



Four weeks of mindfulness activities
to help you work with stress!

Understanding Your Stress

Activity Book & Meditation Series

by New Leaf Foundation

New Leaf Foundation

New Leaf Foundation supports the mental, emotional, and physical health of youth in equity-deserving communities through mindfulness-based programming, resources and trainings. Our aim is to address the causes and impacts of chronic stress on young people, while also confronting systemic barriers that many face in accessing wellness-based resources.

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Contents

Introduction	01
Week One: What is Stress?	03
Week Two: Stress & Your Body	06
Week Three: Stress & Your Mind	09
Week Four: Working With Stress	12
Self-Care Plan	15
What Next?	16



Introduction

This 4-week activity book is designed to help you understand how stress affects you physically, mentally, and emotionally, and learn how to work with it in positive ways. We all experience stress and not all types of stress are the same. There are types of stress that can hurt us and types of stress that can help us. Through these next four weeks, we will use mindfulness activities to explore how stress affects us all differently, learn how to notice when you are stressed, how you react to your stress, and how to work with stressful moments in positive ways.

How it works

Each week we've provided you with journal prompts or activities as well as a weekly meditation that focuses on body and breath awareness. All you need is a journal and pen or coloured markers/pencils.

If writing isn't your thing, switch it up and do the activities as voice memos or drawings.

“

**These mountains
that you are
carrying,
you were only
supposed to
climb.**

Najwa Zebian

”

Week One

What is stress?



Everyone feels stress at different points in their day and in their lives. However, just because we all experience stress doesn't mean that we all experience it in the same ways. The basic definition of stress is tension caused by a physical, mental or emotional factor. Stress can be caused by something external, such as from your surroundings, or by something internal, like an illness or even your thoughts.



Meditation: Noticing Tension in Your Body

Listen on [SoundCloud](#) or [YouTube](#) (for a 5-minute version, [click here](#))

Keep track of how often you
try the meditation here →

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S
<input type="radio"/>						

Activity

A stressor is something that causes you stress. Being aware of and understanding your stressor(s) can help you learn to work with your responses to stress more effectively.

Write a list of things that cause you stress (ex. schoolwork, siblings fighting, etc.)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In the first part of this activity, you identified situations or things that cause you to feel stressed. When we experience stress, there are usually a lot of other feelings and behaviours that come up too. Check out the words and phrases below, and circle any that you've experienced when stressed.

worried having too much to think about tension
chest pains nervous over-committed
angry stretched too thin uncomfortable frustrated
stomachaches anxious headaches overwhelmed
unable to focus restless overthinking

Write down any additional words that you associate with stress.



Try this! To bring yourself into the present moment, try noticing what your 5 senses are taking in—what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.

“

**Listen to your
body. It will talk
to you if you're
willing to listen.**

Phyllis George

”

Week Two

Stress & Your Body



When we experience stress of any kind, our bodies are affected. When you're stressed, for example, you might notice reactions in your body like a racing heart, shortness of breath, feeling flushed or hot, tense muscles, an upset stomach, "brain fog" or a headache. If we get to know our body's signals well, it can be easier for us to notice when our stress levels are starting to build and then make choices about how to create more calm.



Meditation: Tense & Release

Listen on [SoundCloud](#) or [YouTube](#) (for a 5-minute version, [click here](#))

Keep track of how often you
try the meditation here →

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S
<input type="radio"/>						

Activity

The purpose of this exercise is to build an understanding of how we experience stress in our bodies and the ways we respond to those feelings. Start with the Tense & Release Body Scan in this week's recorded meditation and notice where you feel tension in your body.

Describe the sensations you noticed in your body during the meditation

ex. heat, prickly, butterflies

When you felt those sensations, what did you want to do?

ex. scratch, open your eyes, nothing, etc.



Try this! To connect with your body and the ground beneath you in a simple way, wiggle your toes in your shoes for 5-10 seconds. Next, press your feet into the soles of your shoes. Finally relax your feet and notice what you feel.

“

**Feelings are
something you
have; not
something you
are.**

Shannon Alder

”

Week Three

Stress & Your Mind

Stress not only affects our physical body but also our mind. Stress causes many different types of emotions that may contribute to our thoughts and behaviour. How stress affects our minds will be unique to each of us... we are all individuals and react differently. Let's get to know our thoughts and feelings a little better.



Meditation: Thoughts Like Clouds
Listen on [SoundCloud](#) or [YouTube](#)

Keep track of how often you
try the meditation here →

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S
<input type="radio"/>						

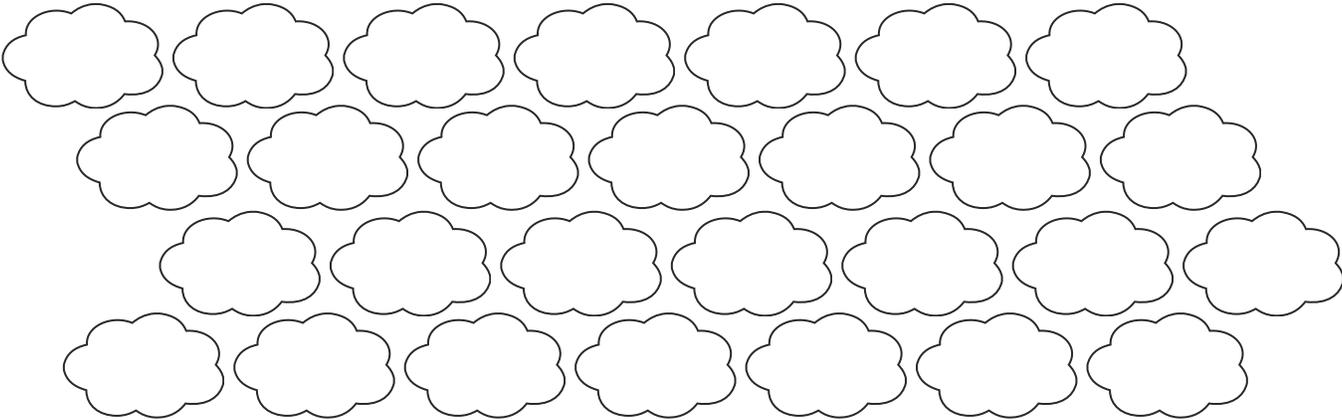
Activity

Choose 3 emotions that you associate with being stressed (ex. fear, anger, sadness). Write them below and pick a different colour for each.

Emotion

Colour

For one week, colour in a shape below each time you feel one of the 3 emotions. At the end of the week, notice what colour shows up the most.



Try this! To balance out the focus we've put on challenging emotions, take a few moments to name 5 things you're grateful for.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

“

**You may not
control all the
events that
happen to you,
but you can
decide not to be
reduced by them.**

Maya Angelou

”

Week Four

Working With Stress

Many people look at stress as negative, however, not all stress is bad. Experiencing some stress over a test may cause us to study harder. Learning from a mistake we made results in growth. These are positive examples of stress. However, high levels of stress or stress that we experience over long periods of time without a break can cause us harm, so it can be helpful to learn how to work with these harmful types of stress in positive ways.



Meditation: Working with Uncomfortable Emotions
Listen on [SoundCloud](#) or [YouTube](#)

Keep track of how often you
try the meditation here →

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S
<input type="radio"/>						

Activity

What you'll need: paper, markers or coloured pencils

In this activity, we'll take time to reflect on the stresses in our day and the tools we have available to support our bodies and minds during stressful times.

Use the outline provided on the next page or draw waves on a piece of paper. Label the waves with things that cause you stress. For example, worries and fears that created these waves. In the spaces between the waves, write down things, activities or people that bring you calm or that you enjoy.

Consider putting this activity sheet somewhere you can see it regularly, and take a look at it whenever you need a reminder of who and what can help you navigate challenges.

Example: school work, money



Example: playing basketball, talking with a friend



Try this! Before a hard conversation or dealing with a difficult situation, pause and inhale for a count of 3 or 4 and exhale for a count of 5.

“

**Caring for
myself is not
self-indulgence,
it is self-
preservation.**

Audre Lorde

”

Self-Care Plan



Our last activity is to create your own personalized self-care plan, consider how you can take care of your physical, mental and emotional health. Who might help you? What actions can you take? Write at least 3 ideas into each box. See if you can commit to doing at least one thing from each box every week.

Mental

For example, turn off devices,
read a book, journal

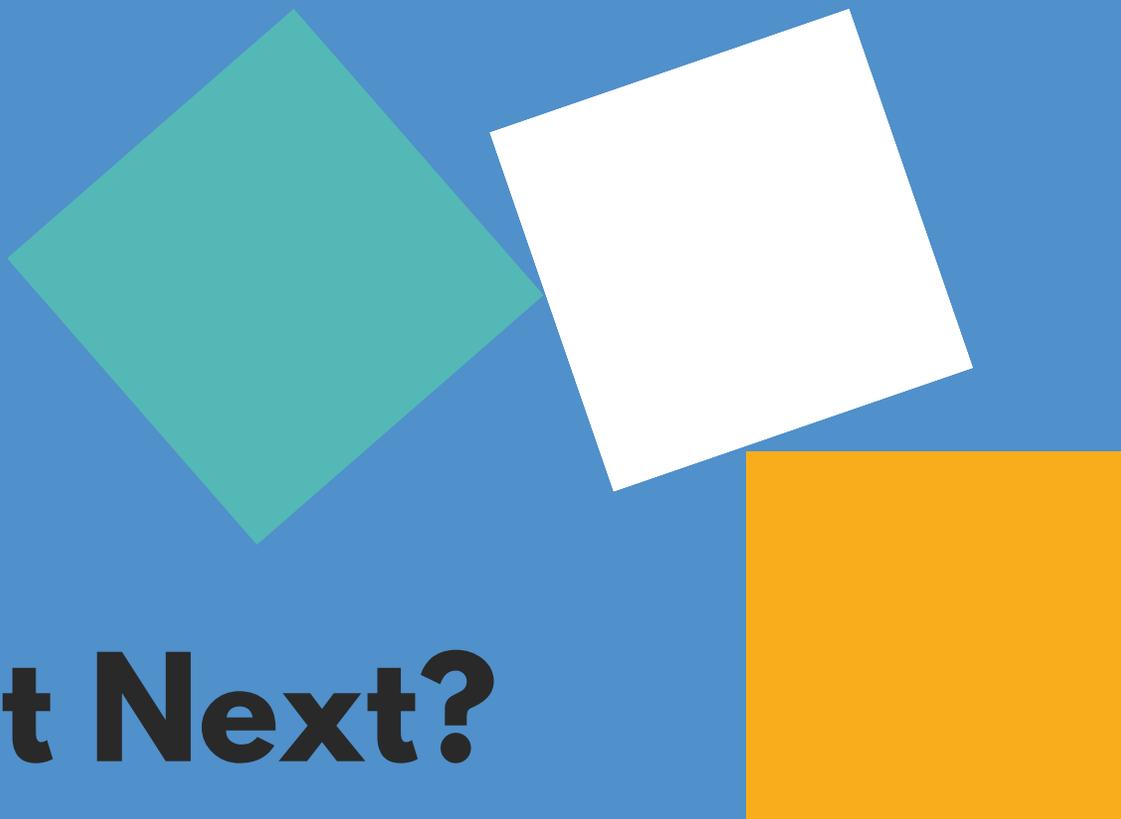
Emotional

For example, talk to a friend, make
art, listen to music

Physical

For example, go for a walk, take a
nap, dance

Write down individuals or groups you can
ask for help when stressed



What Next?

We hope that this 4-week activity book has equipped you with a better understanding of stress and ways you can take care of your physical, mental, and emotional health. If you're interested in learning more about mindfulness, you can:

- Try our [Pause: Introduction to Mindfulness Activity Book](#)
- Try our [7-Day Mindfulness Journal](#)
- Check out other mindfulness activities available [on our website](#)
- Drop us a line to tell us what was helpful about this activity

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