STRESS LESS WEEK

activity booklet

UCLife[X] presents the

mood booster manual

Designed for UC students by UC students

ucx | uclife[x]

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About this booklet

Here at UCLife[x], we understand just how stressful the final weeks of semester can be. Between finishing assignments, preparing for exams, and balancing university, paid work, social commitments and time for yourself, there's a lot to juggle. But don't worry, we've got you covered!

Designed in collaboration with a UC psychology student, this **Mood Booster Manual** is packed with research and evidence-based techniques to help you de-stress.

Inside, you'll find a collection of practical tools, strategies, and activities, curated with accessibility in mind, to help you manage stress during peak assessment periods or anytime you need a quick boost!

Get to know your support team

uclife[x]

@uclifex

If there's an event on campus that everyone's talking about, chances are it's been organised by UCLife[x]. Activities are held throughout the year to help you make new friends and, most importantly, have fun!

UC SPORT

@uc.sport

UC Sport is your gateway to all sports at the University of Canberra. Whether you're looking to play socially or compete in national tournaments wearing the UC blue, our teams are always a great source of pride for UC.

UC Medical and Counselling

The UC Medical & Counselling Centre provides support to UC students with an emphasis on ethical and confidential care. With general practitioner, nursing, and psychology services as well as a visiting psychiatrist, we have all the resources to support your health and well-being needs. Doctor's consults are bulk billed/direct billed and psychology appointments are free for all enrolled UC students.

You can book via the **HotDoc app** or by contacting reception on **02 6201 2351**

What's your STRESS LESS WEEK style?

Feeling the assessment crunch? Take a few minutes to find the tool that best fits your current mood.

Right now, my body feels:

- **A** Jittery, my heart is racing, or I feel 'on edge'
- **B** Tense in my shoulders and neck from sitting too long
- **C** Sluggish, tired, and in need of some "brain fuel"
- **D** Fine physically, but I can't stop fidgeting

My thoughts are currently:

- **A** Spiralling or stuck in a 'what if' loop about my grades
- **B** Overwhelmed by my massive to-do list
- **C** Bored or uninspired; I've been staring at the same page for an hour
- **D** Negative or self-critical

If I had 5 minutes right now, I'd want to:

- **A** Just disappear into a quiet, calm space
- **B** Get my to-do list organised and make a quick game plan
- **C** Get up to stretch, grab a snack, or step outside for some fresh air
- **D** Do something that doesn't involve a screen

Right now, my study space feels:

- **A** Too loud or overstimulating: I need to tune out the world
- **B** Cluttered and chaotic: I can't focus with all these open tabs and notes
- **C** Suffocating: I've been stuck in the exact same chair for hours
- **D** Draining: my eyes hurt from staring at a screen for too long

The main thing holding me back right now is:

- **A** Panic or fear about not getting the mark I need
- **B** Decision fatigue: I don't know which task to start first
- **C** Exhaustion: my brain feels like it's running on empty
- **D** Perfectionism or feeling like whatever I write isn't good enough

To feel supported right now, I most need:

- **A** A quiet moment alone to catch my breath
- **B** A clear, step-by-step plan so I'm clear on what I'm doing
- **C** A quick chat, a laugh, or a change of scenery with someone
- **D** A gentle reminder to stop being so hard on myself

My current focus level is best described as:

- **A** Racing: my mind is running 100km/h
- **B** Stuck: I keep staring at my to-do list without making progress
- **C** Drained: I'm nodding off or losing concentration every few minutes
- **D** Disengaged: I'm completely unmotivated and looking for any distraction

THE RESULTS

MOSTLY A'S

The Biological Reset | **Go-To Tools**

Your nervous system is on high alert; you need tools that signal to your brain that you are safe.

Pg 7 Box Breathing
Pg 8 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding
Pg 9 Progressive Muscle Relaxation
Pg 24 'Tune Out' Playlist

MOSTLY B'S

The Practical Planner | **Go-To Tools**

You feel overwhelmed by the "bigness" of your tasks; you need structure and a way to reframe the pressure you're under.

Pg 10 The Mindset Reframer
Pg 13-14 Daily Bookends
Pg 15 Evening Brain Dump
Pg 17-18 Momentum & Reinforcement
Pg 27 Stress Less Planner
Pg 28 Habit Tracker

MOSTLY C'S

The Energy Recharger | **Go-To Tools**

You've hit a wall; you need a physical change of pace to keep going.

Pg 16 Power Nap Playbook
Pg 19 Desk-Based De-Stiffener
Pg 20-21 Brain Fuel & Nutrition
Pg 22 Mindful Nature Walks
Pg 23 Connection Hacks

MOSTLY D'S

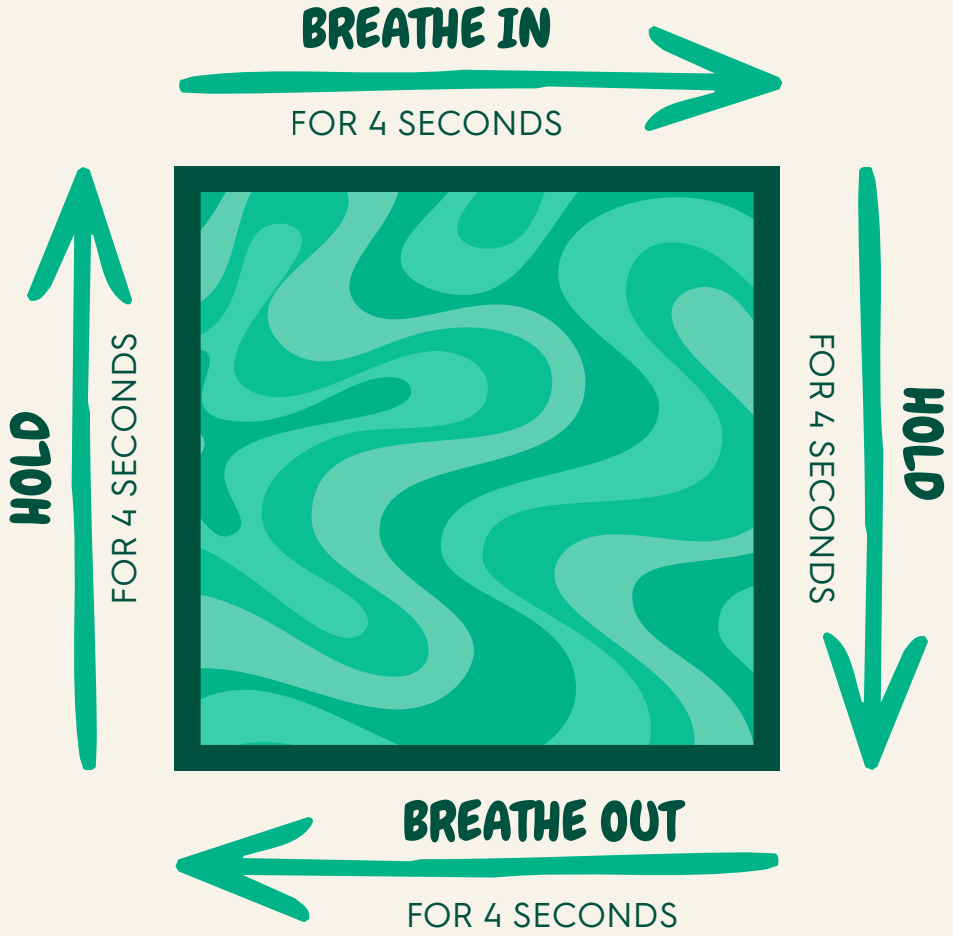
The Creative Escape | **Go-To Tools**

Your brain needs a distraction break to reset its focus and quiet the inner critic.

Pg 11 Self-Compassion Break
Pg 12 Gratitude Journal
Pg 25 Affirmations Word Search
Pg 26 Dot-to-Dot

BOX BREATHING

This is a simple four-step relaxation technique to help take you out of fight-or-flight mode. Feel free to trace your finger around the box if that's helpful.



5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

If you're feeling anxious, use the below to get in touch with your senses and bring you back to the present moment.

First, take 3 slow breaths in and out, focusing your mind on one sense at a time.

JUST SIMPLY NAME:



PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR)

A simple technique to help reduce anxiety, improve sleep, and build awareness of where stress is being held in the body and how to release it.

SETTLE IN	Sit or lie down in a quiet, comfortable spot.
BREATHE	Close your eyes and take 3 slow, deep breaths.
SAFETY FIRST	Do not strain your muscles—skip any areas that hurt.
TENSE & RELEASE	Work your way up from your feet to your face. Squeeze/tense one muscle group at a time tightly for 5 seconds and then release.
SCAN YOUR BODY	Notice how heavy and relaxed your whole body feels.
GENTLY CLOSE & OPEN EYES	Take a few slow breaths and open your eyes before standing up.

CLICK HERE OR SCAN THE QR CODE FOR A GUIDED PMR EXERCISE WITH HEADSPACE:

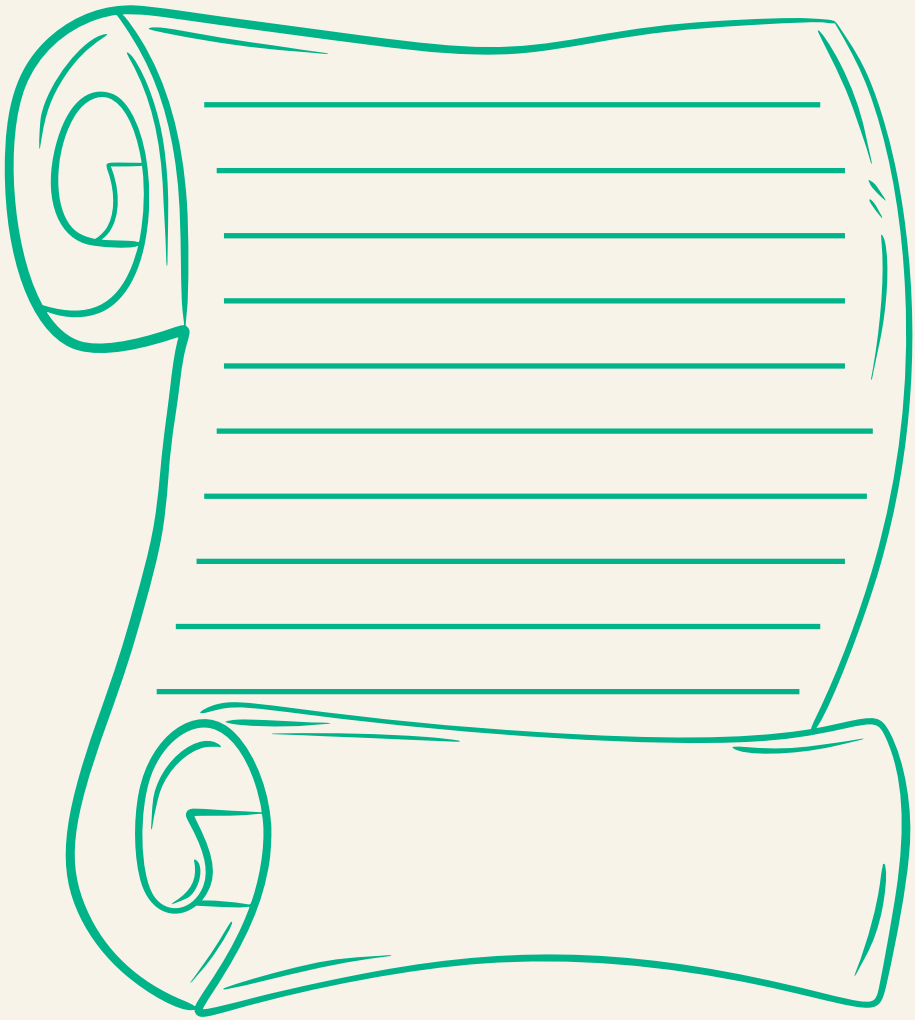
THE MINDSET REFRAMER

Don't believe everything you think. *Use this simple guide to catch and quiet your inner critic.*

IDENTIFY *Spot the negative thought*	**CHALLENGE** *is it actually true?*	**REFRAME** *find a balanced view*
E.g., "If I fail this exam, my entire degree is ruined."	*"This isn't true, as I can make up for my mark in other assessments."*	*"This exam is important, but there are always back-up plans and support."*

SELF-COMPASSION BREAK

If your best friend came to you stressed about assessments, what would you say to comfort them? Write those words on the scroll below:



Read the words you just wrote back to yourself.

THE THREE-DAY GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Regularly writing down things you appreciate helps to lower stress and boost overall mood.

DAY 1

1.

2.

3.

DAY 2

1.

2.

3.

DAY 3

1.

2.

3.

*If you found this activity helpful, you might like to try out the free **"Morning! – Gratitude Journal" app.***

DAILY BOOKENDS: MORNING ROUTINE

How you start your day sets the tone for your mind. Protect your morning energy and build momentum with these simple habits. Use the blank space below to add your favourite morning rituals and design a headstart that works for you!

THE AM RECHARGE

1. **Delay the Dopamine Hit:** Avoid checking emails, Canvas, or social media for the first 15-30 minutes after waking up.
2. **Hydrate & Wake up Your Brain:** Drink a glass of water and get some natural morning light on your face.
3. **Choose One Micro-Intent:** Before opening your laptop, write down just one 'Stress Less' goal **(Pg 27)** to ensure wellbeing stays on your agenda.

DAILY BOOKENDS: EVENING ROUTINE

Sleep is when your brain consolidates your learning and clears cognitive fatigue. Ensure you have a restorative night by starting with how you close your evening. Use the blank space below to add your own wind-down rituals that help you transition into a restful sleep.

THE PM RESET

1. **The Prep-Ahead Hack:** Set out your clothes and pack your bag for the next day. Removing these tiny morning decisions reduces friction and stress.
2. **Screen-Free Buffer:** Commit to screen-free time at least an hour before bed.
3. **The Mind Dump:** If your mind is racing with exam worries or uncompleted tasks, clear your head by unloading them onto paper **(Pg 15)**.

TOMORROW'S PROBLEM

LOUD THOUGHTS

THE EVENING MIND DUMP

Getting your rushing thoughts and worries out of your head and onto paper signals to your brain that it's safe to rest.

3 WINS FROM TODAY

THE POWER NAP PLAYBOOK

THE 10-20 MIN POWER NAP	THE 30-60 MIN MEMORY NAP
Stays in light stage sleep. Rapidly restores alertness, reaction time, and focus with zero 'sleep inertia' (grogginess). Perfect between study block sessions.	Reaches deep slow-wave sleep. Best for memory consolidation and fact retention before exams (note: allow 10-15 minutes to shake off mild grogginess).
THE 90-MIN FULL CYCLE NAP	**THE COFFEE NAP**
Completes a full sleep cycle (NREM to REM). Boosts creativity, emotional processing, and procedural memory without grogginess.	Drink a quick espresso, set a 20-minute timer, and close your ees immediately. Adenosine drops while sleeping, and caffeine peaks right as you wake up!

NIGHTTIME RULE OF THUMB

For maximum daytime nap efficiency, aim to keep your overnight wake-up time consistent. It anchors your body's circadian clock!

THE KEEPING MOMENTUM HACK

Taking frequent study breaks is essential for consolidating information, boosting your attention span, and reducing fatigue.

THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE

Beat procrastination and burnout by working with your brain, not against it.



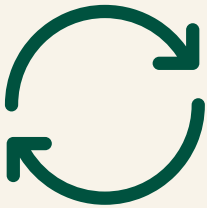
FOCUS

Set a timer and study with zero distractions for 50 minutes.



RESET

Take a 10-minute break.



REPEAT

After 2-4 cycles, take a longer 20–30-minute break.

Pro-Tip: Set a timer for your breaks too! This lets you fully relax and 'tune out' without constantly checking the clock.

Auditory Anchor: Pair your 50-minute focus sessions with our TUNE IN playlist, and switch to our TUNE OUT playlist during longer breaks **(Pg 25).**

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

With a busy university workload, rewarding your effort is essential. Use these examples alongside ***The Pomodoro Technique (Pg. 18)*** *or any study method that works best for you.*

MICRO-REWARDS	SHORT BREAKS
 After a focus session stand up, stretch, or grab a glass of water.	 After finishing a task step outside for fresh air, watch a short video, or listen to a favourite song.
END-OF-DAY TREATS	**MILESTONE REWARDS**
 Enjoy a warm tea, read a chapter of a book, or watch a TV show.	 After finishing a major assessment treat yourself to a nice meal out or a guilt-free afternoon off.

My favourite micro-reward is:

_____

My end-of-semester milestone treat will be:

_____

DESK-BASED DE-STIFFENER

THE RUBBER NECK

- Sit up tall and drop your right ear to your right shoulder
- Hold for 3 deep breaths
- Repeat on the left side

REACH FOR THE STARS

- Interlace your fingers and push your palms straight up to the ceiling
- Stretch as high as you can. Hold for 10 seconds

THE CHEST OPENER

- Clasp your hands behind your back
- Sit up straight, press your shoulder blades together, and lift your chest

SEATED SPINAL TWIST

- Place your left hand on your right knee
- Gently twist your torso to the right, looking over your shoulder
- Switch sides and repeat

HEAVY SHOULDER ROLLS

- Shrug your shoulders all the way up to your ears
- Roll them backward in a smooth slow circle x5
- Reverse and roll them forward x5

BRAIN FUEL & QUICK NUTRITION TIPS

THE BRAIN FUEL RULES

Avoid the Sugar Crash: *Ditch high-sugar energy drinks and lollies that cause a quick 20-minute spike followed by brain fog. Opt for slow-release carbs (like oats or wholegrain toast) and natural sweet options.*

Hydrate to Concentrate: *Even mild dehydration causes fatigue and poor concentration. Keep a water bottle at your desk and take a sip every 15-20 minutes.*

Smart Snacking: *Combine protein, healthy fats, and fibre to keep your focus steady. E.g., apple slices with nut butter or berries and Greek yogurt.*

QUICK REFRESH: WATERMELON SORBET

Ingredients

- 2 cups diced watermelon
  frozen overnight
- 8 tbsp coconut milk
- 1 tsp honey
  optional

Method

1. Blend frozen watermelon for a few seconds to break it down.
2. Add coconut milk and honey, blend until mixture is smooth and creamy.
3. Serve immediately for a softer consistency or freeze for 2-3 hours for a firmer texture!

PESTO & CANNELLINI BEAN PASTA

Servings: 4 | Prep Time: 10 mins | Cook Time: 5 mins

Ingredients

- 300g pasta
- 1 can cannellini beans
- 1 cup pesto
- 4 cups spinach
- 1 tsp olive oil
- salt and pepper to taste
- parmesan to serve
  optional

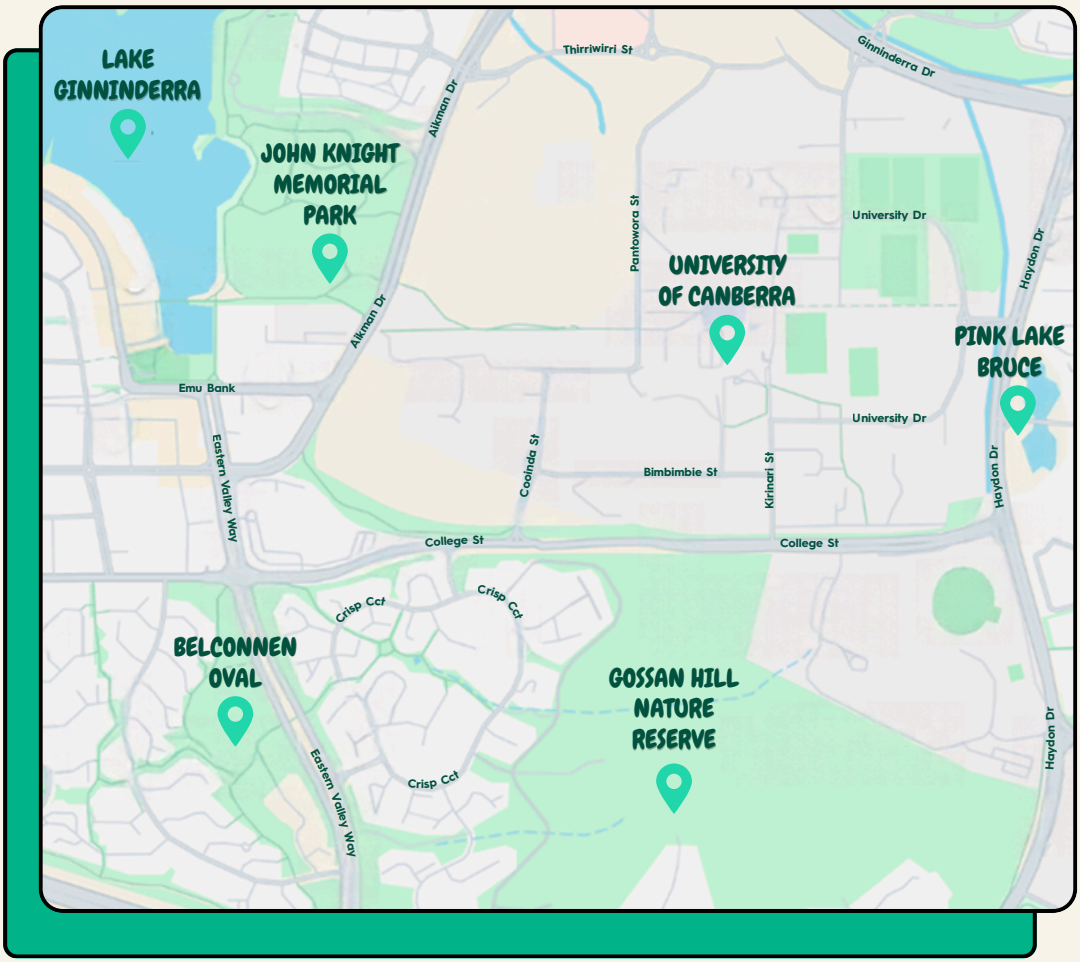
Method

1. Heat a saucepan of salted water and cook pasta according to the package instructions until al dente. Reserve ¼ cup of pasta water, drain, and set aside.
2. Drain and rinse the cannellini beans.
3. In a large pan, heat the olive oil and spinach. Add the cannellini beans and stir.
4. Add the reserved pasta water to the pan. Simmer for 2 minutes, stirring frequently.
5. Add the pasta and pesto, stirring until well-coated.
6. Plate up and top with grated parmesan cheese if desired!

Hungry for more quick meals? *Click here or Scan this QR code to access the full UCX Food Pantry Cookbook for more great recipes!*

MINDFUL NATURE WALKS

Stepping outside isn't a distraction—it's an essential part of study. A quick change of scenery physically resets your nervous system and clears mental clutter.



SOCIAL CONNECTION

Under high study pressure, our brains can slip into 'fight-or-flight' state. Stepping away for a quick conversation signals safety to your nervous system, restoring both your mood and your cognitive capacity so you can study better.

SHORT ON TIME? TRY THESE MICRO-CONNECTIONS:

STUDY SIDE-BY-SIDE (BODY DOUBLING)	SEND A SIMPLE 'THINKING OF YOU' TEXT
Study in the same space as a friend. You don't have to talk to connect. Simply having someone working alongside you keeps you focused while reducing isolation.	Send a quick text to a friend just to say, "Swamped with study, but so glad we're in this together!" Showing appreciation instantly boosts both of your moods!

THE 15-MINUTE COFFEE PACT

Grab a coffee with a classmate, set a timer for 15 minutes, and make a strict rule: no talking about assessments.



SOUNDSCAPES FOR STUDY & REST

When academic stress builds, the right auditory frequencies can act as a cognitive dial—helping you either lock into deep focus or signal to your nervous system that it is safe to rest.

PLAYLIST 1: TUNE IN (FOCUS & FLOW)

Need to block out library background noise and keep your brain ticking?

This playlist has been curated to stimulate cognitive flow—ideal for listening during your Pomodoro study blocks (Pg. 18)





PLAYLIST 2: TUNE OUT (RELAX & RECHARGE)

Ready to step away from your laptop?

This playlist is structured using a scientifically backed 'U-Curve' model (beginning with calming instrumentals and rising into warm, uplifting tunes)—especially good to play during your longer study breaks (p.18).



AFFIRMATIONS WORD SEARCH

G T C Z H E J O Y C
R P O C R C T P E O
A A N K E A H T N U
T T F I S P V I O R
E I I N I A W M U A
F E D D L B O I G G
U N E F I L R S H E
L T N A E E T T B O
S D T N N S H I V U
J R A W T U Y C F S

CAPABLE
WORTHY
RESILIENT
CONFIDENT
GRATEFUL
OPTIMISTIC
COURAGEOUS
KIND
PATIENT
ENOUGH

GROWTH MINDSET DOT-TO-DOT



STRESS LESS WEEKLY PLANNER

Plan your week holistically: track your daily study tasks alongside one exercise habit (Active Goal) and one self-care focus (Stress Less Goal).

	M	T	W	T	F
TO DO					
ACTIVE GOAL					
STRESS LESS GOAL					

THE HABIT TRACKER

Track your wellbeing habits during this busy assessment season. Mark each box your way (✓, ✗, or shade it in) and use the blank rows to add your own custom goals. Small daily consistency = big cognitive payoff.

	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
DRANK 2L OF WATER							
10+ MINS OF NATURAL MORNING LIGHT							
2X 50-MIN POMODORO FOCUS SESSIONS (P.18)							
STEPPED OUTSIDE							
DESK STRETCHES							
7-8 HOURS OF SLEEP							

STRESS LESS WEEK EVENTS

WEEK 13 NOV 2 - NOV 6

Check out some of our events throughout Stress Less Week, designed to help you stress less. You can find the full schedule on the Student Events page of the UCX website.

uclife[x]

SOCIAL SPORT ALL WEEK
LIVE MUSIC SESSIONS
FREE FOOD
TRIVIA
MUSICAL BINGO

UC SPORT

SOCIAL SPORT SCHEDULE

No experience needed, no cost, no registrations. Just rock up between 12:30pm-2:30pm every day, have a play and get back to your day feeling refreshed.

Monday: Volleyball in the Sports Hall
Tuesday: Soccer on the Concourse Lawns
Wednesday: Basketball on the 3x3 courts near UCFit[x]
Thursday: Cricket on the Concourse Lawns & Pickleball in the Sports Hall
Friday: Badminton in the Sports Hall

REACH OUT IF YOU NEED HELP

You can book an appointment licensed professional via the HotDoc app or by contacting reception on 02 6201 2351

Speak with the Student Wellbeing & Support team Face to face in the Student Centre (Monday-Friday 10am-4pm) on 02 6206 8841, or via email at wellbeing@canberra.edu.au

Access immediate support 24/7 via the University Crisis Line operated by Lifeline on 1300 271 790 with text message support in the evenings on 0488 884 227

Go to the UC website for more information and resources

To access resources and references used to compile your Mood Booster Manual, click here or scan this QR code:

@uclifex
uclife@canberra.edu.au