

Stress Management — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a personal practice. Each section maps to one course module and mixes reflection, structured worksheets, and checklists, followed by editable templates you can use every day. Work through it slowly, ideally over a few weeks, returning to the trackers as you go. The aim is not to fill in pages but to build real self-awareness and a written plan you will actually use under pressure.

Map How Stress Shows Up in You

Build an accurate picture of your own stressors, early warning signs, and recovery patterns before you try to change anything.

Worksheet: My Stress Signature

Stress leaks through four channels long before you feel overwhelmed. For each channel, write the specific signs that are true for you, not generic ones. Then mark which sign tends to appear earliest, because that is your most useful warning light.

Physical signs (e.g. jaw tension, shallow breath, gut changes, tight shoulders)

Cognitive signs (e.g. racing thoughts, can't concentrate, worst-case thinking)

Emotional signs (e.g. irritability, dread, tearfulness, numbness)

Behavioural signs (e.g. snapping, procrastinating, scrolling, skipping meals)

My single earliest warning sign across all channels

The sign other people notice in me before I do

Exercise: Acute vs Chronic Stressor Audit

List the stressors currently in your life, then sort each one. Acute stressors are short and resolve; chronic stressors grind on with no clear off-switch. This sort decides your strategy: acute stress needs in-the-moment tools, while chronic stress needs better recovery and often boundaries at the source.

- List every stressor on your mind right now, big and small, without editing.

- Label each one as acute (short, resolves) or chronic (ongoing, no off-switch).

- For each chronic stressor, note one thing: can I reduce it at the source, or must I focus on recovering from it more fully?

- Which one or two stressors, if better managed, would relieve the most pressure?

Exercise: One Week of SUDS Check-Ins

Train interoception by rating your stress on a 0 to 100 distress scale (SUDS) three times a day for one week using the tracker template. Do not try to fix anything yet. The only goal is to learn the texture of your own escalation and what reliably moves the number up or down.

- At each check-in, note the number, the time, and what was happening.

- Which times of day run highest for you, and which run lowest?

- What activities, people, or thoughts consistently push the number up?

- What, if anything, brought the number down, even slightly?

Checklist: Foundations of an Accurate Stress Model

I can describe the difference between acute and chronic stress in my own words

I understand that chronic activation, not stress itself, is what harms health

I have written out my personal stress signature across all four channels

I have tracked my SUDS for at least five days

I have identified my top one or two highest-impact stressors

Build Your In-the-Moment Regulation Toolkit

Practise and personalise the fast-acting body and attention tools so they are automatic when you actually need them.

Exercise: Test the Four Breathing Protocols

Try each breathing protocol for two minutes when you are calm, then rate how calming and how easy each felt from 1 to 10. You are choosing your default and your backup. Practising while calm is what makes a tool reachable while stressed.

- Cyclic sighing (double inhale, long exhale): how calming (1-10), how easy (1-10)?

- Box breathing (4 in, 4 hold, 4 out, 4 hold): how calming (1-10), how easy (1-10)?

- Coherent breathing (about 5 in, 5 out, six breaths a minute): how calming, how easy?

- 4-7-8 breathing (4 in, 7 hold, 8 out): how calming, how easy, and best for sleep?

Worksheet: My Tiered Regulation Toolkit

Match tools to intensity using your SUDS scale, so you reach for the right strength of intervention in the moment. Fill in what you will actually do at each level, drawing on breathing, cold, movement, grounding, and connection.

Mild (around 30 SUDS): my go-to quick reset

Moderate (around 60 SUDS): what I add (e.g. brisk walk, progressive muscle relaxation)

High (around 90 SUDS): my body-first emergency reset (e.g. cold water, physiological sigh) before any thinking

My grounding technique for breaking a rumination spiral

The person I will contact when I need co-regulation

Where I will keep this list so I can find it under stress

Exercise: Complete the Stress Cycle With Movement

For one week, after any noticeably stressful event, deliberately add two minutes of physical movement to discharge the stress chemistry. The point is to feel the difference between solving the problem and clearing the leftover arousal from your body.

- What was the stressful event, and what movement did you use (stairs, fast walk, jumping jacks, shaking out)?

- How did your body feel before the movement versus after?

- Did completing the cycle change how long the stress lingered?

- Which form of movement felt most accessible to repeat?

Checklist: Regulation Skills I Have Rehearsed

- I have a default breathing protocol I can run without thinking
- I have practised the physiological sigh as a single-breath reset
- I have tried a cold-water reset and know it interrupts a spike fast
- I have used the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique at least once
- I have written a tiered toolkit matching tools to my distress level
- I keep my crisis tools somewhere I can reach when overwhelmed

Rewire the Thinking That Drives Stress

Use CBT, ACT, and stress-mindset tools to change how often ordinary events tip you into a threat response.

Worksheet: Run a Full Thought Record

Take one real stressful moment from this week and work it all the way through the CBT thought-record sequence using the template. Naming the distortion and disputing it on paper is what gradually rewires the automatic appraisal.

Activating event (facts only, no interpretation)

Automatic thought that fired

Feeling and behaviour it produced

Cognitive distortion(s) named (catastrophising, mind-reading, all-or-nothing, etc.)

Dispute (actual evidence, what I'd tell a friend, a more balanced view)

New balanced thought and how the feeling shifted

Exercise: Defuse a Sticky Thought

Pick one recurring stressful thought that hooks you, then run the ACT defusion ladder out loud. You are not trying to make the thought untrue; you are loosening its grip so you can choose your next move from a small distance.

- Write the sticky thought as a short sentence (e.g. I'm not good enough).
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- Say it again as: I am having the thought that ...

- Say it once more as: I notice I am having the thought that ...

- What changed in how much the thought controlled you across the three steps?

Exercise: Threat to Challenge Reframe

Choose an upcoming performance moment (a presentation, exam, hard conversation) and rehearse the challenge reframe. Use this only where arousal genuinely helps you rise to a demand, not for chronic grinding stress.

- What is the upcoming moment, and what physical sensations do you expect (racing heart, sweaty palms)?

- Rewrite those sensations as evidence your body is energising you: my heart is sending more oxygen to my brain.

- Replace I need to calm down with a phrase that fits the energy (e.g. I'm getting fired up for this).

- What does caring about doing well tell you about why this matters?

Checklist: Cognitive Tools I Can Use

- I can name at least four of my most common cognitive distortions
- I have completed at least one full written thought record
- I can use cognitive defusion to step back from a sticky thought
- I have clarified what I most value beneath the noise of stress
- I know when to use the challenge reframe and when to choose recovery instead

Lower Your Baseline and Write Your Plan

Strengthen the lifestyle foundations and assemble everything into a written, three-timescale stress-management plan.

Worksheet: Score Your Four Foundations

Rate each foundation honestly from 1 to 10, then pick the single weakest one to improve for the next two weeks. Trying to fix everything at once is how plans collapse; one strong foundation makes every other tool work better.

Sleep: consistency, duration, quality (1-10) and one specific weak point

Exercise: weekly minutes of movement (1-10) and the easiest way to add more

Nutrition and stimulants: blood-sugar stability, caffeine and alcohol (1-10) and one change

Connection: quality of supportive relationships (1-10) and one person to reach out to

My single weakest foundation to focus on first

The one concrete change I will make for the next two weeks

Worksheet: Set a Boundary You Have Been Avoiding

Resentment is data; it usually marks a boundary you needed and did not set. Identify one over-commitment and script the boundary in advance so you can deliver it cleanly when the moment comes. The commitment or request that drains me and that I need to limit

The clear, kind no I will say (no pile of justifications)

My pause phrase to avoid a reflexive yes (e.g. let me check and get back to you)

The recovery time I will protect on my calendar as a real appointment

What I expect to feel when I hold the boundary, and why it is still worth it

Exercise: Draft Your Crisis Protocol

Write an ordered, body-first protocol for what to do when you hit overwhelm, because at a 90 on your distress scale you will not remember techniques you only read about. Keep the final version on your phone or a wallet card.

- Step one: the fastest body-first reset I will use (e.g. cold water on the face, physiological sigh).
- Step two: the grounding technique I will run next (e.g. 5-4-3-2-1).
- Step three: the named person I will contact, with their number written down.
- The warning signs that tell me it is time to seek professional help, not just self-manage.

Checklist: My Plan Is Ready to Use

- I have identified and started improving my weakest foundation
- I have one daily regulation anchor I can sustain
- I have scheduled real weekly recovery and connection
- I have written a crisis protocol and stored it somewhere accessible
- I have a pre-decided response for my two or three most predictable stressors
- I know the warning signs that mean I should reach out for professional support
- I have a plan to restart without self-blame when I inevitably lapse

Your Action Plan

1. Track your SUDS three times a day for one week to learn your personal escalation pattern before changing anything.
2. Write out your full stress signature across physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural channels.
3. Choose one default breathing protocol and practise it for five minutes daily while you are calm.
4. Build your tiered toolkit so you know exactly which tool to use at a 30, a 60, and a 90.
5. Add two minutes of movement after any stressful event for a week to feel the stress cycle complete.
6. Complete at least one full written thought record on a real stressful moment, naming and disputing the distortion.
7. Identify your weakest lifestyle foundation, usually sleep, and improve just that one for two weeks.
8. Script and deliver one boundary you have been avoiding, using your pause phrase and a clean no.

9. Write your crisis protocol on a phone note or wallet card and rehearse reaching for it.
10. Assemble your full three-timescale plan and put one daily anchor into practice tomorrow.

