Stress and anxiety are a part of everyday life. While mild stress can actually be beneficial as a motivator, higher levels of ongoing stress can lead to medical, psychological and social problems. This information sheet helps you understand the stress response, as well some of the things you can do to make stress more manageable.

**Fight, flight, freeze response**
When we feel anxious, stressed or uncomfortable, we might notice signals from our body:
- Muscle tension or soreness
- Breathing becomes quicker and shallower
- Nausea and “butterflies in the stomach”
- Feeling hot and sweaty
- Increased heart rate
- Trembling or shaking hands and feet.

This physiological response is the **fight, flight, freeze** response. Our body is preparing itself for action to keep you alive. If you think back to cave man days – if a tiger jumped out, then you would have a very similar response. In that situation, this response would be very useful, as it would help us survive.

Nowadays, we do not have to focus on day-to-day survival. However, our fight, flight, freeze response can still be activated. An increase in physiological arousal can occur when we experience other perceived “threats” in our environment such as talking in class or sitting an exam. Our brains can send danger signals to our bodies, which in turn activates the fight, flight, freeze response.

If this response builds up, rather than helping us to act, it can often get in the way of what we are trying to do. This is where breathing and relaxation can be important. If we notice these signals and they do not help us in the situation we are in, then we need to reassure the body that we are not in danger and soothe ourselves.

**Calm breathing**
Finding ways to slow our breathing can be the most powerful tool in reducing physiological arousal. Three breathing exercises you can try are big breaths out, the 3-3-3 breathing and the 4-7-8 breathing approaches. You can talk yourself through these or you can download an app or listen to an audio (links on the next page) to guide you. It is important to take deep breaths in and out of the belly, rather than from your chest. When practicing this technique, it can be helpful to place one hand on the chest and one hand on the stomach to monitor where the breath is moving from.

The big breath out
Focus on taking a big breath out, as much as you can, and then a little more. You will naturally draw a deep breath in following this. Pause and repeat.

3-3-3 breathing
Breathe in for 3 counts, hold for 3 counts, breathe out for 3 counts. Pause and repeat.

4-7-8 breathing
Breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 7 counts, breathe out for 8 counts. Pause and repeat.
Relaxation
Relaxation can come in many forms. When we think of relaxation often the first thing that comes to mind are those activities you do when you don’t have to study or work. In this information sheet, we are referring instead to a structured relaxation exercise. It is important to try some to find ones that suit you. Two relaxation exercises that people often find helpful are Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Visualisation.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation
Our muscles hold a lot of tension. Strategically tensing and releasing our muscles is a great way to help the body recognise any tension and relax more readily. See the downloadable audio links below.

Visualisation
These types of exercises involve you imagining yourself in a relaxing place. This could be the beach, in a forest or a place that has special meaning for you. See the downloadable audio links below.

Grounding
Grounding techniques can be very useful when we feel distressed, particularly when the distress makes us feel overwhelmed, unreal or detached, or it feels like we are in a different situation to where we really are.

Move around
Stretch, stamp your feet, jump up and down, dance, run on the spot, rub your arms and legs, clap your hands, walk, do burpees or star jumps, walk up some stairs. Consciously remind yourself where you are right now.

5-4-3-2-1
Notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel (not emotions but physical touch and sensations), 2 things you can smell or like the smell of and take 1 slow, deep breath.

Try to think about different things
Count backwards in 7s from 100, think of 10 different animals, 10 blue things, one animal or country for each letter of the alphabet, say the alphabet backwards, name the street names in the area you grew up etc.

Audio downloads
There are many free audios that you can access online, or as downloads. We’ve listed three places that you can go to download and stream tracks to help with breathing and relaxation.

The Desk
Visit The Desk (free to UTAS students @ www.thedesk.org.au) to download the

Abdominal Breathing Track or Progressive Muscle Relaxation under tools and relaxation.

Orygen Youth Health
Download the Breathing Exercise Track, Progressive Muscle Relaxation and The Beach track from Orygen Youth Health by visiting https://oyh.org.au/our-services/training-resources/free-downloads-youth-mental-health-resources/pause

ABC Classic Flow
This is a collection of short guided relaxation, breathing, meditation and yoga sessions that you can stream or download. Three conscious breaths, desk break grounding, body scan, conscious breathing, guided relaxation and progressive muscle relaxation are some of the sessions available. Visit abc.net.au/radio/programs/classicflow

Mobile device apps
There are a number of apps available that can guide you through breathing and structured relaxation activities. Four that you might like to try include:

Breathe by Reachout, Calm, Breathe 4-7-8, Paced Breathing.

Where can I get more information or help?
University Counselling Service:
utas.edu.au/counselling
Free personal counselling (face-to-face, video, phone, instant chat and email) appointments are available with experienced mental health clinicians between 8.30am and 5.00pm weekdays.
Online bookings: utas.edu.au/appointments
Phone: 1800 817 675
After Hours Crisis counselling support phone 1300 511 709 & text 0488 884 168

Beyond Blue: beyondblue.org.au
Free information and support people around mental health and wellbeing. Includes online chat service. Phone 1300 22 46 36

Headspace: headspace.org.au
Information, resources and support for people 25 years and under. Includes online and phone support through headspace, as well as face-to-face service at a centre near you.