some of your challenges?

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**Your Turn!**

These kinds of challenges can be very stressful. Talk to a friend or classmate and discuss how you can overcome some of these challenges. Write down your ideas here:

## **Stress Test**

Certain things in our life can make us more prone to stress like certain habits, our lifestyle and choices we make. How prone are YOU to stress?

**Your Turn!** Read each statement and rate how it applies to you.

Give yourself

- 4 points for Almost Always
- 3 points for Usually
- 2 points for Sometimes
- 1 point for Almost Never
- 0 points for Never

	Almost Always	Usually	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
1. I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day.					
2. I get 7-8 hours of sleep, at least 4 nights a week.					
3. I give and receive affection regularly.					
4. I have at least one relative within 50 kms on whom I can rely.					
5. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.					
6. I smoke less than half a pack of cigarettes a day (non-smokers = almost always).					

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7. I drink fewer than five alcoholic drinks a week (non-drinkers = almost always).					
8. I am the appropriate weight for my height.					
9. My income is adequate for my basic needs.					
10. I get strength from my religious/spiritual beliefs.					
11. I regularly attend club or social activities.					
12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.					
13. I have at least one friend in whom I confide about personal matters.					
14. I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, teeth, etc.).					
15. I am able to speak openly about my feelings when angry or worried.					
16. I have regular conversations with my housemates/partner about domestic problems.					
17. I do something fun at least once a week.					

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18. I am able to organize my time effectively.					
19. I drink fewer than three caffeine drinks a day.					
20. I take quiet time for myself during the day (at least 10 min.).					
<b>Total</b>					

### What your score means:

60-80	Shows that you have excellent ways of dealing with the stressors of everyday life
50-60	Shows that you have a healthy way of dealing with the stressors of everyday life
40-50	Shows that you are struggling to deal with the stressors of everyday life
20-40	Shows that you are having a really hard time dealing with the stressors of everyday life
0-20	Shows that you are at high risk of having a breakdown due to the stressors of everyday life

## **Your Stress Signals**

Here is a list of some, but not all, possible reactions to stress. Check all of the symptoms you experience when you feel stressed. Notice that symptoms of stress can affect us in all sorts of ways. It can affect us physically, behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively.

You can learn to recognize these symptoms or signals in yourself before stress gets too far out of hand. When you recognize your unique signals, it's time to take action. Ideas for this are coming up!

### **Your Turn!**

Check the symptoms that you have when you get stressed out.

#### **Physical Symptoms**

	✓		✓
Headaches		Back pain	
Indigestion		Tight neck, shoulders	
Stomach aches		Racing heart	
Sweaty palms		Shallow breathing	
Cold hands, feet		Restless	
Dizzy		Ringing in the ears	
Easily fatigued		Constipation	
Muscle tension		Diarrhea	

### Behavioral Symptoms

	✓		✓
Excessive smoking		Drive too fast	
Bossy with others		Grind teeth	
Eat too little or too much		Overuse of alcohol	
Critical attitude of others		Inability to finish tasks	
Short-tempered		Bite your nails	
Procrastinate		Fidgety	
Sleep too much or too little		Very tense	

### Emotional Symptoms

	✓		✓
Bothered by unimportant things		Cry easily	
Nervous, anxious		Feel overwhelmed	
Edgy		Angry	
Lonely		Irritable	
Depressed		Feel burned out	
Moody		Feel powerless	
Feel helpless		Yell a lot	

**Cognitive Symptoms**

	✓		✓
Trouble thinking clearly		Inability to make decisions	
Difficulty concentrating on things		Worry constantly	
Forgetfulness		Loss of humour	
Lack of creativity		Self-critical	
Expect too much from others		Pessimistic	

## **Stress Journal**

A stress journal can help you identify regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. Each time you feel stress, keep track of it in your journal. As you keep a daily log, you will begin to see patterns and common themes.

Think of something that is stressing you out now. Here is an example.

Just  
another  
example

### **What is the issue?**

Money is tight. By the end of the month I don't have enough money for groceries and I can't send my kids to school with lunch. Often I keep them out and we go to the Women's Centre for lunch. That means I can't go to school either.

### **How do you feel both physically and emotionally?**

It makes me feel sick to my stomach that I can't feed my children properly. I get very anxious and depressed. I also get worried that I will be kicked out of school.

### **How do you act in response to this stress?**

I often get angry that I can't support my family better. I sometimes yell at my kids or partner.

### **What can you do to make yourself feel better?**

I need to talk to someone about this situation and see if I can get help from somewhere. I don't have time to get a job as I am in school full-time and I can't afford a babysitter for kids in the evenings and weekend. I just need a little extra help. I don't want to yell at my kids anymore so I need to take deep breaths when I feel that anxiety creeping into my chest.

**Your Turn!**

What is the issue?

How do you feel both physically and emotionally?

How do you act in response to this stress?

What can you do to make yourself feel better?

**Did you know?**

Daily journal writing is known to help with stress. It is a great technique for releasing stress and coming up with ideas to tackle problems you are facing in your life.

## **Managing Your Stress**

### **Your Turn!**

So far we have been focusing on the source and symptoms of stress, but now let's look at solutions. Try and work with a group of people for this section. Brainstorming is more effective if you have several people working together.

What are some stressors that you face?

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What are some unhealthy ways of dealing with stress?

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What are some healthy ways of dealing with stress?

Compare your lists with the lists below:

## **Unhealthy Ways of Managing Stress**

- Drinking
  - Drugs
  - Yelling
  - Gossiping
  - Arguing
  - Hitting
  - Fighting
  - Smoking
  - Watching TV
  - Eating excessively
  - Spending money
  - Buying things
  - Gambling
  - Becoming a loner

### Healthy Ways of Managing Stress

#### 1. Choose New Behaviors

- Resolve incomplete tasks. Take care of them now!
- Keep your finances organized.
- Say "no".
- Relax.
- Meditate or pray for 10 minutes a day.
- Watch a funny movie.
- Take a long bath.
- Write in your journal.
- Read a good book.
- Breathe deeply.
- Go for a walk.
- Go out on the land.
- Go fishing.
- Exercise.
- Listen to uplifting music.
- Laugh.
- Call a friend.
- Work on a hobby (sewing, crafting, etc.).
- Eat healthy food.

#### 2. Choose New Thoughts

- Visualize problems and troubles shrinking to a manageable size.
- Take a mental vacation.
- Challenge negative beliefs about yourself.
- Focus on the positive.
- Find the opportunity in the problem.
- Evaluate – Will this matter one year from now?
- Trust a positive outcome.
- Detach.
- Reframe.
- Visualize success.
- Assume the best.
- Face the fear.
- Identify your hurt.
- Forgive.

## **Your Top Ten Stress Busters**

### **Your Turn!**

Look at both your list and the list given for dealing with stress in a healthy way. Choose your top ten stress busters. Write them below. Now write them on a cue card and put it where you can see it each day (e.g. in your wallet, on your fridge or your bathroom mirror).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Stress Case Studies**

### **Your Turn!**

Read the case studies below and write down all the things that could be stressful for this person. Write down how they seem to be coping with the stress and give ideas for coping with the stress. Work with a partner on this activity.

**Lorne** is a single father of three children all under the age of 10. He works full time as a water delivery driver. He and his ex-wife do not get along and she rarely sees the kids. He lives in his home community and has friends and family to help him out. He rarely has time for himself or the activities he likes. Some of his ways of coping are drinking once the kids have gone to bed and gambling online.



<b>Stressors</b>	<b>Ways Lorne is Coping</b> (good or bad)	<b>Other Suggestions</b>

**Shawna** works full time and is in charge of running her household. Her husband rarely helps out at home with the housework and kids. He spends a lot of time gambling and drinking with friends. Shawna is tired most of the time and rarely has a minute for herself. Her daycare provider is often sick and so she has to find alternative care for her children. She often takes her frustrations out on her kids and then she feels really bad afterwards. She feels like she can't take it anymore.



Stressors	Ways Shauna is Coping (good or bad)	Other Suggestions

**Tessa** cares for her mother at home and her children. Her husband works full-time and helps her out quite a bit. Her mother has dementia and is quite difficult to deal with at times. She forgets things and often leaves the house in the middle of winter without any warm clothing on. Tessa wants to care for her mother but is finding it increasingly hard. She feels that she has no options in her community. Tessa tries to manage the stress by taking long walks in the evenings and talking to her friends about the issue.



Stressors	Ways Tessa is Coping (good or bad)	Other Suggestions

**Barry** is in school full-time in Fort Smith. He left his family behind so that he could pursue his life-long dream of becoming a carpenter. Money is tight at home and he doesn't have a way of supporting his family until he finishes school. School is hard; it is much harder than he thought it would be. He is struggling to keep up and feels that he is not smart enough to continue. If he doesn't complete the course he has to pay back all the money he got from the government to go to school. He feels very stressed out. On occasion he has gone binge drinking to relieve the stress but realized that this wasn't helping him. He decided to talk to the pastor at the church and now when he gets stressed out he calls up the pastor and they go for coffee and talk about ways that Barry can handle his stress.



Stressors	Ways Barry is Coping (good or bad)	Ideas for Coping

## **Work-Life Balance**



### **Your Turn**

Take this short quiz to see if you have Work-Life Balance in your life.

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
1. I regularly enjoy hobbies or interests.		
2. I make time for everything that I need to do.		
3. I work or go to school between 30 – 45 hours a week.		
4. I get worked up about school assignments or work issues.		
5. I usually have enough time to spend with my loved ones.		
6. When I am home I feel relaxed.		
7. I rarely lose my temper at home, at school or work.		

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8. I often feel exhausted by Wednesday and wonder how I can make it to the weekend.		
9. I rarely miss out on family events because of school or work.		
10. School or my work gets frustrating. I am often late or distracted.		
11. My family is often upset with me because I spend too much time studying or working.		
12. School or work is often on my mind when I am doing other things.		

Rate yourself the following way:

Give yourself 2 points if you Agreed to:

- 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9,

Give yourself 2 points if you Disagreed to:

- 4, 8, 10, 11, 12

**Excellent Work-Life Balance – 20-24 points**

**Good Work-Life Balance – 14- 20 points**

**Poor Work-Life Balance – Below 14**

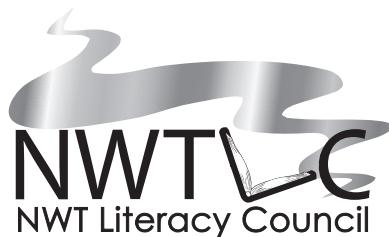
**Your Turn**

Write down some things that you can do to make your work and life more balanced?

The *Career-Life-Work* Series consists of the following:

- Personal Management Skills Manual
- Communication Skills Manual
- Career Development Manual
- Job Success Strategies Manual
- Dealing with Conflict Workbook
- Getting the Job Workbook
- Soft Skills for Work Workbook
- Planning Your Career Workbook
- Dealing with Stress Workbook
- Goal Setting Workbook

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