

A Qualitative Evaluation of Employee's Perceived Stress Utilizing a Worksite

Stress Management Intervention

by

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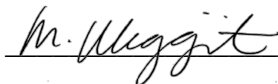
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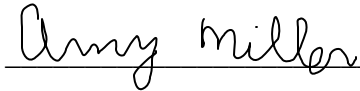
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Abstract

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), 64% of Americans in 2019 reported work as a major stressor. Since the 1980s in the United States and across the world, work-related stress has risen as one of the top occupational health concerns. Empirical research throughout the last few decades has established the correlation between stress and numerous deleterious health effects. Researchers have implemented worksite stress management interventions in various ways within different frameworks that have provided varying results. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an eight-week, web-based, stress reduction intervention on employees of a private university in Southern California. A one-group pre- and post-test was employed using the 14-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which was administered at week one and week eight of the intervention. The study aimed to answer if there was an association between the number of workbook sessions completed in the program and perceived stress level and if the eight-week stress management intervention decreased perceived stress employees. A Chi-square was employed to test for an association, and frequency analysis was computed to determine pre- to post-mean difference. No significant association was found ($\chi^2(60) = 41.38, p > .05$). There was a numerical reduction observed in the frequency analysis findings from pre- ($\mu = 28.60$) to post- ($\mu = 21.93$) intervention. Overall, a higher post-PSS score was seen when anything less than all eight intervention weekly activities were completed; however, the intervention did not statistically lower PSS scores. Recommendations are provided for enhancing future worksite stress management interventions.

Keywords: employee wellness program, university workers, stress management, stress reduction program

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Introduction

Stress is part of normal life (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019) and affects people of all ages, status, backgrounds, and parts of the world. Throughout an individual's lifespan, stress' effects vary in degree and duration. Some stressors are positive, such as speaking in front of a crowd, and can result in a positive feeling of achievement from the experience, while others are negative, such as dealing with a medical crisis of a loved one (APA, 2019).

Today, the term stress is a widely understood concept in both lay and scientific language. However, it was not until 1936 that the word "stress" was instituted into medical terminology by Hungarian endocrinologist Hans Selye (1907-1982) who described it as the "nonspecific response of the body to any demand" (Tan & Yip, 2018, p. 170/para. 1). Selye, who referred to as the father of stress research, uncovered stress in his laboratory rats while searching for a female hormone (Viner, 1999). He was the pioneer researcher to "identify 'stress' as underpinning the nonspecific signs and symptoms of illness" (Tan & Yip, 2018, p. 170/para. 6).

Selye further went on to develop the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) in which he asserts that an organism's physiological response to a given stressor can be divided into predictable stages (Selye, 1951). The first stage is the Alarm Stage: the body is caught off guard by a stressor the sympathetic nervous system is activated and hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline, are released into the bloodstream, providing a burst of energy preparing the body to meet the threat (Selye, 1951). The Stage of Resistance is the second phase: the body attempts to resist the unbalance to sustain homeostasis (Selye, 1951). The third stage, Exhaustion, is a direct consequence of the increase in energy expenditure from responding to the stressor, or the demand on the body's counteracting mechanisms deplete, thus making it susceptible to illness and death (Selye, 1951).

While chronic stress has deleterious effects on an individuals' health and well-being, the National Institute of Mental Health ([NIMH] 2019) noted the beneficial component of the fight or flight response in an acute or life-threatening circumstance. Nonetheless, despite its primitive and essential purpose for survival, the body's response to acute and chronic stress can be a catalyst to and perpetuate health disorders (NIMH, 2019). Since Selye's uncovering, there has been a considerable amount of research that has concluded and described the strong association between stress and overall wellbeing.

Literature Review

Stress and Health

According to some researchers, in many instances the effects of stress on the body are detrimental as they contribute to various pathological conditions and diseases (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). When stress is severe and prolonged, the body can develop physical and mental illness (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). Yaribeygi and colleagues reported that some of the major effects of chronic stress on brain health include memory, cognition, and learning complications (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). Decades of research has also indicated that the effect of living with stress suppresses the immune system (Schedlowski & Schmidt, 1996; Segerstrom & Miller, 2004), and this correlation is now universally accepted and recognized by the medical community. Additionally, stress can exacerbate conditions, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, infertility, colds, fatigue/insomnia, digestive issues, and changes in appetite (Sapolsky, 2008). The effect of stress on an individual's health varies as each person's biomarkers differ and how they deal with and process through stressful episodes is unique with every situation (Salleh, 2008). Nonetheless, symptoms and risk of long-lasting and excessive stress pose the same effect for everyone – critical health threats. While one stressor

may cause one individual to experience a high level of anxiety and extensive stress, it may not impact another in the same manner. National assessments provide information about which concerns are regarded as major stressors among the general population in the U.S.

Stressors

The APA (2019b) reported that significant stressors among adults were money (60%), work (64%), family responsibilities (54%), personal and family health concerns (51% and 50%, respectively), and the economy (50%) in 2019. Both adult males and females perceived stress levels increased from 2014 to 2015 with females reporting a higher level of stress than males at 37% and 31%, respectively (APA, 2015). In 2019, the cost of health care was classified as a significant stressor with 71% of those with private insurance and 54% of those with public insurance reporting that it created stress in them (APA, 2019b). Americans across all ethnic backgrounds reported higher levels of stress in 2019 from 2018 related to mass shootings, acts of terrorism, climate change, and sexual harassment (APA, 2019b). The media and presidential elections were also cited by Americans as causes of stress in the same year (APA, 2019b). Furthermore, the professional literature has provided a broader viewpoint of the matter, indicating work stress as a prominent stressor across westernized nations, and this has led it to be developed into a significant domain in stress research (Beheshtifar, Malikeh, Nazarian, & Rahele, 2013; Quick & Henderson, 2016; Ahmad & Ashraf, 2016; Thorsteinsson, Brown, and Richards, 2014; Ganster & Rosen, 2013; Nixon et. al., 2011; Mark & Smith, 2012).

Work Stress

Work-related stress has been examined in various occupations. Authors of one study who analyzed stress in the healthcare field recognized and contended that stress is experienced across all levels of employees irrespective of their rank in the structural hierarchy (Beheshtifar,

Malikeh, Nazarian, & Rahele, 2013). Quick and Henderson (2016) reported acknowledgment of occupational stress as one of the top occupational health problems initiated 40 years ago. Since then, there have been rapid evolutions in technology in the workforce, and its continual advancement is thought of by some as one of the many factors contributing to stress in the workplace today (Ahmad & Ashraf, 2016). Additional contributors in the workplace include organizational and policy changes, workload and demands, market dynamics, shifts in the economy, downsizings, and ultimately job security (Ahmad & Ashraf, 2016). In their examination of the sources of occupational stress, Quick and Henderson (2016) identified similar sets of demands (stressors) of important consideration. The authors also described contributing factors, such as excessive work pressures and low control of employees; aspects of uncertainty such as job insecurity and consequences of behavior; and poorly managed work conflict (Quick & Henderson, 2016).

Consequently, many individuals in the workforce may develop medical, psychological, and sociological problems due to work distress as noted by the professional literature. For instance, Thorsteinsson, Brown, and Richards (2014) found work-related stress connected to psychological strain, fatigue, depression, and anxiety in their study conducted in office workers. Similarly, other researchers have critically reviewed decades of work stress literature within the context of the long-term effects of continuous exposure to prolonged stress on the body (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). Ganster and Rosen (2013) indicated that there is substantial evidence supporting the relationship between work stressors and self-reported affective outcomes, such as anxiety, job attitudes, and job-related tension. In a meta-analysis conducted by Nixon et al. (2011), work stressors and self-reported physical complaints demonstrated a statistically significant moderate correlation. The various work stressors included in the reviewed studies

were interpersonal conflict, lacking control, organizational restraints, work hours, role ambiguity and conflict, and workload (Nixon et. al., 2011). The physical symptoms of stress include headaches, back pain, eye strain, sleep trouble, dizziness, loss of appetite, fatigue, and gastrointestinal issues (Nixon et. al., 2011).

In the examination of stress in university workers, Mark's and Smith's (2012) study compared university employees and members of the general population. They found workplace demands and negative coping methods associated with high levels of depression, anxiety, and low job satisfaction in the university employee sample. The implication of the studies mentioned, along with supportive evidence, that links between work-stress and adverse health outcomes suggest that rather than just trying to change job characteristics employers should help adopt appropriate interventions to help employees develop positive coping techniques to work-related stress.

Cost of work-related stress. The magnitude of the problem of workplace stress extends beyond harmful effects on employees' welfare and organizational productivity; it also has a significant impact on society. Measuring direct and indirect losses of occupational stress is not only done in a humanistic way but also in financial terms (Hassard, Teoh, Visockaite, Dewe & Cox, 2018). Evidence of Hassard and colleagues' (2018) work showed that work-related stress has a substantial economic burden on society. In their respective study a systematic analysis of the cost of work stress to society was conducted and provided national cost ranges across the globe. For the United States, the cost was reported to be \$187 billion; \$1,211.84 per worker with 70% to 90% of the total cost attributed to losses in productivity and 10% to 30% attributed to health care and medical expenses (Hassard et al., 2018). It is argued in the literature that the high cost derives from reduced work capacity, increases in sick leave, employee absenteeism,

turnover, higher rates of on the job accidents, and increases in compensation claims (Vaananen, Murray, & Kuokkane, 2014). On the job performance is a direct outcome of stress in the work environment and in the end, produces economical deficits in society. The excessive strains and pressures in the modern workplace have emerged into a global occupational and public health concern.

Reducing Stress and Recommendations

There is a consensus that those who experience stress are concerned about it as they have somewhat of an understanding of its harmful effect; however, for most, it is not well managed (Sapolsky, 2008). The high levels of self-reported stress are a public health concern that merit exploration of a wider range of mediations. Therapeutic measures require more than just pharmacological treatment and stress needs not to be underestimated in the role it plays on health and society. Non-pharmacological interventions, such as lifestyle modifications, and stress reduction programs can be helpful strategies for the management of life stressors. According to the APA (2019a), some non-medical, evidence-based measures to reduce acute and chronic stress include eliminating stressors, cultivating social support, eating healthy, muscle relaxation, meditation, adequate sleep, physical activity, cognitive behavioral therapy, and professional support.

With Americans spending substantial time at their workplace, worksite wellness programs and interventions can decrease poor health outcomes and improve the overall wellbeing and quality of life of workers (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019). Public health practitioners and employers gain significantly from implementing workplace interventions to combat some of the most prominent health concerns in the nation.

Evidence suggests that worksite wellness interventions are effective when they are well-designed, well-executed, and founded on evidence-based principles (Goetzel et al., 2014).

The CDC (2017) provided recommendations for employers to help reduce stress at work. The recommendations are as follows: (1) be the role model – for employees to follow suit organizational leaders should remain positive in trying and stressful circumstances; (2) consult with staff – inquire or discuss with them what may be causing them work-related stress, which can be conducted through surveys or one-on-one interaction; (3) address work conflict in a positive manner by respecting the dignity of each member; (4) provide space for employees to participate in decisions that affect their jobs; (5) avoid unrealistic deadlines; (6) clarify your expectations, ensuring roles, responsibilities, and goals are well-known by the employee and match organizational values; and lastly, (7) offer rewards and incentives and openly recognize accomplishments and provide social interaction time amongst colleagues (CDC, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the effectiveness of the Employee Wellness Program (EWP) at a private university in California. More specifically, the study examined the impact of an EWP eight-week stress reduction intervention on participants. The intervention was web-based and included evidence-based stress reduction strategies. Health behavior modification and stress reduction were determined by pre- and post-test, using the 14-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The findings of this study will be used to help enhance future interventions for the university's EWP.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Is there an association between the number of workbook sessions completed in the “Finding Balance” program and perceived stress level among participants?
2. Does participation in the eight-week stress management intervention decrease perceive stress in faculty and staff at the university?

Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that there would be a stress level mean difference between groups of the number of program sessions completed. It was also hypothesized that there would be a lower stress level mean from pre- to post-participation in the "Finding Balance" program.

Methods

Design

The current study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design in which a questionnaire that measured the participants' perceived stress, as well as other variables, was administered before and after an eight-week stress reduction intervention was implemented. The intervention, titled "Finding Balance," was created by Kaiser Permanente.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through the private university's internal email through which all university staff and faculty were invited to participate in the no-cost stress management program (see Appendix B). Participants were asked to register via a Google document, which was linked in the email. The recruitment was open for 10 days. Additionally, a stress management guide was offered as a downloadable document attached in the email (see Appendix C). Participants were emailed a link to complete the electronic pre-test questionnaire on week one, and the post-test was emailed for completion on week eight. Participants completed a 35-item Qualtrics survey pre-test that included the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983) (see Appendix D). The PSS consists of 14 items that include inquiring about feelings as well as the severity, control, and frequency of stress, such as, "How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?" Scales were rated from a score of one (never) to five (very often). Additionally, participants completed a few demographics questions about their age, ethnicity, educational level, marital status, family composition, and workload. The 29-item Qualtrics survey post-test excluded demographics questions and asked about participation and stress-reducing activities that were completed as part of the program (see Appendix E).

Participants

A total of 56 university staff and faculty registered for the EWP. All 56 participants were informed about the program's time duration, that their responses to the pre- and post-tests would be utilized for program evaluation purposes, and of the anonymity of their participation and their questionnaire responses. Additionally, participants were notified that at the end of the program, their name would be entered into a raffle for an opportunity to receive a gift for their participation. Participants indicated consent to the study by clicking on the "I Agree" button on the electronic consent form (see Appendix F).

Institutional Review Board Approval

The university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved this study. An amendment to the IRB was completed after the program concluded for the addition of a research assistant to complete the evaluation of this intervention.

Intervention

The intervention was conducted entirely online through email (see Appendix G). At the start of each week, on Monday mornings, the program content was virtually delivered to the participants' work emails. The weekly sessions are evidence-based stress reduction strategies that were administered to participants as weekly singular topics that included instructions on behavioral practices and approaches for stress management. The eight themes, in chronological order, included journaling about life stressors, writing about reactions to stressful situations, developing a course of action to facilitate cognitive and behavioral change in responding to stress, physical and mental relaxation, personal finances, nutrition, physical activity, and setting personal goals beyond the intervention such as redoing the intervention and/or obtaining

professional support for continued stress management. The following is a summation of the program's eight-week content.

Week one consisted of a welcome message, an overview of the eight-week program, and participants were provided the link to Qualtrics and asked to complete the pre-test. The "Finding Balance Stress Reduction Workbook" was also provided via link and as an attachment (see Appendix H). The topic for week one was "How Stress Affects You and Why It Matters." Participants were provided information about the importance of stress management for good health and encouraged to write some of the things that were causing them stress and rate their overall stress level.

Week two's topic was "Write It Down to Let It Out," and participants were prompted to journal about a situation that caused them stress and how they reacted to it. This allowed participants a way to release their feelings and discover patterned behavior. Writing at least once a week throughout the intervention was suggested. Additionally, the pre-test questionnaire was also linked, and participants were reminded to complete it if they had not done so previously.

Week three was the "Making and Action Plan" with the Finding Balance Guide attached to the email as a PDF file (see Appendix C). Building upon the previous week's intent, participants were encouraged to examine their patterned behavior and start making small changes in how they respond to stress. The workbook activity provided instructions on mapping out an attainable action plan to help lower stress.

Week four was about "Relaxation and Stress." Participants were advised to make relaxation part of their routine to help offset the negative effects of stress. Breathing and stretching techniques were provided in a one-page simple-to-follow illustration guide, attached to

the email, and a guided Christ-centered meditation was available for viewing through a linked video.

Week five covered “Money and Stress” and had participants examine their expenses, create a budget, and strategies to combat financial stress. Free online tools that help track personal spending were provided. Participants were given information about the benefits of maintaining a personal financial budget.

In week six, the topic of “Nutrition and Stress” was introduced. The connection between food and mood was presented, along with foods that have been linked to reducing stress. Participants for this week were asked to write in their workbook what they ate for each day of the week and then rate their stress level for that day. Hence, participants were able to examine the connection between the food they consumed throughout each day and how it made them feel.

Week seven continued with introducing exercise as a natural stress reliever. In “Exercise and Stress” participants discovered how exercise can directly help keep stress under control. Similar to the previous week, participants were asked to track their daily exercise each day of the week and then rate their stress daily.

Finally, on week eight participants were sent a congratulatory message for completing the program. Continuation of the practices that were taught was suggested. If participants met their goal(s), then the development of new goals was highly advised. If a participant felt they still had negative feelings about stress, then it was suggested they try the program again or talk to a professional health practitioner for additional advice and resources. Participants were asked to complete the post-test online survey, which was linked in the last email sent.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable for the first research question is the number of workbook sessions completed within the intervention “Finding Balance,” which ranged from zero sessions to eight sessions and was a categorical variable. The dependent variable for the first research question was the PSS score, which was calculated and had a minimum score of zero and a maximum score of 56. For the second research question, the mean PSS was compared from pre-test to post-test and measured as a ratio (continuous) variable. The PSS is scored 0 to 56 with a higher score indicating a higher perceived stress level. In order to calculate properly, all measures of the PSS scores were recoded from this study's original scores (one-five). In the original PSS, one = never, two = almost never, three = sometimes, four = fairly often, five = very often to the PSS scoring (zero-four). The recoded items were; zero = never, one = almost never, two = sometimes, three = fairly often, four = very often. The 14 items of the scale were presented in questions 21 to 35 in the pre-test (see Appendix D) and 10 to 17 and 19 to 24 in the post-test (see Appendix E). Additionally, post-test questions 13, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, and 24, which correspond to the positively stated items, and four, five, six, seven, nine, 10, and 13 on the PSS were reversed coded to zero = four, one = three, two = two, three = one, four = zero as indicated by the PSS scoring method. Scores were then obtained by summing across all 14 items. Both pre-test and post-test PSS scores are a precise measure of personal stress and a reliable stress assessment instrument (Cohen et al., 1983). The measures in this scale ask about feelings and thoughts in the last month. There are some similarities between questions; however, each question provides an understanding of how different situations affect perceived stress from person to person.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were performed as part of the statistical analysis for this study. Participants were not paired, and thus a one group paired samples *t*-test could not be computed to test for mean differences between pre- and post-intervention. In order to examine the findings of the dependent variable, a frequency analysis was computed for both pre- and post-test to compare the means. A Chi-square was employed to test for an association, and a cross-tabulation was computed on the grouping variable, the number of sessions, and the dependent variable, post-PSS scores, to quantitatively analyze the relationship between the variables. This method of analysis is effective for identifying trends, patterns, and probabilities within a dataset.

Results

Participants

The eight-week intervention was offered to all faculty and staff at a private university in Southern California. Fifty-five participants voluntarily participated in the intervention during the fall of 2019. The participants were adult males ($n = 9$) and females ($n = 46$). More than half (68.5%) of participants were White Non-Hispanic. The highest age category was 22 to 32 years old (47%). A larger percentage of participants had higher levels of education. Forty percent of participants had a bachelor's degree, 41.8% had a master's degree, and 9.1% had a doctoral degree. The highest percentage of marital status was married (47.3%) (see Table 1).

Major Findings

The first research question examined to see if there was a relationship between the number of workbook sessions completed in the “Finding Balance” program and post-perceived stress level among participants. A crosstabulation table was created to examine this relationship, and results revealed that one participant completed all eight activities in the workbook and their reported post-PSS was eight, which was the lowest score among all participants. In comparison, two participants who reported completing only one of the weekly activities scored 22 and 26 on the post-PSS, which demonstrates a higher-rank PSS outcome than that of all eight sessions. Additionally, one participant completed two activities and scored 23 (see Table 2). Overall, when examining the crosstabulation table, it was clear that although the number of weekly activities resulted in mixed post-PSS ranges, the completion of anything less than all eight sessions of the weekly intervention resulted in higher post-PSS than that of all eight sessions.

The second research question looked at if participation in the eight-week stress management intervention would decrease perceived stress in faculty and staff at the university.

Frequencies were computed on the pre- and post-PSS scores, which revealed that mean of the pre-test was 28.60 and the mean for the post-test was 21.93. The scores on the pre-PSS ranged between 12 as the minimum and 49 as the maximum. The post-PSS minimum score was eight, and the maximum score was 30 (see Table 3). The employee wellness program stress management, "Finding Balance" numerically showed a lowered perceived stress level in the university's staff and faculty who responded to the pre- and post-test; however, the program did not statistically lower PSS scores.

A Chi-square test of independence was calculated to determine the association between the number of workbook sessions completed in the "Finding Balance" program and post-perceived stress level. No significant association was found ($\chi^2(60) = 41.38, p > .05$). The number of sessions completed does not appear to have an effect on post-perceived stress levels.

Discussion

This study hypothesized that there would be a difference in the stress level from pre-test to post-test based on how many sessions were completed within the intervention, implying an association between the number of sessions completed and post-PSS level, which statistically was not found. Additionally, the observed findings of this study demonstrated that the implementation of the stress management program was effective in reducing the numerical mean level of PSS from pre- to post-intervention in the university's staff and faculty. However, results were not found to be significant; thus, the second hypothesis of this study, that there would be a lower stress level mean from pre- to post-participation in the “Finding Balance” program, was not statistically proven.

In contrast to the findings of this study, the American Psychological Association (2017) recommended several non-medical methods for managing stress at work, such as tracking stressors, developing healthy responses, recharging, incorporating relaxation routinely, and seeking support. These were all elements included in this study's intervention. However, Goetzel and colleagues (2014), who extensively reviewed the effectiveness of worksite wellness programs in recent decades, concluded that EWP's success hinges on how “well-designed, and well-executed” they are aside from being “founded on evidence-based principles” (p.927/para.1).

Similarly, in a study with a small study sample size ($n = 35$) of employees who were taught stress reduction skills with a two-hour cognitive behavioral-based self-intervention showed the program had no significant impact on psychological symptoms of perceived stress, anxiety, and burnout reduction (Feldman, 2019). Still, the same study resulted in positive qualitative data as participants reported that they considered the stress reduction strategies “Cognitive Reframing” and “Mini Habits” useful for managing their stress moving forward

(Feldman, 2019). This may well apply to the current study. While results were not significant, participants may have discovered feasible stress-reduction methods to utilize post-intervention.

However, a study conducted by Flaxman and Bond (2010) at a worksite resulted in a significant reduction in employee distress ($n = 177$) from only three half-day stress management training. The assessment was across six months and employed a control group (Flaxman & Bond, 2010). This study, likewise, implied more rigorous research with a post-intervention follow-up would be beneficial for acquiring significant results. Nonetheless, there are variations in the results of stress management interventions. This can be attributed to the breadth of methodological variations in stress reduction and management (Roohafza et al., 2012). Furthermore, comparing results is a challenge when settings, timeframe, sample size, demographics, culture, and socioeconomic status may also range widely (Roohafza et al., 2012).

Additionally, in a review of the literature on stress management interventions in organizations and workplace health promotion and wellness programs, Tetrick and Winslow (2015) reported that some of the major challenges that EWP interventions face seem to be getting employees to partake and employing a randomized control group (RCT). Although RCT is the golden standard in research, it may not be easily achieved, particularly if programs are implemented at the department or organizational level (Tetrick & Winslow, 2015). These were two of the challenges faced by the current study. Despite, various attempts to recruit for the program, the participation rate fell relatively low. It was also not possible to conduct an RCT for the current study as the intervention was intended for a target population at an organizational level. The contribution of this study, therefore, is on the emphasis of proper evaluation planning, particularly on study design, to present evidence that substantiates a stress management intervention's value in the workforce.

Public Health Implications

Stress and its effects on the workforce are very costly and a serious public health threat. Yet, there is debate around whether or not employee wellness programs work in health promotion and health behavior change in workers. Employers and other stakeholders may raise this question when considering if they are worthy of implementation. Considering that stress is one of the main contributing factors to some of the leading health disorders in the U.S. and the role EWPs can exert on the wellbeing of members in the workforce, public health workers should focus on program evaluation. The an overall lesson to be derived from this study is ensuring that programs be well designed and have adequate sampling size to support statistically significant results favorable to the implementation of non-medical stress reduction remedies in the workforce. Elements of study designs for EWPs that should be highly considered are conducting focus groups, pairing samples, and including qualitative data in assessments. Additionally, health professionals should support employers in adopting a health culture as part of the overall organizational culture to help facilitate the success of EWPs among their employees.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study had many strengths and limitations. Some strengths include employing a tool that is recognized for its demonstrated reliability and validity, the 14-item Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983) to accurately assess participants' perceived stress levels. Adding to the study's strength was that the intervention included recommendations from the APA (2019c) for effectively managing worksite stress, such things as tracking participants' stressors, in one activity participants were asked to write about what was causing them stress, and developing healthy responses, where participants were encouraged to "make an action plan" for their

response to stress. Additionally, the fact that the program was web-based and content was emailed allowed for easy access and viewing at any time, meaning activities could be revisited at any point as well.

On the other hand, the results of this study should be interpreted in the context of its limitations, which include inadequate power, study design, and sampling selection. Based on G*Power effect size 0.5, error of probability 0.05, and power of .80, the minimum sample size needed was 64 participants in order for statistical tests to be effectively powered. The number of participants who initially enlisted and completed a pre-test was 56, yet only 15 completed the post-test despite being offered an incentive. The intent of the intervention was to promote health and wellness, specifically to the university's staff and faculty participating in the employee wellness program, thus random sampling was not conducted nor was a control group employed. Additionally, the study design was a one-group pre-test and post-test, which does not control for threats of internal validity, therefore restricting the extent to which alternative explanations of the results can be ruled out (Slack & Dvalidity 2001).

There are several threats to internal validity for the present study. The first is history; any event that may have occurred simultaneously outside the program may have negatively or positively affected participants' stress levels. Another was testing; in some instances testing may cue behavior change simply on the basis of the participant knowing that they are being evaluated, or in the case of this study, a participant's affiliation with the program facilitator could have influenced their responses. A third threat was the selection of subjects, which was, as noted previously, not random but rather a convenience and voluntary sample, which does not allow for the causal inferences of the study to be generalized. The fourth and final threat, was experimental mortality. As also mentioned earlier, a significant amount of participatory attrition occurred; of

the 56 participants who started, there were only 15 respondents to the post-test, which may also indicate that those who completed most or all of the program may have had more motivation and thus achieved better outcomes. It is not clear if attrition occurred in the sample from the actual intervention (with plausible causes such as leaving their position with the university or employment leave) or exclusively from incompleteness of the post-test. The unidentified data coincides with the recent literature on retention where a clear distinction between study retention and therapy retention is not offered by some authors (Allen Zweben, Fucito, & O'Malley, 2009). Underpower of the study also contributed to the issue of analyses where the assumptions of the Chi-square were not met.

This study presents positive findings aligned with implementing evidence-based practices within an employee wellness program. Besides, recommendations for employers and program implementors are to adopt a healthy culture as an integral part of the organizational culture to facilitate success.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research aimed to answer what, if any, association existed between the number of workbook sessions completed in the “Finding Balance” stress management program by university faculty and staff and their perceived stress level post-intervention. Based on quantitative and qualitative analysis, an association between these two variables was not found. It can be concluded that post-perceived stress is independent of the stress management sessions administered to university staff and faculty who participated in the EWP in the fall of 2019.

Secondly, testing for effectiveness, this research also aimed to answer if participation in the eight-week stress management intervention decreased perceived stress in faculty and staff at the university. The observed findings demonstrated a decrease in the mean of PSS scores from

pre- to post-test for participants who reported PSS levels at week one and then at week eight of the intervention. Yet, as positive as this finding may seem, it cannot be concluded with confidence that the intervention reduced participants' PSS levels as it also raises the question regarding its generalizability application. Although the findings were true for our study sample, inadequate sample size impaired significant results.

Overall, evaluations conducted by researchers conclude that comprehensive workplace programs, that adopt best practices and a culture of health, do achieve positive changes in health behavior and health outcomes. Empirical evidence to date demonstrates the deleterious effects of stress in the workplace, and the significant role EWP can exert on the health of members in the workforce and the economy. Thus, recommendations for enhancing future university EWP interventions are to, first and foremost undergo, a more scientifically rigorous methodology to evaluate its efficacy by involving a control group. Aside from study design, adequate study power is of utmost importance. Performing focus groups at the university may improve the rate of participation. Integrating a process evaluation strategy in the planning process can also build and support changes as deemed necessary. Lastly, a differing dimensional measure of success may be captured in the form of qualitative data. Inquiring about such things as what participants hope to achieve from the program and if any of their goals were met as a result of participation could be its own endorsement for all stakeholders. Likewise, it may also increase the involvement of future participants interested in pursuing optimal wellbeing.

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Appendix A: Tables

Table 1

Demographics of the Study Sample

	n	%
Gender		
Male	9	16.4
Female	46	83.4
Age (in years)		
22-32	26	47.0
33-43	8	15.0
44-54	18	33.0
55-65	3	5.0
Ethnicity		
White (non-Hispanic)	37	68.5
Hispanic/Latino	6	11.1
African American	3	5.6
Asian	2	3.7
Other	1	1.9
2 or more races	5	9.3
Marital Status		
Currently Married	26	47.3
Single, never married	23	41.8
Widowed	1	1.8
Divorced	2	3.6
Separated	1	1.8
Other	2	3.6
Education		
Some college credits, no degree	3	5.5
AA/Technical certificate	2	3.6
BS/BA	22	40.0
Master's	23	41.8
Doctoral	5	9.1

Table 2

Weekly Activities Completed in the “Finding Balance” Stress Management workbook and Post Perceived Stress Scores (n = 15)

		Frequency, n (%)										
		PSS Score										
		8.0	11.0	16.0	17.0	18.0	22.0	23.0	26.0	28.0	29.0	30.0
Weekly Activities	Overall Participants											
All	1 (100.0)	1(100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
1	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
2	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1(100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
3	4 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	1(25.0)	1(25.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1(25.0)	1(25.0)
4	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
5	4 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1(25.0)	1(25.0)	0 (0.0)	1(25.0)	0 (0.0)	1(25.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
7	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1(100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total count	15 (100.0)											

Table 3*Pre- and Post-Perceived Stress Score Frequencies*

	Pre PSS- Score	Post PSS- Score
N	51	15
Mean	28.6078	21.9333
Median	29.0000	23.0000
Range	37.00	22.00
Minimum	12.00	8.00
Maximum	49.00	30.00

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear University faculty and staff,

The Employee Wellness Program at the university has teamed up with Kaiser Permanente to bring you a simple-to-follow, 8-week program designed to help you manage your stress more effectively. Through weekly emails and self-paced activities, you will look at how stress affects you — and explore positive ways to deal with it. Please use the link below to register for this FREE program and learn how to find balance and reduce your stress.

Once registered, keep an eye on your inbox — the program starts soon! In the meantime, get a head start on your path to a less stressed life with the Finding Balance stress management guide, which is attached, or you can download the guide [here](#).

Appendix C: Stress Management Guide

Finding Balance

Stress management guide

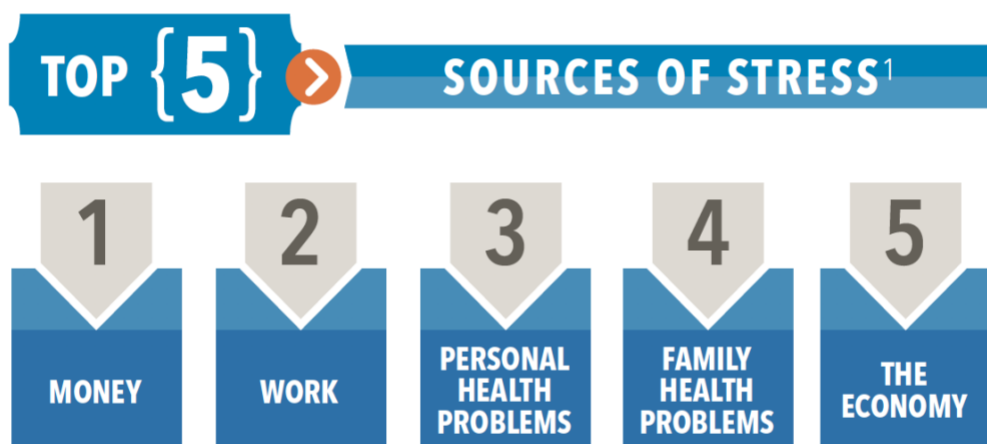


Finding balance and managing stress

Stress is a fact of life – but it doesn't have to interfere with your quality of life

Too much stress takes a toll on the body and the mind. The good news is that you can get ahead of stress by learning healthy ways to manage it. You can't control what stresses you out, but you can control how you react. That's the secret to mastering stress management.

What's stressing you out?



Everyone experiences stress in different ways and for different reasons, but there are some sources of stress that most everyone can identify with. No matter where it comes from, stress doesn't become a problem until there's too much of it.



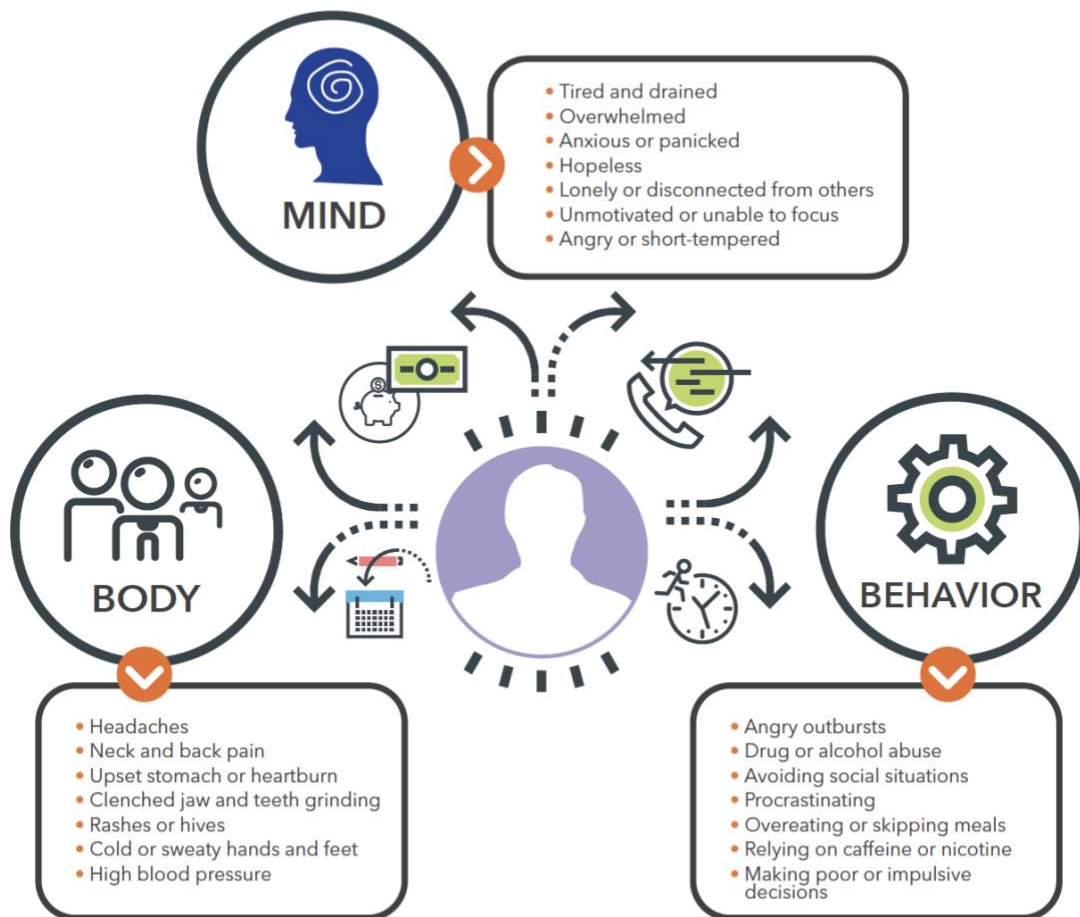
How stressed are you?

Take our [interactive stress assessment](#) to find out where you stand.

Effects of stress

Stress can impact your mind, body, and behavior.

Do any of these symptoms sound familiar? Stress could be to blame.



How stress works

For a scientific look at what stress does inside your body, [watch this animated video from TED-Ed.](#)

Stressed at work? You're in good company.

Work is a fact of life. For most people, so is work-related stress. Sometimes stress at work can work in your favor – it can give you energy to meet a deadline, fuel creativity, and motivate you to take on new challenges. But too much stress is never good and can lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction.



Myths and facts about work and stress

Myth

- Multitasking gets things done faster.
- Working more hours means you'll get more done.
- It doesn't matter how you feel, as long as you get your work done.

VS

Fact

- Multitasking can reduce productivity by as much as 40%.⁴
- People who work 70 hours a week accomplish the same amount as people who work an average of 55 hours a week.⁵
- Happy employees are 12% more productive than their unhappy co-workers.⁶

Simple tips for a less stressed work life

Small changes in how you handle stress can make a big difference in how you feel from 9 to 5.



Take a break to breathe

When you're feeling overwhelmed, a few minutes of [deep breathing](#) can help. Breathe in for a count of 5, hold for 5, and exhale for 5. Repeat 15 times or until you start feeling more grounded and focused.



Get organized

Clutter sends signals to your brain that your work is never done. But an organized workspace can boost your focus, productivity, and creativity. If you don't use it, don't want it, or don't need it, don't keep it!



Walk away if you need to

Sometimes the best thing to do in a stressful situation with a coworker is to hit pause. Agree to revisit the discussion later. Then take a walk and clear your head.



The power hour: Tackle your to-do list in 4 steps

Try this popular technique for getting more done in less time.⁷ You'll be amazed by what you can do in an hour!

1

Make a list.

Take 5 minutes to write down everything you need to do today, even the smallest tasks. (Don't worry – the goal isn't to do all of them in an hour, just as many as possible. More on that later.)

2

Start small.

Tackle the easiest, quickest tasks – phone calls, emails, etc. – first. Do as many as you can as fast as you can. Cross them off your list as you go, and stop after 20 minutes.

3

Get focused.

Turn off your phone, exit your email, and focus on the highest priority item on your list. Spend the next 35 minutes working only on that task. No distractions!

4

Rest and recharge.

You're making progress. Take 5 minutes to sit back, clear your head, and renew your energy and focus.

Congratulations. You've just had a productive hour. Got another 60 minutes to spare? Grab your list and start the process again.



Stress and depression

Know the difference

Sometimes stress and depression have similar symptoms, but depression is far more serious. The Finding Balance program is designed to give you simple tools for managing stress, and help you learn healthy ways to cope with it. Treating depression requires more personalized care and attention.

If you think you might be depressed, talk to your doctor.

Visit kp.org/depression to take the [depression self-assessment](#) and find resources that can help.

¹ American Psychological Association (2016). *Stress in America: The impact of discrimination*. *Stress in America™* Survey.

² 2014 Work Stress Survey, Nielsen (formerly Harris Interactive), April 9, 2014.

³ "Dangerously Stressful Work Environments Force Workers to Seek New Employment," *Monster.com* press release, April 16, 2014.

⁴ Peter Bregman, "How (and Why) to Stop Multitasking," May 20, 2010, *Harvard Business Review*, hbr.org/2010/05/how-and-why-to-stop-multitasking.html.

⁵ Jena McGregor, "Working More Than 55 Hours a Week is Bad for You – in Many Ways," August 24, 2015, *Washington Post*, www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/08/24/working-more-than-55-hours-a-week-is-bad-for-you-in-many-ways/.

⁶ Andrew J. Oswald, Eugenio Proto, and Daniel Sgroi, "Happiness and Productivity," *Journal of Labor Economics*, 33, no. 4 (October 2015).

⁷ Peter Bregman, "A Practical Plan for When You Feel Overwhelmed," September 23, 2010, *Harvard Business Review*, hbr.org/2010/09/a-practical-plan-for-when-you-1.html.

Kaiser Permanente health plans around the country: Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc., in Northern and Southern California and Hawaii • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Colorado • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Georgia, Inc., Nine Piedmont Center, 3495 Piedmont Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30305, 404-364-7000 • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States, Inc., in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., 2101 E. Jefferson St., Rockville, MD 20852 • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Northwest, 500 NE Multnomah St., Suite 100, Portland, OR 97232

Appendix D: Pre-Test Questionnaire

Demographics

What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

2. What is your age (in years)? _____

3. How would you describe your race/ethnicity? You may select more than one.

- a. White
- b. Hispanic/Latino
- c. Black or African American
- d. Asian
- e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- f. American Indian/Alaskan Native
- g. Other: _____

4. What is your marital status?

- a. Currently Married
- b. Single, never married
- c. Widowed
- d. Divorced
- e. Separated
- f. Other

5. Do you have any children?

a. Yes

b. No

6. If you do have children, how many children do you have? _____

7. Are you currently a student working towards a terminal/graduate degree?

a. Yes

b. No

8. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? If you are currently enrolled in a degree program, please select the highest degree/level of education received to date.

a. Some high school

b. High school graduate or GED

c. Some college credit, no degree

d. Associate degree/technical certificate

e. Bachelor's degree

f. Master's degree

g. Doctorate degree

For the following questions, please try to recall as accurately as possible to the following statements.

9. In the past 7 days, how often did you eat a nutritious meal?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

10. In the past 7 days, how many times did you exercise or engage in a physical activity that made your heart beat fast, made you sweat and/or made you breathe hard, for at least 30 minutes?

a. 0 -1 times

b. 2 – 3 times

c. 4 -5 times

d. 5 times or more

11. How often do you participate in fun activities or take short trips (for example, a day trip to the beach, or weekend trip to the mountains)?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

12. How often do you pray or participate in deep stretching and/or breathing activities to relax and take time to recharge?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

13. How often do you feel that you stay on top of your to-do-list?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

14. How often do you plan a personal financial budget and stick to it?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

15. If you are a faculty member, do you currently teach overload courses?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. Are you currently employed at more than one job?

- a. Yes
- b. No

17. If you do work more than one job, how many hours per week would you estimate you work (total, between all jobs)? ____

18. I tend not to ask for help when I need it?

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree

d. Strongly disagree

19. I often use caffeine or energy drinks to provide me with energy?

a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Disagree

d. Strongly disagree

20. I often work long hours and/or bring my workload home with me?

a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Disagree

d. Strongly disagree

21. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

22. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

23. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

24. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

25. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

26. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

27. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

28. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

29. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often

e. Very often

30. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

31. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

32. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

33. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

34. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

35. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

Appendix E: Post-Test Questionnaire

For the following questions, please try to recall and respond as accurately as possible to the following statements.

1. In the past 7 days, how often did you eat a nutritious meal?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

2. In the past 7 days, how many times did you exercise or engage in a physical activity that made your heart beat fast, made you sweat and/or made you breathe hard, for at least 30 minutes?

- a. 0 -1 times
- b. 2 – 3 times
- c. 4 -5 times d.
- 5 times or more

3. How often do you participate in fun activities or take short trips (for example, a day trip to the beach, or weekend trip to the mountains)?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

4. How often do you pray or participate in deep stretching and/or breathing activities to relax and take time to recharge?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

5. How often do you feel that you stay on top of your to-do-list?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

6. How often do you plan a personal financial budget and stick to it?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

7. I tend not to ask for help when I need it?

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree

d. Strongly disagree

8. I often use caffeine or energy drinks to provide me with energy?

a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Disagree

d. Strongly disagree

9. I often work long hours and/or bring my workload home with me?

a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Disagree

d. Strongly disagree

10. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

11. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

12. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

13. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

14. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

15. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

16. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

17. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

18. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often

e. Very often

19. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

20. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

21. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?

a. Never

b. Almost never

c. Sometimes

d. Fairly often

e. Very often

22. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

23. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

24. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?

- a. Never
- b. Almost never
- c. Sometimes
- d. Fairly often
- e. Very often

The following questions are specific to the stress reduction program.

25. How many sessions did you complete in the Finding Balance workbook?

- a. All of the sessions
- b. 1 session

- c. 2 sessions
- d. 3 sessions
- e. 4 sessions
- f. 5 sessions
- g. 6 sessions
- h. 7 sessions

26. Which activities did you find most useful in the stress reduction program? Please only select one response.

- a. Week 1: Identification of the big sources of stress in your life
- b. Week 2: Completing the Stress Journal
- c. Week 3: Coping with stress and making an action plan
- d. Week 4: Relaxation
- e. Week 5: Money and Stress
- f. Week 6: Nutrition and Stress
- g. Week 7: Exercise and Stress
- h. Week 8: Reflection and Progress

27. Did you attend either of workshops offered in conjunction with the stress reduction program?

- a. Yes, the relaxation workshop.
- b. Yes, the stress and nutrition workshop.
- c. Yes, both.
- d. No

28. Overall, did you find this program helpful in reducing your stress?

a. Yes

b. No

29. Please provide any feedback regarding the stress reduction program. _____

Appendix F: Informed Consent Document

Welcome to the Employee Wellness Stress Reduction Program! We are interested in understanding employee stress and how to effectively reduce stress among employees. Over the course of the next 8 weeks, you will be presented with information electronically via email, relevant to employee stress and how to reduce stress in the workplace. In order to determine if the stress reduction program was successful, we would like you to answer some questions before and after the program related to employee stress. All of your responses are anonymous and will be kept completely confidential.

The pre-test and demographic questionnaire, which is completed at the beginning of the program, should take you around 15 minutes to complete and the post-test, which will be completed at the end of program, should take you less than 15 minutes to complete. At the end of the program, you will be entered into a raffle to receive a gift for your participation.

Your participation in the stress reduction program is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the program, for any reason, and without any penalty. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please contact Principal Investigator's name, email address and phone. For general questions regarding the study, you may also email employeeewellness@caprivateuniversty.edu. For questions related to Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, please contact the IRB at caprivateuniversty.edu.

Because this program focuses on employee stress and stress reduction, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable when considering some of the pre and post test questions, as well as the content addressed throughout the program. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or unsure, please contact your health care provider. You may also visit/contact the university wellness center.

The benefit to participating in this program is providing participants with tools and skills that can be used to reduce stress among employees. Furthermore, if the program is successful, the results can be used to support similar programs among other employers.

By clicking the 'I AGREE' button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

Appendix G: Program Content / Weekly Emails

Week 1

Subject line: Welcome to the Employee Wellness Stress Reduction Program: Finding Balance

Attachment: PDF file of Finding Balance Stress Reduction Workbook

Welcome to the Employee Wellness Stress Reduction Program: Finding Balance
Over the next 8 weeks we will provide you with tools and resources to help you reduce your stress. Before we get started, we would like to ask you to complete a pre-test questionnaire, which is linked.

This questionnaire helps us to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. It shouldn't take more than 10 minutes to complete and your responses are completely anonymous.

Finding Balance Week 1: How stress affects you and why it matters.
It's hard to be your best self if you're feeling tired, anxious, tense, or distracted. But those are some of the physical and mental symptoms of stress — and they all take a toll on your total health.

With that in mind, please download your stress management workbook, which is attached to this email, and write down the main sources of stress in your life. It is a simple way to learn more about yourself — and a small step you can take toward feeling healthier and happier.

We are excited to embark on this journey with you over the next 8 weeks! Please let us know if you have any questions.

Please note: If you have changed your mind and no longer wish to participate in program, or if you have any questions, please contact us.

Week 2

Subject line: Finding Balance Week 2: Your Stress Journal

Welcome to week 2 of the Employee Wellness Stress Reduction Program

As a quick reminder, if you have not yet completed the pre-test questionnaire, please try to complete it this week. It only takes about 10 minutes to complete, and your responses are completely anonymous. The pre-test questionnaire is linked.

Week 2 Finding Balance: Write it down to let it out

Last week, we asked you to rate your overall stress level and think about where your stress comes from. This week, you're going to get a little bit more specific by writing about a single stressful situation and taking a look at how you reacted to it.

Tracking your response to stress can make it easier to spot patterns — the first step toward identifying what you'd like to change. Try to write in your stress journal at least once a week throughout the Finding Balance program. The more you write, the more you'll get out of it.

Tip: Don't carry the weight of stress

Watch this short video to see how constant stress can weigh you down over time — and learn how you can lighten the load.

Be sure to complete the week 2 activity in your stress management workbook.

Lastly, the article linked below provides quick and easy activities to help reduce your stress throughout the day: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/15-minutes-to-minimize-stress_b_9974038

Have a great week.

Please note: If you have changed your mind and no longer wish to participate in program, or if you have any questions, please contact us.

Week 3

Finding Balance Week 3: Making an Action Plan

Attachment: Finding Balance Guide (pdf)

Welcome to Week 3 Finding Balance: Making an action plan

How you respond to stress is up to you

Last week, we started looking at specific stressful events and examining how you react to them. This week, you'll take a closer look at how you cope to see if there's anything you'd like to do differently.

It can be as simple as trading a negative action for a positive one — like deep breathing instead of overeating. Click on the link to watch a quick video on how to use Quick Calm breathing technique to reduce stress. Small changes like this can make a big difference in how you feel. So, try setting a goal this week, and make an action plan to achieve it.

Your guide to a less stressed life

Find out how stress affects you — and what you can do about it — in the Finding Balance Stress Management Guide, which is attached to this email.

As a reminder, be sure to complete the week 3 activity in your stress management workbook.

Lastly, the article linked below guides you in creating an action plan for your goals: <https://time.com/4196996/write-down-goals/>

Have a great week!

Please note: If you have changed your mind and no longer wish to participate in program, or if you have any questions, please contact us.

Week 4

Subject line: Finding Balance Week 4 Relaxation and Stress

Attachment: happyfy-Stretching for Stress Reduction

Welcome to Week 4 Finding Balance: Relaxation and Stress

Make time to unwind

When you're stressed, the last thing you want to hear is that you should try to relax. But it's actually very good advice. By making relaxation part of your routine, you train your mind and body to offset the negative effects of stress. This can help you restore balance, feel calmer, and even sleep better.

The great thing about practicing relaxation is that once you find techniques that work for you, you can use them anytime. Start simple: This week, listen to this guided meditation podcast [Having The Mind of Jesus](#), to help you in prayer and Christ centered meditation. You can also try some breathing and stretching techniques, which we attached to this email. See if it makes a difference in how you feel.

Did you know?

Meditating for just a few minutes a day can lead to lower stress. That's because meditation actually changes the way your brain works — and it can teach you to cope better. Meditation is often associated with Eastern religions or New Age practices, but it plays an important role in the Christian faith, as well. One of the most effective ways to meditate as a Christian is to do so on the Word of God. Unlike other forms of meditation that require “emptying” your mind, this form requires you to dive in and think deeply on God's truth. The video linked below guides you into a time of stillness centered in Christ.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9zNGQsX7OI>

As a reminder, be sure to complete the week 4 activity in your stress management book. Please note: If you have changed your mind and no longer wish to participate in program, or if you have any questions, please contact us at.

Week 5

Subject line: Finding Balance Week: Money and Stress
Welcome to Week 5 Money and Stress

Examining your expenses

If you have financial concerns, you have plenty of company - money is one of the leading sources of stress in America. You can't avoid rent, mortgage or monthly bills, but can you cut down on any other expenses?

This week, you'll learn how simply paying attention to where your money goes can be a big help. And as you can see in this list of 12 ways to fight financial stress, there's a lot more you can do. Some ideas include:

- Making a budget and sticking to it
- Cooking at home instead of eating out
- Simply talking to a loved one about money issues

Creating a budget

For creating and sticking to a budget try any free online budgeting tool, like Every Dollar - it can help you track your spending. Watch this tutorial video to learn more about how to use it: <https://youtu.be/sHxkQ9d0me8?t=35>

Stressing about money, personal debt and the economy can have a serious impact on your health. If you have financial worries, creating a budget can help. Here are just a few reasons why you should budget your money. You can also read tips offered by the American Psychological Association (APA) on how to deal with your stress during tough economic times, linked here: <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/economic-stress>

As a reminder, be sure to complete the week 5 activity in your stress management book.

Please note: If you have changed your mind and no longer wish to participate in program, or if you have any questions, please contact us at.

Week 6

Subject line: Finding Balance Week 6: Nutrition and Stress
Welcome to Week 6 Nutrition and Stress

The food-mood connection

When it comes to stress, what you eat - or don't eat - matters. Some people cope with stress by overeating, eating unhealthy foods, or both. On the other hand, some may find themselves skipping meals because they're pressed for time.

One reason it's hard to make healthy food choices when you're stressed is that stress makes your brain crave comfort foods like burgers and fries. Try stocking your kitchen or office with healthy options like berries or mixed nuts - tasty choices that actually make you feel better. Here are [13 foods that fight stress](#).

Emotional eating

Do you tend to overeat when you're stressed? Learn more about emotional eating, common signs and how to overcome emotional eating as you [face your feelings](#) instead of heading for the fridge. You can also watch this video that explains more ways to beat stress with nutrition: <https://youtu.be/nWIMfFlzHPY>

As a reminder, be sure to complete the week 6 activity in your stress management book.

Please note: If you have changed your mind and no longer wish to participate in program, or if you have any questions, please contact us .

Week 7

Subject line: Finding Balance Week 7: Exercise and Stress

Welcome to Week 7 Exercise and Stress

Move more to stress less

Even in small doses, physical activity is a natural stress reliever - 62% of adults who use exercise to manage stress say it's extremely effective. In contrast, only 33% of adults who watch TV to manage stress say that it helps. Pretty convincing right?

This week, try looking at your stress level in relation to physical activity. If you don't normally exercise, start simple with a 10 min- walk. [Walking briskly](#) can lower your risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes as much as running. If you're feeling ambitious, try taking a fitness class. Any additional physical activity can make a difference in how you feel.

Find a workout you love

Choose physical activities you enjoy that won't make it feel like work. Click [here](#) for helpful fitness activity ideas. You can also view this video for a simple exercise routine you can do at home. <https://youtu.be/SCOoZqNcXLM>

As a reminder, be sure to complete the week 7 activity in your stress management book.

Please note: If you have changed your mind and no longer wish to participate in program, or if you have any questions, please contact us.

Week 8

Subject line: Finding Balance Week 8 Rate your progress

Welcome to the final week of the Finding Balance Stress Management program. We hope that you have found several methods and tools to help you reduce your stress. We would like to ask you to complete the post-test questionnaire that is linked.

It takes about 10 minutes to complete and your responses are completely anonymous. Once you complete it, you will have the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a gift card.

Looking ahead to a less stressed life

Over the past 8 weeks, you've seen how being aware of your response to stress can help you manage it. And by writing down your thoughts in your workbook, you created a place to revisit anytime you need a reminder of what worked best for you.

By finishing this program, you've taken a meaningful step toward a less stressed life. This week, you'll have a chance to look back and see how far you've come. Rating your progress in this final workbook activity might even inspire some new ideas or goals for the future.

Keep up the good work

Stress management is like any skill- the more you practice, the easier it gets. If you met the goal you set for yourself, try setting another one to keep the momentum going!

If you're still feeling the negative effects of stress, try doing the program again, or talk to your doctor for advice and additional resources.

As a reminder, make sure to complete the last activity in your workbook.

We look forward to receiving your feedback about your experience with the program and welcome any questions and/or comments you may have.

Thank you,

Please note: If you have changed your mind and no longer wish to participate in program, or if you have any questions, please contact us.

Appendix H: Finding Balance Workbook

Finding Balance Workbook

Simple tools for a less stressed life

Welcome to your Finding Balance workbook

Stress is a fact of life. By participating in this program, you've taken an important step to start managing it better. These workbook activities are designed to help you see how stress affects you, and discover healthy ways to cope.

Each week, you'll receive an email with ideas and tips for addressing stress in your life. And each email points to a corresponding activity in this book. The goal is to find patterns in your behavior – and see where small changes can make big differences in the way you feel.

Here's what's included:



Surveys and quizzes

to help you find out where your stress comes from and how you deal with it.



Your stress journal

to jot down specific moments where you felt stressed, and track how you responded.



Your stress action plan

to set 1 simple, achievable goal for reducing stress.



Weekly activities

to help you learn more about different causes and symptoms of stress, and discover healthy ways to cope with it.



TIP

Getting the most from your workbook activities

You'll get the best results if you answer questions as honestly as possible. Don't worry, your answers are just for you – you don't have to share them with anyone. The activities are designed to help you see how what you do affects how you feel – and that's the first step toward making healthier decisions.

Week
1

Getting started

What's your overall stress level right now?

Just estimate based on how you feel – there's no right or wrong answer.



Think of this number as a starting point. You'll get to rate your stress level a few times throughout the program, so you can see how the number changes. That's how you'll begin to see how what you do affects how you feel.



What are the big sources of stress in your life?

Take a minute to write them down. For many people, it's things like work, relationships, money, and health – but everyone experiences stress differently, for different reasons.

One of the big ideas we'll discuss in this program is that you can't always control the sources of your stress, but you can control how you react to stressful situations. For example, getting rid of all work-related stress is probably not an option. But you can learn healthy ways to stay ahead of it – like doing a 5-minute breathing exercise when you need to – to make busy days feel more manageable. That's the kind of healthy behavior we'll focus on in the coming weeks.

Week
2

Your stress journal

Last week, you rated your stress level and examined the causes of stress in your life. This week, let's get more specific. Think about a time recently when you felt particularly stressed, and fill in the blanks below.

1. I was stressed because:

2. My stress level was:

0

1

2

3

4

5

< Low

High >

3. Here's how I coped with my stress:

4. Afterward, I felt:

5. Was this a healthy way to deal with stress? If not, what might be a better option?



TIP

Getting the most from your stress journal

The more you write in your stress journal, the easier it will be to identify patterns you want to change. Try to add a new page to your journal at least once a week.



Week
3

Coping with stress and making an action plan


As we mentioned in Week 1, you can't always control the sources of your stress, but you can control how you react. So now that you've learned a bit about where your stress comes from, let's focus on how you respond to it.

In the chart below, you'll find both healthy and unhealthy ways of dealing with stress. Which ones are you doing? Check all that apply. Add 2 check marks for things you do often or regularly. If you do something very rarely or never, leave it blank. Are there other things you do to cope with stress? Feel free to add them to the list.

 Healthy coping behaviors	 Unhealthy coping behaviors
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Planning and eating nutritious meals	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Skipping meals or eating poorly
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Exercising regularly	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding exercise
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining a healthy work-life balance	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Working long hours or bringing work home
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Planning fun activities or short trips	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Not taking enough personal time
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Asking for help when you need it	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Holding feelings in or not asking for help
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Focusing on the positive	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Focusing on the negative
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Staying hydrated to keep energy up	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Using caffeine or nicotine when tired
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Meditating to relax and taking time to recharge	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Relying on alcohol to relax
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Staying on top of your to-do list	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Not taking care of important things
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Sticking to a budget	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring your budget
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="text"/>



REALITY CHECK

You might notice that sometimes the things you do to cope with your stress can end up causing you more stress. With that in mind, let's move on to your stress action plan. 

Week
3

Stress action plan

1. Look at your check marks on the previous page. Think about your healthy and unhealthy coping behaviors, and write down a goal for managing stress. It can be a healthy behavior you'd like to start doing or do more often, or an unhealthy one you want to avoid.

For example: I want to cut back on coffee and take up meditation.

2. How confident are you that you can complete your goal?



If your confidence level is less than 7, consider starting with a smaller, more achievable goal. Reach that goal first, and then work toward your original goal.

3. What specific actions will you take to accomplish your goal?

4. When will you start?




Hold on to this action plan. You'll return to it at the end of the program and use it to evaluate your progress. In the meantime, you'll get to try some different techniques to beat stress, and do some activities designed to help you discover what works for you. Congratulations on being proactive and taking the first steps toward a less stressed life!

Week
4

Relaxation

It might sound strange, but sometimes relaxation takes work. When stress levels rise, it can be difficult to quiet your mind, breathe, and relax – but that’s exactly what your body needs. Over the next few days, make it a point to practice relaxation. Meditation, breathing exercises, yoga poses – whatever you’d like to try. (Go back to this week’s email if you need ideas!) Spend a little time to figure out what works for you and establish some go-to relaxation techniques. Going forward, you can use them whenever you need to unwind.

 Did you make time to relax today?	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
What relaxation technique did you try?					
Rate your stress level before.	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >
Rate your stress level after.	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >

What do you notice? See any patterns?



Looking forward

If you think these techniques can help you manage stress, set some healthy relaxation goals for yourself going forward.

1.
2.
3.







For example: Meditate for 5 minutes every night before bed. Focus on your breathing whenever you feel overwhelmed.

 Start a new relaxation page

Week
5

Money and stress

If you're stressed about money, you're not alone. Everyone's financial situation is unique, but knowing where your money goes can help you manage financial stress. You can't avoid expenses like rent and bills, but you can take a look at what you spend on other things – like coffee, or going out for lunch. Daily expenses can add up fast – so keep track of what you spend this week. See anything you'd rather save on than spend on?

 What did you spend money on today?	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
List non-essentials you bought and how much they cost.					
Daily total:					
Rate today's financial stress level.	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >

What do you notice? See any patterns?




Looking forward

If you think changing your spending habits can help you keep financial stress under control, set some healthy goals to help you spend less and save more.

-
-
-

For example: Only go out for coffee once a week. Bring lunch from home on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

 Start a new money and stress page

Week
6

Nutrition and stress


A healthy, balanced diet can keep you energized, focused, and ready for anything. A poor diet can have the opposite effect, leaving you drained and making it easy for stress levels to rise. Examine the connection between what you're eating and how you're feeling. Take a look at what's on your plate, and see if making simple changes could help you stress less.

 Did you eat healthy today?	What did you eat today?	What did you drink today besides water?
Day 1 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more
Day 2 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more
Day 3 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more
Day 4 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more
Day 5 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more

 Start a new nutrition page 1

Week
6

Nutrition and stress, *continued*

 Assess and rate	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Overall, did you eat healthy today?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Rate today's stress level.	<div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> <div>4</div> <div>5</div> </div> <div>< low high ></div>	<div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> <div>4</div> <div>5</div> </div> <div>< low high ></div>	<div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> <div>4</div> <div>5</div> </div> <div>< low high ></div>	<div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> <div>4</div> <div>5</div> </div> <div>< low high ></div>	<div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> <div>4</div> <div>5</div> </div> <div>< low high ></div>

What do you notice? See any patterns?



Looking forward

If you think eating healthy helps you keep stress in check, set some healthy eating goals for yourself going forward.

1.
2.
3.


For example: Stop skipping breakfast. Spend time on Sundays making healthy meals for the week ahead.

 Start a new nutrition page 2

Week
7

Exercise and stress

Exercise is a natural stress reliever. If you work out regularly and already feel the physical and mental benefits, you might notice that your stress levels surge if you skip the gym. If you don't exercise, now is a perfect time to start – and see how keeping fit can help you keep stress under control. Remember to start small if you need to – think a 20-minute walk, not 2 hours at the gym. Track your activity level this week, and discover the connection between exercise and stress.

 Did you break a sweat today?	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Did you exercise today?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
What did you do?					
For how long?					
Rate today's energy level	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >
Rate today's stress level.	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >	1 2 3 4 5 < low high >

What do you notice? See any patterns?



Looking forward

If you noticed that exercise helps you keep stress in check, set some healthy fitness goals for yourself going forward.

1.
2.
3.

For example: Walk 30 minutes, 3 times per week. Play basketball every Saturday.

 Start a new exercise page

Week
8

Rate your progress



Congratulations!

You've reached the end of the Finding Balance program.

Over these 8 weeks, you've explored the connection between stress and relaxation, financial issues, diet, and exercise. Hopefully, you've made some discoveries about how what you do affects how you feel. Take a moment to look back and reflect on what worked for you.

1. What was your goal from your action plan in Week 3?

2. Describe your progress toward that goal:

3. What obstacles did you encounter?

4. How did you (or can you) work through those obstacles?

5. What are your key takeaways from the program?

6. What was your overall stress level from Week 1?



7. What is your overall stress level now?



Simply participating in this program – taking a look at how stress affects you, examining the healthy and unhealthy ways you cope with it, and trying some healthy new coping behaviors – was a meaningful step toward addressing stress in your life. Keep up the great work!



Want to keep going?

If you'd like to continue making and measuring your progress, keep going!

You can find Stress Journal pages and blank copies of the relaxation, financial, nutrition, and exercise activities here.



Relaxation



Money



Nutrition



Exercise



Stress Journal

Stress and depression

Know the difference

Sometimes stress and depression have similar symptoms, but depression is far more serious. If you think you might be depressed, talk to your doctor. Visit kp.org/depression to take the depression self-assessment and find resources that can help.

Your stress journal

Think about a time recently when you felt particularly stressed, and fill in the blanks below.

1. I was stressed because:

2. My stress level was:

0

1

2

3

4

5

< Low

High >

3. Here's how I coped with my stress:

4. Afterward, I felt:

5. Was this a healthy way to deal with stress? If not, what might be a better option?



TIP

Getting the most from your stress journal












The more you write in your stress journal, the easier it will be to identify patterns you want to change. Try to add a new page to your journal at least once a week.



Start a new journal page

Relaxation

It might sound strange, but sometimes relaxation takes work. When stress levels rise, it can be difficult to quiet your mind, breathe, and relax – but that’s exactly what your body needs. Over the next few days, make it a point to practice relaxation. Meditation, breathing exercises, yoga poses – whatever you’d like to try. (Go back to this week’s email if you need ideas!) Spend a little time to figure out what works for you and establish some go-to relaxation techniques. Going forward, you can use them whenever you need to unwind.

 Did you make time to relax today?	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
What relaxation technique did you try?					
Rate your stress level before.	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >
Rate your stress level after.	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >	 < low high >

What do you notice? See any patterns?



Looking forward

If you think these techniques can help you manage stress, set some healthy relaxation goals for yourself going forward.


1.
2.
3.

For example: Meditate for 5 minutes every night before bed. Focus on your breathing whenever you feel overwhelmed.

 Start a new relaxation page

Money and stress

If you're stressed about money, you're not alone. Everyone's financial situation is unique, but knowing where your money goes can help you manage financial stress. You can't avoid expenses like rent and bills, but you can take a look at what you spend on other things – like coffee, or going out for lunch. Daily expenses can add up fast – so keep track of what you spend this week. See anything you'd rather save on than spend on?

 What did you spend money on today?	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
List non-essentials you bought and how much they cost.					
Daily total:					
Rate today's financial stress level.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ < low high >	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ < low high >	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ < low high >	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ < low high >	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ < low high >

What do you notice? See any patterns?



Looking forward

If you think changing your spending habits can help you keep financial stress under control, set some healthy goals to help you spend less and save more.

1.
2.
3.

For example: Only go out for coffee once a week. Bring lunch from home on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

 Start a new money and stress page


Nutrition and stress

A healthy, balanced diet can keep you energized, focused, and ready for anything. A poor diet can have the opposite effect, leaving you drained and making it easy for stress levels to rise. Examine the connection between what you're eating and how you're feeling. Take a look at what's on your plate, and see if making simple changes could help you stress less.

 Did you eat healthy today?	What did you eat today?	What did you drink today besides water?
Day 1 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more
Day 2 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more
Day 3 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more
Day 4 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more
Day 5 <i>Continues on the next page</i>	Breakfast: <input type="text"/> Lunch: <input type="text"/> Dinner: <input type="text"/> Snacks: <input type="text"/>	Coffee/energy drinks <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Soda <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more Alcohol <input type="text"/> 0 <input type="text"/> 1 <input type="text"/> 2 <input type="text"/> 3 <input type="text"/> 4 <input type="text"/> more

 Start a new nutrition page 1

Nutrition and stress, *continued*

 Assess and rate	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Overall, did you eat healthy today?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Rate today's stress level.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >

What do you notice? See any patterns?



Looking forward

If you think eating healthy helps you keep stress in check, set some healthy eating goals for yourself going forward.

1.
2.
3.

For example: Stop skipping breakfast. Spend time on Sundays making healthy meals for the week ahead.

 Start a new nutrition page 2

Exercise and stress

Exercise is a natural stress reliever. If you work out regularly and already feel the physical and mental benefits, you might notice that your stress levels surge if you skip the gym. If you don't exercise, now is a perfect time to start – and see how keeping fit can help you keep stress under control. Remember to start small if you need to – think a 20-minute walk, not 2 hours at the gym. Track your activity level this week, and discover the connection between exercise and stress.

 Did you break a sweat today?	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Did you exercise today?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What did you do?					
For how long?					
Rate today's energy level	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >
Rate today's stress level.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 < low high >

What do you notice? See any patterns?



Looking forward

If you noticed that exercise helps you keep stress in check, set some healthy fitness goals for yourself going forward.

1.
2.
3.

For example: Walk 30 minutes, 3 times per week. Play basketball every Saturday.

