# NIU EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

# Tips for Coping with Stress

**1. Stop, breathe, and tell yourself: “This is hard, and I will get through this *one* step at a time.”** Listen to what you are telling yourself. It is important that you change your self-talk when it is repeatedly negative and self-defeating. Statements such as… *“I can’t deal with this. It is too much. I will never get through this. I will never end.” …*make it harder to cope. You want your new thoughts to acknowledge the difficulty and remind yourself of what you can do to cope with the situation. Identify the steps you need to take first, write them down, and focus on each step one at a time…if you look at everything you have to do, you will become overwhelmed. Remember you can only do *one* thing at a time and focus exclusively on that *one* thing.

1. **Acknowledge to yourself, what you are feeling. All feelings are normal so accept whatever you are feeling.**

Once you recognize, name, and accept your feelings, you feel less out of control. Take 3 deep breaths and breathe into your feelings. It is important during this time of stress to own and name your feelings and NOT hurt yourself or lash out at someone else.

1. **Find someone who listens and is accepting. You don’t need advice. You need to be heard.** Sharing our story is how we begin to accept whatever is happening. It may be that you need to let go of your expectations of how things should be and talking about your feelings and beliefs is the beginning of that process. Consider contacting NIU Employee Well-being for assistance. 815-753-9191.
2. **Eat regularly and make healthy choices.** Skipping meals, particularly breakfast, contributes to fatigue, mood swings, and poor concentration. Healthy choices (foods not high in simple sugars) maintain your blood sugars and therefore your energy and concentration.
3. **Take a 2–5-minute break: take a walk outside around your building or try some muscle stretching and relaxing in your chair or in your office.** Everyone can break for 2-5 minutes. When you take a break, you do something different so if you are sitting, stand up and stretch or walk. If you were active, sit and stretch and always remember to take 3 deep breaths.
4. **Exercise 30 minutes** **a day to maintain your health and your emotional well-being.**

* Walking is the single most effective thing you can do to enhance your overall physical health, regulate your sleep, increase your metabolism, keep your appetite in check, improve your mood and increase your positive thoughts. It is also the cheapest (except perhaps in the winter) form of exercise.
* Thirty minutes of walking daily increases your serotonin which is a feel good hormone. Research has found 30 minutes of daily walking as effective as medication for some people. The difficulty is getting up and doing it when you feel so tired from the depression. So start with small steps. Anything is better than nothing.
* You can divide your exercise into three 10 minute periods of brisk exercise which becomes easier to build into your daily routine. Pick a parking spot 10 minutes from the building where you are going. When you are walking briskly to the building, look up. *Looking up at the sky when you are walking, helps you breathe more deeply and makes you feel better.* Perhaps looking up reminds us that the world is bigger than you and gives you a break from your negative thoughts.
* At the end of the work day, when you return to your car, you will have exercised for 20 minutes and just need to exercise for 10 more minutes. Maybe find some stairs to walk down.

1. **Find something that makes you laugh or start smiling and think of something funny.** A deep belly laugh is a great way to relieve stress. Smiling, even when you don’t feel like it, increases your immune system. Your body does not care if your smile is genuine. Keep funny jokes where you can look at them and stop, read them, and let yourself really laugh.
2. **Know your limits and when you need to let go.** Some problems are beyond our control. If something cannot be changed, work at accepting it for what it is. Resist the urge to fix the unfixable or try to control the uncontrollable. Sometimes a mantra helps…“It is what it is; I can accept it.” For things within your control, remember change takes time. If you are holding on and need to let go, journal about it.
3. **When you go home, take Good Care of Yourself. Remember to:**
   * **Balanced Meals influence your biochemistry and brain function** (Change Your Brain, Change Your Life, Daniel Amen, M.D.)**.** Our body needs proteins in balance with healthy fats and complex carbohydrates along with fruits and vegetables. East a minimum of 3 meals a day. Skipping breakfast depletes your energy so at least eat orange juice and some protein to sustain your energy until lunch. See a nutritionist to learn about a well balanced diet that will assist you in getting the nutrients your body needs to maintain your energy, mood and sleep.

* **Get enough rest and sleep. Sleep at least 6 hours and not more than 9 hours.** If you are having difficulty sleeping, listening to peaceful, slow music website [www.tuneyourbrain.com](http://www.tuneyourbrain.com) and/or do progressive relaxation just before you go to sleep. If you still have trouble sleeping, contact the NIU Employee Assistance Program at 753-9191. Sleep is how our body heals and strengthens our immune system.
* **Identify or create a nurturing place in your home.** A rocking chair, a nice view, and soothing music are important components to having a nurturing place. Twenty minutes of rocking in a rocking chair reduces both your physical pain and anxiety. It is like giving your self a hug.
* **Practice relaxation or meditation. Go to your nurturing place and listen to guided relaxation tapes.** Time spent in meditation or prayer allows your mind and body to slow down and let go of the stress. Take a mental vacation in the midst of stress by relaxing your body, shutting your eyes and visualizing yourself in your favorite vacation spot or quiet haven.

**Resources**

Amen, Daniel, G. M.D. 1998 Change Your Brain, Change Your Life. New York: Three Rivers Press

Carlson, Richard, Ph.D. 1997. Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff…and it is all small stuff. New York: Hyperion

McKay, Matthew, Ph.D., Davis, Martha, Ph.D., Fanning, Patrick. 1997. Thoughts and Feelings: Taking Control of Your Moods and Your Life. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Visit MedMD at [www.webmd.com/mental-health/default.htm](http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/default.htm) for more information on Stress Management

For CDs of meditations for difficult times visit [www.touchstarpro.com/p-123-meditations-for-difficult-times.aspx](http://www.touchstarpro.com/p-123-meditations-for-difficult-times.aspx)

Prepared by Nancy Apperson, NIU Employee Assistance Program Coordinator