

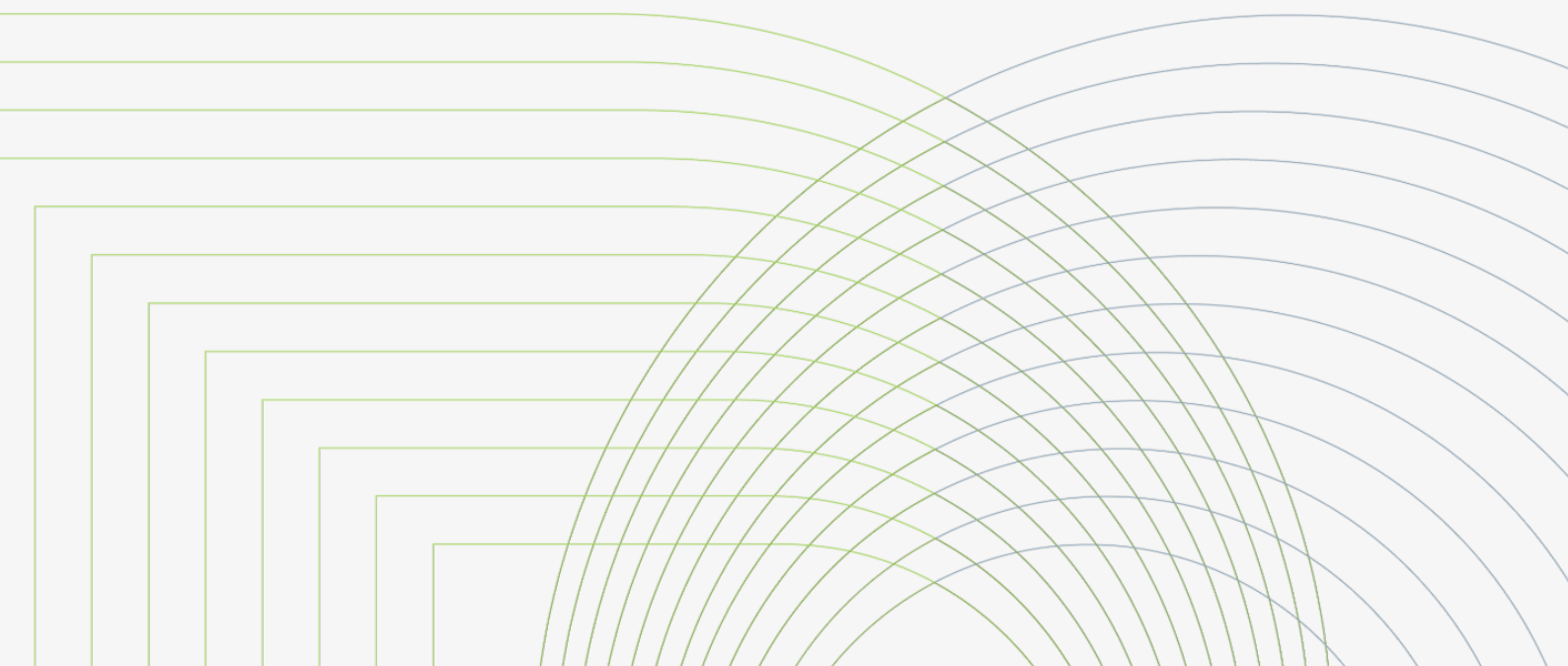
Module 5.2

General Health:

Stress

Keeping the Body in Mind – Resources

Consumer Learning Module



Module 5.2: Stress

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Stress



Life can be stressful at times, and stress can stem from various factors. It is essential to understand that not all stress is negative; a certain level of stress can be beneficial, stimulating, and motivating, helping us perform better and achieve our goals.

However, when stress becomes overwhelming, it can hinder performance and negatively impact our health and overall wellbeing.

Common sources of stress include:

- Intense emotions, such as hurt or anger.
- Work or academic pressures.
- Financial struggles.
- Mental health difficulties.
- Concerns about personal life, family, or recent changes or challenges.

Experiencing stress is normal, and managing it effectively is vital for maintaining mental and physical health.

How Does Stress Manifest in Your Life?

Stress can present differently for each person, including physical symptoms, changes in thoughts, mood, and behaviour.

Symptoms of stress:



Moods

Sadness
Irritability
Feeling overwhelmed



Thoughts

Constant worry
Negative thinking
Thoughts like "I can't..."



Behaviour

Avoidance
Restlessness
Substance use



Physical

Headaches
Muscle tension
Upset stomach
Sleep problems

Stress can affect mental and physical health, contributing to anxiety, depression, psychosis, and various physical illnesses. When the body and mind are stressed, the immune system is strained, leaving fewer resources to maintain overall health. Consequently, effective stress management is crucial for maintaining a healthy mind and body.

Strategies for Coping with Stress

Different stress management techniques work for different people, so it's essential to explore and find the ones that work best for you.

Relaxation Techniques



Visualization: Use mental imagery to picture yourself in a calm, peaceful, and relaxed place. Consider your feelings, sights, sounds, and smells. Revisit this place when you are feeling stressed or worried.

Deep breathing: Slow down your breathing deliberately. Inhale for a count of 4, hold for a count of 2, exhale for a count of 4, and pause for a count of 2. Repeat this exercise several times.

Healthy lifestyle and environment

Exercise: Regular exercise is an effective way to combat stress, as it releases built-up tension and produces hormones that create positive, relaxed feelings.



Healthy eating: Consume regular, nutritious meals and plenty of fluids, particularly water. Limit caffeine and sugar intake.



Engage your senses: Spend time outdoors, take a bath, and focus on your senses.



Enjoyable activities: Dedicate time to activities like music, art, reading, sports, or other pleasurable pursuits.



Healthy Thinking

Reframe your thoughts: Practise interpreting difficult situations more positively, which can reduce stress. Modify negative thoughts and assumptions that arise when worried or stressed.



Mindfulness: Focus on the present moment instead of getting caught up in worries. Pay attention to your body and surroundings.



Behavioural Strategies

Express yourself: Write in a journal, create art, music, or poetry, or talk to someone you trust.



Manage your time: Prioritise tasks, learn to say "no" to things you don't have time for, and set aside relaxation time.



Educate yourself: Learn more about situations that cause stress, such as mental health diagnoses or medication side effects.



Ask for help: Reach out to people for support, whether they are friends, family, or new connections.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) involves tensing and relaxing specific muscle groups to lower overall tension and stress levels. PMR can help with anxiety, physical problems like headaches and stomach aches, and improve sleep quality.

When practicing PMR, it is important to set aside about 15 minutes in a quiet, comfortable place without distractions. For the first week or two, practise this exercise twice a day to become familiar with the technique.

PMR involves two steps:

1. **Tension:** Focus on a specific muscle group (e.g., your left hand) and take a slow, deep breath while squeezing the muscles as hard as you can for about 5 seconds. Ensure you feel the tension in the muscles, which may cause some discomfort or shaking. Make an effort to tense only the targeted muscles and not the surrounding ones.
2. **Relaxation:** After about 5 seconds, release the tension from the muscles, letting them become loose and limp. Exhale as you do this step. Focus on and notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. This awareness is crucial in the exercise.

Perform these steps for each muscle group, starting with your feet and systematically moving up, or vice versa. After completing all the muscle groups, take some time to enjoy the deep state of relaxation.

Setting Stress Goals

Remember to set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals for stress management and self-care, as they can help you stay on track and make progress in managing stress effectively.



Activity: SMART Goal

Set a SMART goal for stress management and self-care:

S _____

M _____

A _____

R _____

T _____

Jane's Story



Jane was experiencing high levels of stress due to her life situation. She often felt overwhelmed and struggled to manage her stress effectively. After learning about the benefits of mindfulness meditation, Jane decided to set a SMART goal to help her reduce stress and improve her overall well-being.

Jane's goal was to practice mindfulness meditation for 10 minutes each day for the next 4 weeks. She planned to keep a log of her meditation sessions to track her progress and to hold herself accountable.

Jane began her mindfulness meditation journey by exploring different techniques, such as focusing on her breath, body scanning, and loving-kindness meditation. She eventually found that focusing on her breath worked best for her. Jane set a consistent time each day to meditate and created a quiet, comfortable space in her home for her practice.

By the end of the 4 weeks, Jane felt more in control of her stress and experienced a greater sense of calm and balance in her life. She decided to continue her meditation practice and set a new goal to increase her daily meditation sessions to 15 minutes.

Congratulations! You've now completed module 5.2 General Health - Stress



Scan the QR code or visit the link for online access to all of the modules and a complete list of references or visit the link below:

mindgardens.org.au/KBIMResources



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