

Stress and Anxiety 101

Student Workbook

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*This workshop and its materials were adapted from
Cal Poly Counseling Services' Anxiety Toolbox and Getting Unstuck programs.*

Welcome!

Welcome to **Wellness U**! Wellness U is a collection of workshops with the ultimate goal of providing you with knowledge and skills to increase your overall well-being and meet your goals. The Wellness U Workshop Series has several parts:

- **Stress and Anxiety 101** helps participants understand the effects of stress and anxiety by learning about the fight, flight, or freeze response and the differences between motivational and unhelpful stress/anxiety. Participants will also learn a basic skill for anxiety management: grounding techniques.
- **Changing Unhelpful Thoughts** introduces participants to a cognitive behavioral strategy for challenging unhelpful thoughts. Participants will be able to identify unhelpful thinking styles, learn alternative responses to unhelpful thinking, and become more aware of their ability to challenge and change thinking patterns.
- **Intro to Wellness** introduces participants to concepts of dimensional wellness and how to increase their overall wellness.
- **Intro to Mindfulness** is all about mindfulness, its benefits, and how to practice mindfulness in day-to-day life.
- **The ABZzzzs of Sleep** helps participants improve the quantity and quality of their sleep by learning about sleep hygiene.
- **Relationships 101** introduces participants to healthy versus unhealthy relationships, ways to manage conflict, and how to set boundaries.
- **Test Anxiety** helps participants understand the components of test anxiety and introduces them to a skill to minimize the symptoms of anxiety.
- **Intro to Tai Chi** presents participants with the opportunity to learn about a traditional Chinese form of exercise which emphasizes breath and body movement and can be useful in reducing stress and anxiety as well as improving joint flexibility, stability, and muscular strength.

By the end of this series, you will have received a lot of information and, at times, it may feel overwhelming. Remember that like any skill (e.g., learning to ride a bike), the skills you will learn in **Wellness U** take time and practice to master. At times, you may encounter obstacles and/or find it difficult to integrate these skills into your daily life. That is okay, it is a normal part of the change process. As with all change, it is important to practice as much as you can, even after encountering setbacks.

Think of your practice of these skills as a form of “mental health hygiene.” At the outset, it may seem tedious and you may question why you need to practice these skills so often. Similar to brushing your teeth, daily practice prevents a buildup of stress over time. The more you practice and use these skills as part of your daily routine, the less tedious they may seem because they simply become a regular part of daily life.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Why have I been referred to Wellness U?

Our clinicians recommend participation in Wellness U after meeting with you because they think you can benefit from it. We strongly believe that if you fully engage in Wellness U and practice these skills, you will see the benefit of attending. And we have the research to back this up – since 2016, students have consistently rated these workshops as helpful. Wellness U also helps support your innate resilience by recognizing your autonomy; in other words, we know that students have the ability to address many of their concerns independently in a supportive environment. In fact, some students may get what they need from Wellness U alone. Others may benefit from Wellness U as well as other services, such as Let’s Talk (informal consultation), a support group, group therapy, or individual therapy.

What if I don’t feel comfortable in groups?

Many people feel anxious about participating in a group. Wellness U is structured and curriculum-driven, like an academic class. You are not required to speak to the entire group if you do not feel comfortable doing so. The facilitators respect each participant’s right to share only what they are comfortable sharing and never require you to share sensitive information about yourself.

What if I have an urgent need to see a clinician during Wellness U?

Simply let the facilitator or Student Counseling Services’ front desk staff know and they will facilitate you getting the help you need.

Why do you recommend practice outside of the workshop?

The focus of these workshops is on building skills; in order to achieve that goal, regular practice is essential. The more you practice, the more you may find you get out of these workshops. The assignments are for you and only you, in the service of your own personal growth. You will not be required to provide your responses at any time during this workshop; however, there will be opportunities to ask questions or share if you do feel comfortable.

Life Change Index Scale (The Stress Test)

Event	Impact Score	My Score
Death of spouse	100	
Divorce	73	
Marital Separation	65	
Jail Term	63	
Death of close family member	63	
Personal injury or illness	53	
Marriage	50	
Fired at work	47	
Marital reconciliation	45	
Retirement	45	
Change in health of family member	44	
Pregnancy	40	
Sex difficulties	39	
Gain of a new family member	39	
Business readjustment	39	
Change in financial state	38	
Death of a close friend	37	
Change to a different line of work	36	
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	
Mortgage over \$20,000	31	
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	
Change in responsibilities at work	29	
Son or daughter leaving home	29	
Trouble with in laws	29	
Outstanding personal achievement	28	
Spouse begins or stop work	26	
Begin or end school	26	
Change in living conditions	25	
Revisions of personal habits	24	
Trouble with boss	23	
Change in work hours or conditions	20	
Change in residence	20	
Change in schools	20	
Change in recreations	19	
Change in church activities	19	
Change in social activities	19	
Mortgage or loan less than \$20,000	17	
Change in sleeping habits	16	
Change in number of family get-togethers	15	
Change in eating habits	15	
Vacation	13	
Christmas approaching	12	
Minor violation of the law	11	
Total		

Directions If an event mentioned above has occurred in the past year, or is expected in the near future, copy the number in the score column. If the event has occurred or is expected to occur more than once, multiply this number by the frequency of the event.

Scoring The Life Change Index

The body is a finely timed instrument that does not like surprises. Any sudden change stimuli which affects the body, or the reordering of important routines that the body become used to, can cause needless stress, throwing your whole physical being into turmoil.

The following chart will give you some idea of how to informally score yourself on Social Readjustment Scale. Since being healthy is the optimum state you want to achieve, being sick is the state of being you most want to avoid.

Life Change Units	Likelihood Of Illness In Near Future
300+	about 80 percent
150-299	about 50 percent
less than 150	about 30 percent

The higher your life change score, the harder you have to work to get yourself back into a state of good health.

T.H.Holmes and T.H. Rahe. "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale," Journal of Psychosomatic Research. 11:213, 1967.

Common Anxiety Symptoms

Physical Symptoms

- Increased heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure
- Choking sensation
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Sweating, hot flashes, chills
- Nausea, upset stomach, diarrhea
- Trembling, shaking
- Weakness, unsteadiness, faintness
- Tense muscles, rigidity
- Dry mouth

Behavioral Symptoms

- **Avoidance** of threat cues or situations
- **Escape**, flight
- Pursuit of safety, reassurance
- Restlessness, agitation, pacing
- Hyperventilation
- Freezing, motionlessness
- Difficulty speaking

Cognitive Symptoms

- Fear of losing control, being unable to cope
- Fear of physical injury or death
- Fear of “going crazy”
- Fear of negative evaluations by others
- Frightening thoughts, images, or memories
- Perceptions of unreality or detachment
- Poor concentration, confusion, distractibility
- Narrowing of attention, hypervigilance for threat
- Poor memory
- Difficulty in reasoning, loss of objectivity

Emotional Symptoms

- Feeling nervous, tense, wound up
- Feeling frightened, fearful, terrified
- Being edgy, jumpy, jittery
- Being impatient, frustrated

Stress versus Anxiety

Everyday Anxiety (Stress)	Anxiety Disorder
In response to a known environmental factor	In response to an unknown source or in response to the experience of stress
Symptoms go away when the stressor goes away	Symptoms remain despite no identifiable stressor
Worry about living away from home for the first time, passing a class, a romantic breakup, or other important life events	Constant and unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress and interferes with your daily life
Embarrassment or self-consciousness in an uncomfortable or awkward social situation; feeling nervous about meeting new people	Avoidance of social situations due to fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated
Feeling nervous or sweating before a big test, class presentation, stage performance, or other significant event	Panic attacks that seem out of the blue and preoccupation with the fear of having another one
Realistic fear of a dangerous object, place, or situation (e.g. fear of poisonous snakes)	Irrational fear or avoidance of an object, place, or situation that poses little or no threat of danger (e.g. fear of elevators)
Making sure that you are healthy and living in a safe environment	Performing uncontrollable repetitive actions, such as excessive cleaning, checking, touching or arranging

Adapted from: <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety>

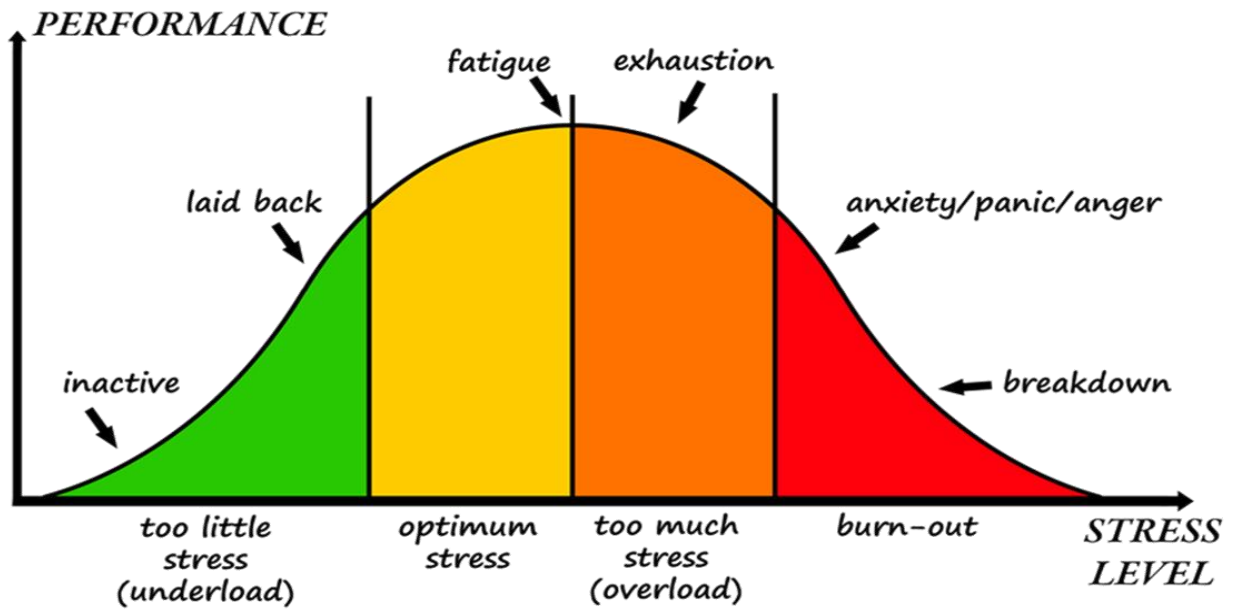
Understanding Anxiety Disorders

While anxiety is a normal and adaptive experience for everyone, anxiety disorders are characterized by significant distress or impairment in social, academic/occupational, or other important areas of functioning (e.g., your general ability to function in life).

Some of the most common anxiety disorders include:

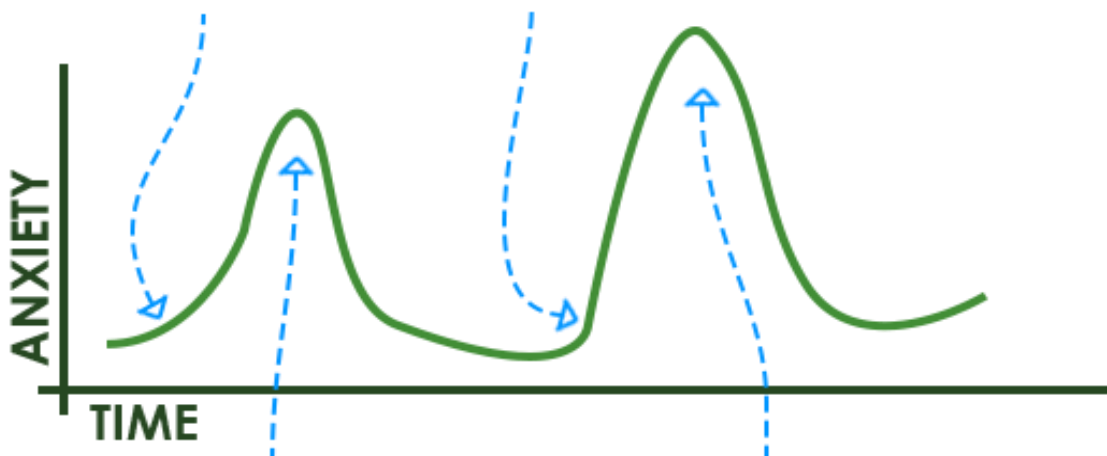
Generalized Anxiety Disorder:	Chronic and unrealistic worry that feels difficult to control about everyday things (i.e., things that do not worry most people)
Social Anxiety Disorder:	Chronic worry solely related to social situations
Panic Disorder:	Characterized by episodes of “panic” that include things like: adrenaline surge, fear of losing control, chest pain, racing heart, shortness of breath, dizziness
Phobias:	Specific fears that are excessive in nature and often lead to avoiding that which is feared (e.g., public speaking, heights, tunnels, etc.)
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder:	Excessive rumination (thinking) with repetitive behaviors to reduce anxiety

STRESS CURVE



Anxiety-Avoidance Roller Coaster

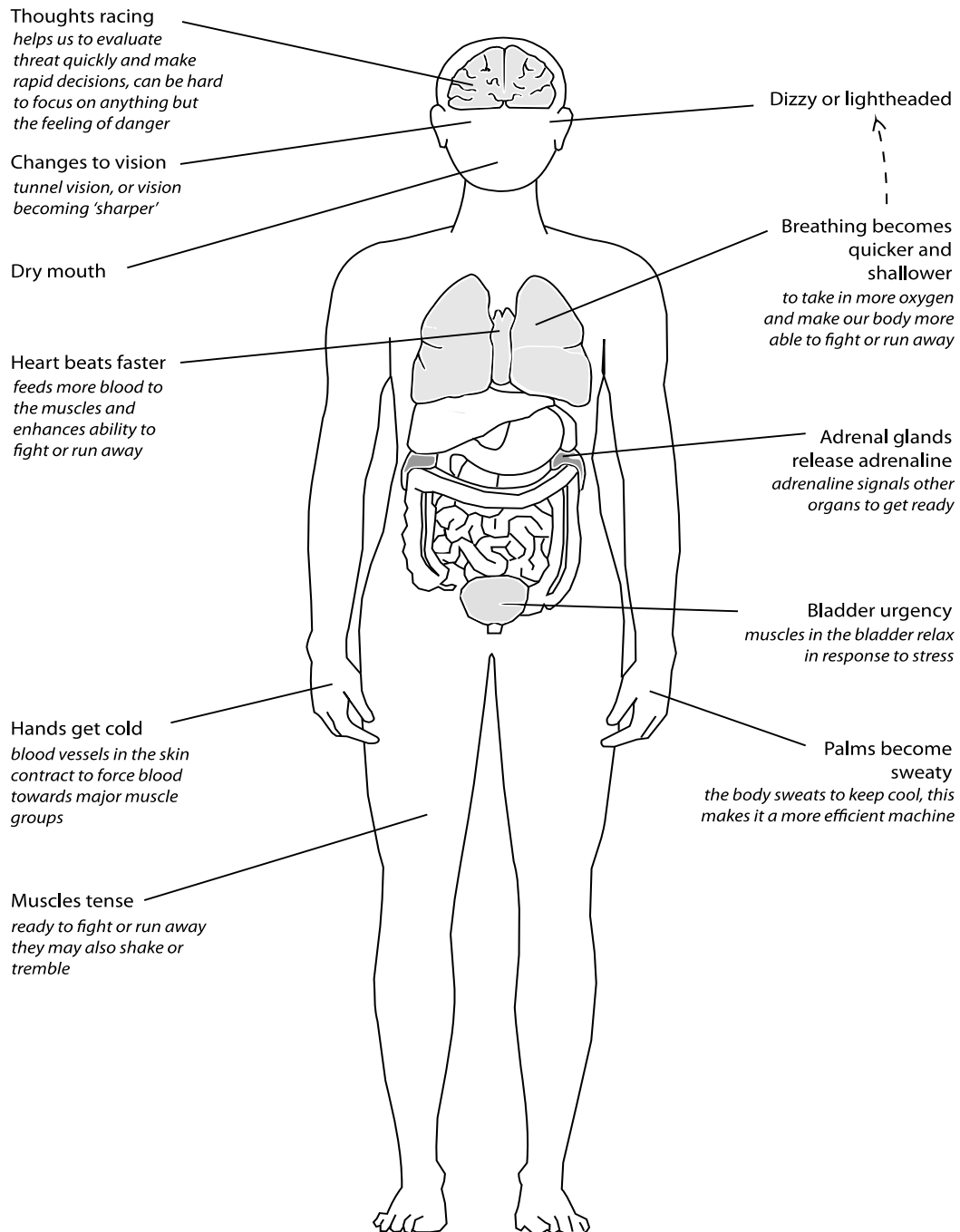
(A person is confronted with an anxiety-producing situation which leads to an uncomfortable sense of worry and agitation.)



(The anxiety-producing situation is avoided, and the person receives a feeling of relief. However, next time the anxiety will be worse.)

Threat System (Fight or Flight)

The 'fight or flight' response gets the body ready to fight or run away. Once a threat is detected your body responds automatically. All of the changes happen for good reasons, but may be experienced as uncomfortable when they happen in 'safe' situations.



Grounding Exercises

When people become overwhelmed with distressing thoughts or feelings, including intense anxiety, activities that keep your mind and body connected (called “grounding”) can be helpful in regaining a sense of stability and mental focus. The following are a number of grounding exercises to choose from to help firmly anchor you in the present moment and provide you with space to choose where to focus your energy. **You may need to try multiple different exercises to find one or two that work best for you.**

1. Remind yourself of who you are now. State your name, age and where you are right now.
2. Take ten slow deep breaths. Focus your attention on each breath on the way in and on the way out. Say the number of the breath to yourself as you exhale.
3. Splash water on your face or place a cool wet cloth on your face.
4. Pay purposeful attention as you hold a cold (non-alcoholic) beverage in your hands. Feel the coldness, and the wetness on the outside. Note the taste as you drink. You can also do this exercise with a warm beverage.
5. Find a “grounding object” to hold, look at, listen to, and/or smell. This could be a soft object such as a pillow or stuffed animal, a smooth stone you found on the beach, a picture of a beautiful scene or loved one, and/or any other object that represents safety or comfort.
6. Listen to music. Pay close attention and listen for something new or different.
7. If you wake up suddenly during the night and feel disoriented or distressed, remind yourself who you are and where you are. Look around the room and notice familiar objects and name them. Feel the bed you are lying on, the softness of the sheets or blankets, the warmth or coldness of the air, and notice any sounds you hear. Remind yourself that you are safe.
8. Feel the clothes on your body, whether your arms and legs are covered or not, and the sensation of your clothes as you move in them.

9. While sitting, feel the chair under you and the weight of your body and legs pressing down on it.
10. If you are lying down, feel the contact between your head, your body and your legs, as they touch the surface you are lying on. Starting from your head, notice how each part feels, all the way down to your feet, on the soft or hard surface.
11. Stop, look, and listen. Notice and name what you can see and hear nearby and in the distance.
12. Look around you, notice what is front of you and to each side, name first large objects and then smaller ones.
13. Get up, walk around, take your time to notice each step as you take one then another.
14. If you can, step outside, notice the temperature, the sounds around you, the ground under your feet, the smell in the air, etc.
15. “54321” Grounding Exercise:
 - Name 5 things you can see in the room with you.
 - Name 4 things you can feel (tactile; e.g. “chair on my back” or “feet on floor”)
 - Name 3 things you can hear right now
 - Name 2 things you can smell right now
 - Name 1 good thing about yourself
16. Write and/or say grounding statements
 - This situation won’t last forever
 - This too shall pass.
 - I can ride this out and not let it get me down.
 - My anxiety/fear/sadness won’t kill me; it just doesn’t feel good right now.
 - These are just my feelings and eventually they’ll go away.