

# “STRESS, AND HOW TO MANAGE IT”

*This document has been drawn up by Anne-Victoire Rousselet, a psychologist.*

## 1 A WELL-BALANCED LIFESTYLE

Your body needs resources to face and cope with life events (positive or negative, minor or important). If your body doesn't have resources, it won't be able to react properly, and stress symptoms will prevent you from finding efficient solutions. Just like a smartphone needs power to function normally, imagine what would happen if your battery ran out? Remember that your brain and your body are connected, and both require energy. With low resources and no social connections, it will be difficult to manage emotions and/or stress.

### **Here are a few examples:**

**SLEEPING TIME:** Your body and brain require six to eight hours per night to recover from the day you just had and to get ready for the next day.

**REDUCING INTAKE OF ALCOHOL AND CAFFEINE, STRICTLY AVOID USAGE OF DRUGS.** Everyone knows alcohol and drugs are toxic, and more than 3 coffees a day can worsen your physical stress symptoms. You might think alcohol or drugs can reduce stress and indeed they sometimes help in the very short term. But they are always detrimental in the long run (and the long run actually starts 12-24 hours after intake). It can put your life at risk.

**SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:** Remember that everybody needs to talk, just to express the feelings they have. You can call friends or family, but you can also talk anonymously and confidentially to psychologist. These professionals will listen to you and they will provide you with helpful advice.

**PHYSICAL EXERCISE:** The mind and body are connected. What you do for your body will impact your brain. This makes physical activities part of stress management. It is recommended that you get at least 150 minutes of vigorous exercise a week. Be careful, however, because practicing sports more than eight hours a week is considered as addictive behavior.

**BREATHING AND RELAXATION:** Meditation, mindfulness and yoga can help. We always forget to breathe deeply while we should do it regularly. As often as you can, take a deep breath and quietly welcome the flow of your thoughts and emotions.

## 2 CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS

The way you perceive a situation, and your resources to face this situation are both critical to letting you choose how to behave. Think about your first experience at school. You were probably told that it would be a great place to learn new skills and to make friends. Or you might have been told something slightly different: "I hope that you will feel good and make new friends. Tell the teacher if other children aren't nice to you.

Now imagine the state of mind of the child, which will be very different in these two situations. In the first case, she has positive expectations and feels secure to face this new situation. In the second case, she was given bad expectations and therefore might be afraid to go to school.

**This is why it is crucial to expect positive experiences and outcomes and to learn to emphasize positive emotions:**

**CHANGE YOUR THOUGHTS:** When you are afraid of doing something, imagine that you are a 5-year-old child and think about a simple task you performed and how proud you were. Think of things as a good challenge, a chance to learn new skills and improve your self-esteem.

**PRIORITIZING:** Set your priorities, and write down a to-do list. Every evening check what you have completed, rather than worrying about what you haven't finished.

**RECOGNIZE "GOOD FAILURES":** When your experience doesn't work out, take a moment to write down the things you've learned from the experience.

**TODAY'S POSITIVE EVENTS:** Take 5 minutes each evening to remember 3 to 5 positive moments that occurred today and experience gratefulness.