

# Wellbeing toolkit





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## Wellbeing is more than being physically well

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'<sup>1</sup>. Wellbeing, and particularly **psychosocial wellbeing**, can be similarly defined as going beyond the lack of illness. The influential factors contributing to psychosocial wellbeing constantly change, are culturally defined and result in an ever-changing experience of psychosocial wellbeing.

## What is stress?

Stress is the body's natural way of getting the energy to work outside our normal comfort zone. Stress is often described as a feeling of being overloaded, wound up tight, tense and worried. We all experience stress at times. It can sometimes help to motivate us to get a task finished, or perform well. But stress can also be harmful. The longer we are under stress, the more tension we store in our mind and body<sup>2</sup>. Stress can interfere with our ability to get on with daily life and affects our physical and psychosocial wellbeing<sup>3</sup>. Being under stress for any length of time leads to typical reactions.

The general symptoms of stress are described below:

**Physical:** Dizzy, sweating, pale, trembling, palpitations, jumpy, nausea, diarrhoea, headache or other aches and pains, loss of appetite, increased desire for stimulants, sugar, alcohol, tobacco, coffee. Bodily tension, fatigue and tightness in muscles. Weak feelings, tiredness, loss of energy and enthusiasm. Sleepy but cannot sleep, disturbed sleep, dreams and nightmares.

**Behavioural:** Apathy, restless, "black" humour, sleep disturbance, increased alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, changed behavioural patterns or habits (exercise, eating, sex,) slurred or confused speech.

**Mental:** Poor memory, organisation, planning, decision making. Can't concentrate or remember details, low attention span. Confusion, misunderstanding. Forget names, lose track of thoughts. Trouble thinking clearly. Can't stop thinking about the worries all the time. Keep thinking about bad times in the past. Not speaking clearly, slurring words.

- 1 World Health Organisation, 2014, Mental health: a state of wellbeing
- 2 Gordon, R. 2005, Information and advice about stress, trauma, and psychological first aid
- 3 Australian Psychological Society, Understanding Stress

**Emotional:** Excitement, high spirits, cynicism, frustration, depression, vulnerable, suspiciousness. Inappropriate emotions e.g. Laughter, jokes. Feel detached from things, don't care anymore. Irritable, bad tempered, impatient and restless, unable to relax or keep still. Feeling overwhelmed, everything seems too hard or difficult. Tearful at times for no reason. Easily upset or hurt, oversensitive to what other do and say. Insecure and wanting to stay in familiar places with routines. Feeling very emotional, waves of anger or worry that are not reasonable.

**Social:** Excessive talking about the event or need of support, distrust, misunderstandings and conflict in close personal relationships. Feel others are to blame and get things all out of proportion. Can't feel happiness, enjoyment or affection for loved ones. Changed relationships with those close to you. Don't want to be with family or friends or always need to be around them. Have to talk about it all the time. Feel that others don't understand or don't seem to care.

**Existential/Spiritual Disillusionment:** Loss of interest, wonder what the point of it all, question values and philosophy of life, cynicism. Moody, gloomy, feeling sad and hopeless as though it will never end.



## The best way to combat stress is pleasure and leisure

Stress does not resolve spontaneously. Even with rest, it tends to perpetuate itself unless deliberate steps are taken to break the sequence of reactions that maintain it<sup>4</sup>. There are plenty of things that anyone can do which will help to break the stress cycle and reduce tension. Many simple pleasures will make a big difference to stress. **Enjoyment is the best antidote to stress.**

Looking after yourself is very important. This can be enhanced by social support, self awareness, self care, and connection to something larger than self.

Some tips for self care include:

- **Get good rest.** Sleep provides more energy, clearer thinking and helps you feel less overwhelmed.
- **Watch your diet and physical health.** Manage your intake of caffeine, alcohol, drugs, medication and take regular exercise.
- **Look after your relationships.** Communicate with people close to you. Lean on them if you need to. Accept or ask for their support if it helps you
- **Do things that make you happy.** As much as possible, take part in activities and interests that make you feel good
- **Stay connected with others.** Eg: workmates, neighbours, and other groups. Don't become isolated, as an individual or as a family<sup>5</sup>.

4 Gordon, op cit.

5 Australian Red Cross, 2011, Helping children and young people cope with crisis: Information for parents and caregivers, p18.

# Self-stress questionnaire

*Please note that this scale is not a clinical diagnostic instrument and is provided for educational purposes.*

The purpose of this questionnaire is to encourage you to review your current stress levels and identify patterns through some of the more common symptoms of stress. This is something you can do on your own and do not need to share with anyone.

The important thing to remember is that stress is an every day occurrence that we all deal with. Positive stress gives us the motivation to win a race, do well in an interview, or meet deadlines. However, when stress loads become too high or stress doesn't go away in a timely manner, it can have a significant impact on our overall health and wellbeing. This is not a sign of weakness but simply something that happens from time to time.

Stresses that result in feelings of tension and anxiety can arise from many sources.

Here are a few<sup>7</sup>:

- Work stressors (long hours, difficult people to work with, deadlines, etc.)
- Home stressors (conflict with children or spouse, home demands, etc.)
- Finances (debt, spending conflict, job loss, difficult economy, etc.)
- Health problems
- Feeling a loss of control over one's life
- Feeling sad and depressed
- Major life events (divorce, moving, new job, loss of a loved one, a tragedy, etc.)

## Questionnaire instructions

How stressed are you feeling? In the last month, how often has any of the statements on the following page been true for you? Choose the option that fits your reality.



## Scoring for questionnaire

Add up the numbers you circled in the Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often and Always columns so you have a column total for each column. If you did not circle any numbers in a column, your column total will be zero. Then add your five column totals to determine your total score.

### Under 46

Your state of stress appears to be at a standard tolerable level. Remember that stress may manifest itself in many ways and it may come on straight away or it may take some time for it to develop. You can reuse this tool at any time to reassess your stress level.

### 46-60

You may be suffering from stress. Consider some of the stress reduction tips in this toolkit, and about how you may be able to bring your current stress levels down.

### 61 and Over

You may be under severe stress. You may wish to think hard about the cause of your stress and work to reduce it as soon as possible.

<sup>7</sup> Wellsource, Inc., Improving Coping Skills, 2009  
<http://www.wellsources.info/wn/SelfTest-Stress.pdf>

## Self-stress questionnaire

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel tired	1	2	3	4	5
I find it very hard to relax or “wind down”	1	2	3	4	5
I find it hard to make decisions	1	2	3	4	5
My heart races and I find myself breathing rapidly	1	2	3	4	5
I have trouble thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I eat too much or too little	1	2	3	4	5
I get headaches	1	2	3	4	5
I feel emotionally numb	1	2	3	4	5
I think about problems over and over during the day	1	2	3	4	5
I have sleeping problems (e.g. staying asleep, bad dreams)	1	2	3	4	5
I have trouble feeling hopeful	1	2	3	4	5
I find myself taking unnecessary risks or engaging in behaviour hazardous to health and /or safety	1	2	3	4	5
I have back and neck pain, or other chronic tension-linked pain	1	2	3	4	5
I intake caffeine or nicotine more than usual	1	2	3	4	5
I feel overwhelmed	1	2	3	4	5
I feel helpless	1	2	3	4	5
I have nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, grinding teeth, fidgeting, pacing, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
I forget little things (e.g. my keys, names, work details)	1	2	3	4	5
I have stomach upsets (e.g. nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, gas, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
I am irritable and easily annoyed	1	2	3	4	5
I have mood swings and feel over-emotional	1	2	3	4	5
I find it hard to concentrate	1	2	3	4	5
I feel distant and cut off from other people	1	2	3	4	5
I use alcohol and/or other drugs to try and help cope	1	2	3	4	5
I have trouble completing things	1	2	3	4	5
<b>COLUMN TOTALS</b>					

**YOUR TOTAL SCORE**

# Burnout checklist

Long-term stress can lead to burnout. Burnout is an emotional state characterised by chronic emotional exhaustion, depleted energy, impaired enthusiasm and motivation to work, diminished work efficiency, a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, pessimism, and cynicism.

It is important to actively create the space for your own wellbeing and to honestly check in with how you're faring on a personal level. No one can be 'strong' all the time. Understanding our own needs and vulnerabilities is a strength. Taking a break and/or seeking support is both a sign of professionalism and a valuable example to those around you.

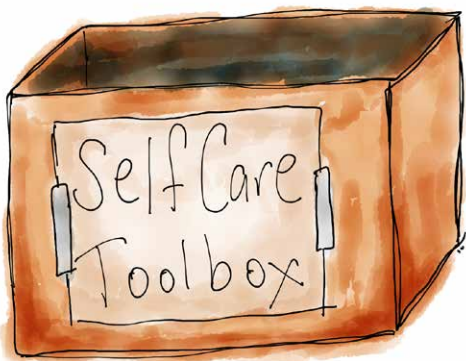
Schedule for yourself (and those in your team) a regular check in with the burnout checklist. Use it to reflect on how you are faring. Do you need to focus on your wellbeing, take a break and/or seek support – earlier rather than later is a good rule of thumb.

*Please note: This burnout checklist is not a clinical or definitive tool and should be used as an indicator only. Even if the items on this checklist are not resonating with you, but you're concerned for your well-being, seek advice and support.*

## Burnout checklist

### Do any of these sound like me?

- Starting to resent clients or becoming overly involved and taking on their worries
- Lacking enthusiasm, drive and energy
- Experiencing a loss of capacity for empathy
- Feelings of emotional withdrawal, bitterness, and cynicism
- Having a reduced sense of accomplishment
- Developing a narrow focus and inability to see where your role fits in the 'bigger picture'
- Tending towards poor or uncooperative behaviour to spite 'the system'
- Being overwhelmed by the size of the task, and defensive about expectations
- Feeling challenged by change; resorting to responses such as "This is how we do it!"
- Over time becoming too invested and unable to accept when your role is no longer required
- Feeling that you are indispensable to a community or individual's recovery.



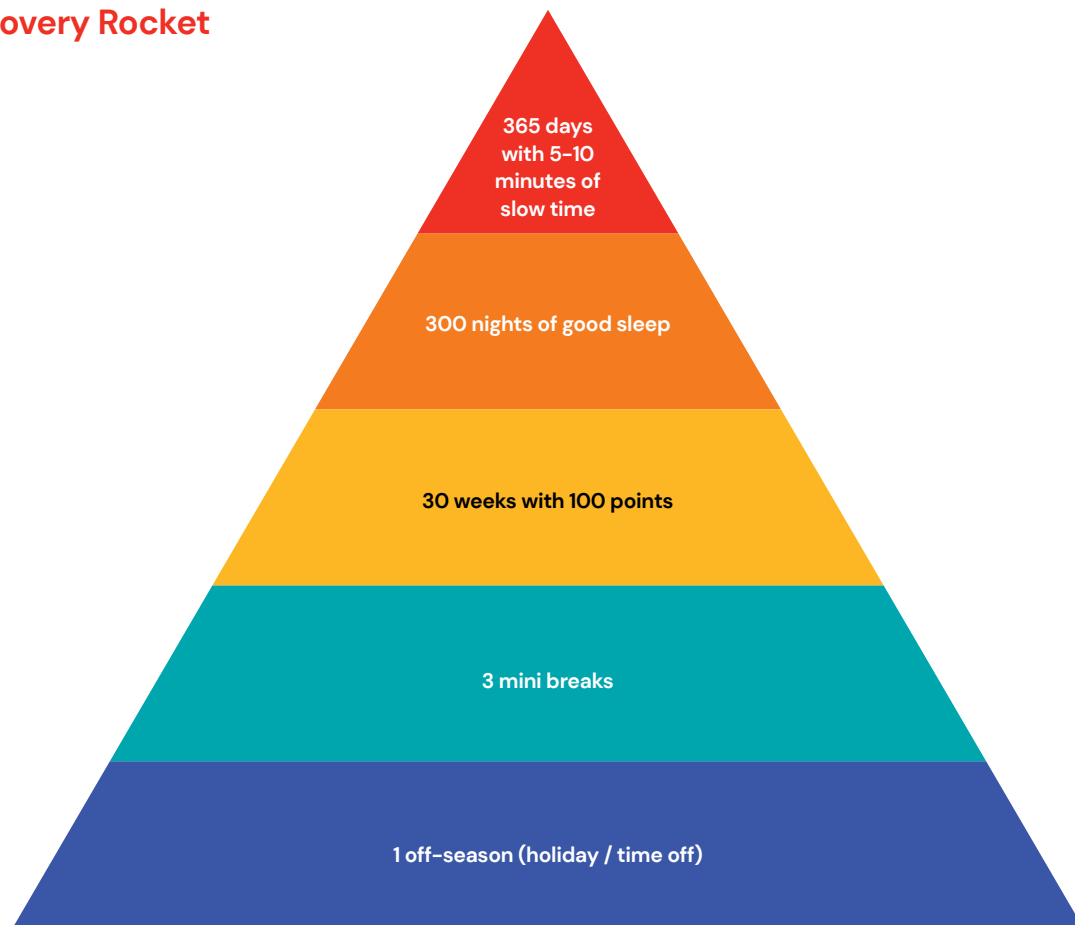
# Recovery Rocket & Recovery Points Table

Andrew May, a human performance strategist and leadership coach, developed the Recovery Rocket in his work with elite athletes. May, along with his clients, realised that recovery between intense physical demands was critical to long-term sporting success. The same principle applies to psychosocial wellbeing and stress. We need to break the cycle of stress to protect our wellbeing and physical health.

The **Recovery Rocket** can help you build your self care plan and work out how much self care is enough! The focus of building a regular self care plan is to ensure you can sustain yourself through the demands of work and life to avoid burning out.

- Every year you should try to take one proper holiday, or at least an off-season.
- Aim to get three mini-breaks throughout the year, preferably one mini-break every three months
- For thirty weeks of the year, aim to get 100 recovery points
- On three-hundred nights of the year aim to get a full, restorative night's sleep where you wake up the following morning feeling totally refreshed and recharged
- 365 days of the year (366 days every leap year) go SLOW for at least ten to fifteen minutes every day.

## The Recovery Rocket





This **Recovery Points Table** combines both indoor and outdoor activities. These activities are predominantly 'slow tasks' as opposed to activities that provide strength or cardiovascular fitness. Going slow is about stimulating the relaxation response, the exact opposite of the stress response.



## Recovery points

For at least 30 weeks of the year, you should accumulate 100 recovery points<sup>6</sup>

Indoor activity	Points	Outdoor activity	Points
Massage	50	Relaxing swim	25
Meditation	50	Surf or Paddle	25
Stretch / Yoga / Tai Chi	40	Bush walk	25
Visualisation *	30	BBQ / Picnic	25
Diaphragmatic breathing *	30	Golf	25
Warm bath	30	Fishing	25
Social catch up	25	Gardening	25
Church / spiritual service	25	Slow Walk	20
Movie or Theatre	25	Slow Cycle	20
Relaxing music	15	Park with kids	20
Read fiction	15	Sightseeing or Festival	15
TV	5	Shopping	15

- \* 5 – 10 minutes.
- All other activities are 30 minutes
- No points are awarded if you are checking your mobile phone

<sup>6</sup> Andrew May, Recovery Rocket, [www.andrewmay.com](http://www.andrewmay.com)

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# Self care plan

Use these questions to identify factors that trigger stress for you, and how to counteract them. Then use this information to develop your self-care plan in the table on page 11.

My stress triggers: e.g. tiredness, being pulled in too many directions...

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How I know I am experiencing negative stress: (Thinking about this ahead of time means we are better able to recognise when we're impacted.)

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My plan to counter negative stress:

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What are my stress-busters? Who can I talk to?

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My rule for when I will seek further support: e.g. three consecutive nights of disrupted sleep

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Developed by Elizabeth McNaughton, Jolie Wills and David Lallemand at New Zealand Red Cross for their publication, 'Leading in disaster recovery: A companion through the chaos' Download the resource via [preparecenter.org/resources/leading-in-disaster](http://preparecenter.org/resources/leading-in-disaster)

## Self care plan

Completing this self care plan can help you manage stress. Use the Recovery Points table to plan and make time for activities that you enjoy. Make it achievable, protect and prioritise the activities within it, put it somewhere visible, update it regularly and get help from others to hold you accountable to it.

	Emotional	Social	Physical	Spiritual
<b>Monday</b>				
<b>Tuesday</b>		<i>E.g. take the dog for a walk</i>		<i>E.g. take time to connect with nature</i>
<b>Wednesday</b>				
<b>Thursday</b>	<i>E.g. catch up with a work mate or professional coaching</i>	<i>E.g. movie with a friend</i>		
<b>Friday</b>				
<b>Saturday</b>				
<b>Sunday</b>				
<b>Accountable to</b>	<i>E.g. my colleague/coach</i>	<i>E.g. the dog</i>		

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# Positive Psychology

We all want to experience wellbeing and flourish in life. Developed by leading psychologist Martin Seligman in 2012, the “PERMA+” model is an evidence-based approach to improving happiness and decreasing anxiety, depression, and stress. Proactively working on the components of PERMA not only increases aspects of your wellbeing, but can also decrease psychological distress<sup>1</sup>. The components are:

**P – Positive Emotion.** Feeling good, optimism, hope, interest, joy, love, gratitude, pride, enjoyment

**E – Engagement.** Feeling of “flow” (absorption in an activity), fulfilling work, interesting hobbies

**R – Relationships.** Emotional and physical intimacy, love, social connection, friendships, family

**M – Meaning.** Purpose in life, sense of belonging, serving something greater than ourselves

**A – Accomplishments.** Achievement, mastery, competence, working toward and reaching goals

The Plus (+) part of the PERMA model suggests that the following are also important to wellbeing:

- *Optimism* – the belief that life will have more good outcomes than bad can result in living longer and lower levels of depression
- *Physical Activity* – increasing movement or activity decreases depression, anxiety etc.
- *Nutrition* – eating a balanced diet rich in vegetable and nutrients has been associated with wellbeing and reduces physical health problems such as obesity, diabetes etc.
- *Sleep* – good sleep hygiene (7–9 hours of quality sleep every night) fosters mental and emotional resilience

<sup>1</sup> Madeson M, 2021, Seligman’s ‘PERMA+ model explained: A theory of wellbeing’, *PositivePsychology.com*, retrieved from <https://positivepsychology.com/perma-model/>

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## Map your Happy

Use this chart to plot out your sources of positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. What areas are strongest? What could you add to really flourish in life?

**POSITIVE EMOTION:** What makes you feel good? What gives you pleasure and enjoyment? What are some things you can do to increase your level of optimism and joy?

**ENGAGEMENT:** What activities do you find fulfilling? What activities do you get completely absorbed in? What other hobbies or other activities would you like to engage in?

**POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS:** What relationships bring you joy and support? What do you do, or can you do, to nurture the level of love, intimacy, and emotional and physical interaction in your life?

**MEANING:** What larger purpose or cause do you feel drawn and connected to? What gives you meaning in your life, and why? What activities could you engage in to give further meaning to your life?

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** What are your ambitions and goals? What would you like to accomplish in the next week? Month? Year? How do you, or could you, celebrate your achievements? What have you accomplished that has given you pride in yourself?

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Some ideas for you consider:

- Taking up a hobby you have always wanted to try
- Listening to uplifting or inspirational music
- Connecting with nature by really listening and observing a natural environment
- Identify your strengths, and do things that you are good at
- Actively listen to a friend, spouse or your children – ask questions and show interest in the answers
- Get in touch with friends and family you have not spoken to or connect with in a while
- Try a new creative activity (like painting, sculpting, learning an instrument, writing your life story)
- Volunteer for a cause or organisation that matters to you
- Use “to do” lists or electronic planners to set goals, and tick tasks off as you achieve them
- Take a cake to work to celebrate your own or someone else’s achievement
- Give yourself permission to feel pride in a job well done
- Reconnect with activities you used to love doing but haven’t done for a while
- Do something to help someone else (eg. Visit a neighbour, volunteer some time or make a donation)
- Reflect on the positive things in your life, and record your thoughts in a journal
- Learn to cook some more balanced or creative meals
- Exercise regularly with a friend



[www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)

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