

Counselling  
Services

# Your Best You

Improving Your Mood



# Your Best You

***Your Best You: Improving Your Mood*** was written specifically for students at Queen's University to assist in improving practical coping skills to manage mood and other aspects of functioning.

While Algonquin's students are our intended audience, we hope this resource will be shared with anyone who may benefit from its use.

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## Purpose of this Workbook

The purpose of this workbook is to improve the skills you use to manage your mood and general functioning. It is important to note that mood can vary significantly in intensity and duration. The workbook is designed as a useful guide to managing moods of varying intensity, but is not intended to replace professional treatment where this is required.

The workbook is NOT intended as a sole resource for anyone experiencing significant symptoms of depression. If you believe you may be clinically depressed, we strongly urge you to seek professional assistance.

The workbook is based on empirically validated research and clinical experience related to the effective treatment of low mood and mild to moderate depression. The book may be used alone when symptoms are mild, or as an aid to treatment with a mental health professional.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>p. 1</b>
Quiz: Are You Ready to Make a Change?	p. 2
Worksheet 1.1: What Do You Want to Change?	p. 3
<b>Chapter 1 – Understanding Your Mood</b>	<b>p. 5</b>
Worksheet 1.2: Are Your Demands and Resources Balanced?	p. 12
<b>Chapter 2 – Case Studies</b>	<b>p. 13</b>
<b>Chapter 3 – Five Factor Model</b>	<b>p. 17</b>
Worksheet 3.1: Record Your Thoughts	p. 21
Worksheet 3.2: Record Your Behaviours	p. 23
Worksheet 3.3: Record Your Physical Feelings	p. 23
Worksheet 3.4a: Connect Your Mood	p. 25
Worksheet 3.4b: Connect Your Mood	p. 26
Worksheet 3.4c: Connect Your Mood	p. 27
<b>Chapter 4 – Tools</b>	<b>p. 31</b>
Worksheet 4.1: Back to the Basics	p. 32
Worksheet 4.2: Pleasant Activities	p. 35
Worksheet 4.3: Daily Activity Schedule	p. 39
Worksheet 4.4: EAR	p. 45
Worksheet 4.5: Coping Cards	p. 47
<b>Chapter 5 – Putting it all Together</b>	<b>p. 48</b>
Worksheet 5.1: Mood Strategy Chart	p. 52
<b>Chapter 6 – Planning for the Future</b>	<b>p. 53</b>
Worksheet 6.1: Planning Ahead	p. 55
<b>Appendix A – Back to Basics</b>	<b>p. 57</b>
<b>Appendix B – Worksheets</b>	<b>p. 66</b>

# Introduction

**A fulfilling life is dependent upon learning.** You arrived at Algonquin with a long established history of learning - from first steps and first words to complex intellectual skills - and you brought with you an expectation to learn a great deal more.

The aim of this workbook is to assist with your learning experience and personal growth to help attain **Your Best You!** The workbook focuses on **Improving Your Mood** and as you are likely aware, when our mood suffers, much of our functioning may suffer along with it.

**Your Best You** was designed specifically with Algonquin students in mind, and focuses on many of the challenges commonly experienced during college years. The workbook is intended to help you develop greater self-awareness and increase competence in managing your mood and other aspects of your life. It also may be a useful resource for friends and family who may wish to offer support.

In this course of study, there are no labs, presentations, midterms or final exams, BUT there are assignments that are critical to your progress. They are relatively short and have no particular due dates - you decide what works for you. Just keep in mind, simply reading the material without completing the worksheets is unlikely to produce a significant change. **Understanding** the concepts is important, **applying** them is crucial to produce change.

# Quiz: Are You Ready To Make A Change?

Your **readiness** for change can impact your ability to change.

This workbook works best for those who are motivated to make a change in their life. Read over the questions below and circle the answers that you think best represent you. Then, tally up your scores on the following page to see how ready you are to make a change.

## 1. How much has your mood been affecting your day to day activities?

- a) Little or none: My mood rarely has a negative effect on my functioning
- b) A moderate amount: My mood negatively impacts my functioning more often than I would like
- c) A lot: My mood negatively affects many of my usual activities

## 2. How important is it for you to improve your functioning?

- a) Not very important: I am functioning well
- b) Moderately important: I am not satisfied with some aspects of my functioning
- c) Very important: I am not satisfied with much of my functioning

## 3. How much of a priority is it for you to improve your functioning?

- a) Low priority: I am functioning well and prefer to spend my efforts in other ways
- b) Medium priority: I would like to make some changes but need to balance this with other demands
- c) High priority: I definitely would like to make some changes

# Answers: How Do Your Scores Add Up?

## Mostly A's

You are functioning generally well and have little need to change. No need to change what is working well! You may still enjoy looking through this workbook.

## Mostly B's

You may be considering making a change. You may be weighing the time and effort it will take to change against the benefits of change. Completing the first few pages of this workbook may help you decide if this is the right time for you.

## Mostly C's

You are ready to change. You have likely decided that you are tired of feeling the way you do, and can imagine some benefits in making a change. You are ready to make this a priority in your life.

## My Responses Mostly \_\_\_\_

## WORKSHEET 1.1

### What do you want to change?

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# Things to Consider

## *“I won’t have time”*

You may feel like you already have too many things taking up your time (e.g., school, a job, your social life). Consider again: How important is it to you to make a change? How are you likely to benefit? Would you be more productive, more efficient, if you could make some changes? If you gain more control over your mood and your functioning, are you likely to have more energy, more motivation, and even free up more time for things you enjoy? Is it worth it to take even small segments of time to work on **Your Best You**?

**Take small steps to achieve effective and sustainable change.**

No need to do everything now! In fact, best not to! Break things down into small attainable goals, and work at your own pace. Spending just a few minutes a day, or every few days, on making small changes, is likely to produce worthwhile results. Be patient - breaking old habits and starting new ones takes practice.

## *“I tried but it didn’t seem to make any difference”*

Change takes time and often occurs gradually. The first steps toward change are often the most difficult. Try working on small attainable goals and remember to practise what you have learned. Simply reading the book will not produce much change. You need to apply the skills. Therefore, it is important to complete the assignments provided throughout the book.

**Change requires change.**

# Chapter 1

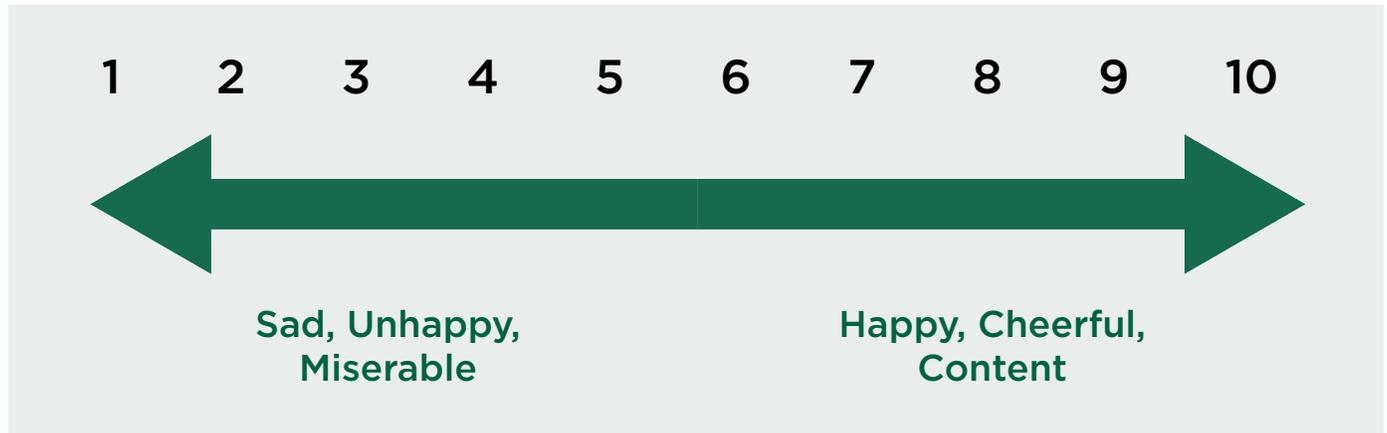
## Understanding Your Mood

We have all been through times when we have felt unhappy, and occasionally, quite sad. We may go through times when we find it hard to motivate ourselves, or have difficulty finding interest in things that we usually enjoy. These experiences are part of life. We all experience these things at various points in our lives, for varying lengths of time.

Sometimes there is an obvious reason behind these feelings. When we go through a difficult time, or experience a significant loss (such as, failing a course, ending a relationship, or the death of someone close to us) it is typical for this to have a negative impact on our mood. Other times, there may not be an obvious reason for feeling this way.

The intensity of these feelings can vary significantly. On some occasions they will be mild, while at other times they will be far more severe, and they may range anywhere between these extremes. Most people tend to hover in the middle range most of the time. It is not realistic to expect to feel completely happy and cheerful all the time! If you imagine your mood on a continuum from 0 to 10, from numb or miserable to happy and content, how would you rate it right now? How would you rate your mood averaged over the last week? Two weeks? See the continuum on the next page and record your mood ratings.

# Mood On A Continuum



Today:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Rating

Past Week:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Rating

Past 2 Weeks:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Rating

It is normal to experience low mood on some occasions for varying durations, but if it lasts for more than a couple of weeks, without an obvious cause (such as the end of a significant relationship or death of someone close to you) you may be experiencing symptoms of depression.

# What Is Depression?

Depression is more than just feeling sad. It is a cluster of symptoms that occur fairly consistently for an extended period of time (e.g., more than two weeks) that cannot be explained by something else (e.g., substance abuse, a medical condition, or death of someone close). If you are depressed, your mood will be very low most of the day and/or you will have a significant loss of interest or pleasure in your usual activities. Some people have difficulty concentrating and/or may feel indecisive. Fatigue, low energy and lack of motivation are common when depressed. Significant weight loss or gain, trouble falling or staying asleep, or oversleeping, may occur. Noticeable agitation or slowness in thoughts or movements may also occur. Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, or guilt may be present. In some cases, people with depression have recurring thoughts of death or suicide.

**YOU ARE STRONGLY ADVISED TO SEE A HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL  
IF YOU SUSPECT YOU MAY BE DEPRESSED.**

**Health Care Professionals include: physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and personal counsellors.**

If you are experiencing symptoms similar to depression, it is highly recommended that you make an appointment to see a physician as certain medical conditions can cause similar symptoms (e.g., anemia, hypothyroidism). If it is determined that you may be experiencing depression, several treatment options are available. Personal counselling has proven to be effective for many people and a physician can help with a referral to a counsellor. In some cases, a combination of antidepressant medication and counselling provide successful treatment.

**Don't go it alone  
Depression is treatable  
Help is available**

# Factors That Impact Mood

While in some cases it may appear that there is no obvious cause for feeling low or depressed, often, contributing factors can be identified. For example, moving away from home, dealing with academic stress, experiencing relationship issues (e.g., romantic or housemates), and worrying about financial concerns, are common realities at university and can have an impact on mood. Changes in general lifestyle, disrupted sleep patterns, illness, alcohol consumption or other substance use, may also affect mood. There are countless factors that may act as a trigger and cause an initial change in mood, or may play a role in maintaining a low or depressed mood.

A common factor in most of the examples listed above is stress. It is hardly surprising to say that stress is experienced frequently by university students, or that it can contribute to negative mood states.

College life is filled with stressors and this can lead to varying degrees of anxiety.

We are pre-programmed to feel anxious. Feeling this way is not only normal, it is necessary. If we were not aware of potential consequences in particular situations and urged to respond – like scrambling out of the way of a speeding motorist – there could be a significant impact on our life expectancy!

Anxiety is a normal, healthy, psychological and physiological response to a threatening situation. When we perceive a threat, a rush of hormones prepares our body to respond as necessary to avoid negative consequences. You are likely familiar with this fight-or-flight response.

Our pre-programmed anxiety response system is intended to turn off and allow us to relax once the threat has passed. Unfortunately, current lifestyles seem to perpetuate ongoing stressful situations and we may find it difficult to “turn it off”. Anxiety then becomes unhealthy, and can lead to a range of negative psychological and physiological responses. Ongoing anxiety can lead to physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle tension or pain, chest pain, fatigue, digestive problems, sleep difficulties, and over long periods can contribute to serious medical conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity and diabetes, if not treated. Not surprisingly, anxiety can also lead to irritability, low mood, and depression.

Anxiety becomes problematic when our response goes beyond what typically would be expected given the circumstances. Recall that mood exists on a continuum and may vary in intensity and duration at different points in life. Are you feeling anxious? Have you felt anxious recently? Is anxiety impacting your mood? Did this impact your mood rating on page 6? While the main focus of this workbook is to improve low mood, or mild to moderate depression, it is important to be aware that anxiety can contribute to such mood states.

# Personal Resources

We all have personal resources that can act as a buffer in stressful situations and have an impact on our mood. For example, if we feel healthy, have had adequate sleep, generally eat fairly nutritious meals, and exercise appropriately several times per week, we are more likely to have sufficient energy to engage in our usual daily activities. When any of these areas of functioning suffer, our energy and ability to maintain our usual activities will likely suffer as well.

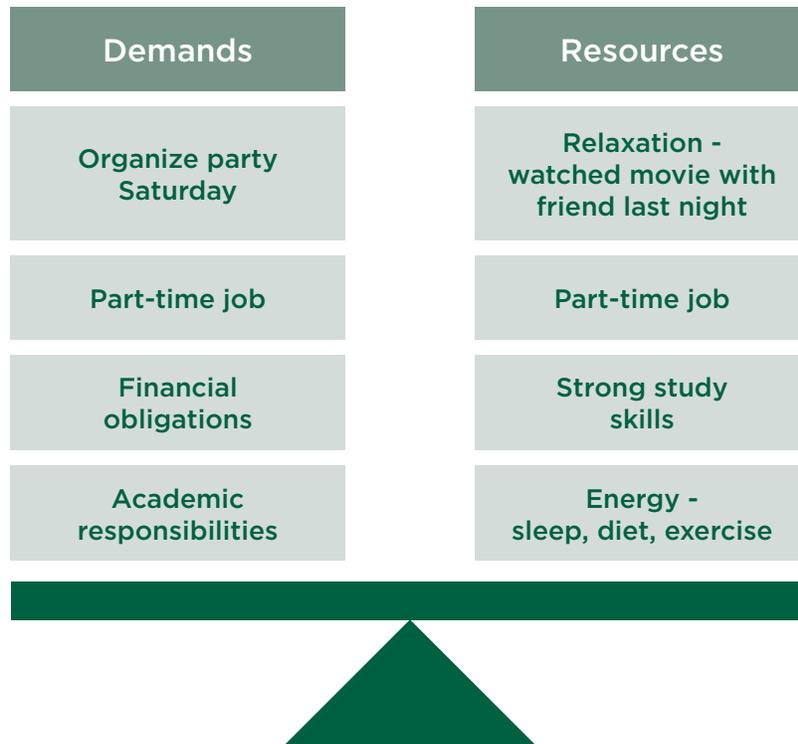
Managing academic responsibilities, extra-curricular interests, employment, and a social life can seem overwhelming at times. Finding ways to reduce responsibilities on some occasions may be a healthy way to manage stressful circumstances. What else do you do to relieve stress, anxiety, or low mood? Do you go for a walk or a run, watch a movie or YouTube, read a book or magazine? Often people will turn to a friend or family member, sometimes to express their difficulties, perhaps to ask for assistance, or for a distraction.

**Most importantly - you are not alone.  
There are people available to help.**

# Balance

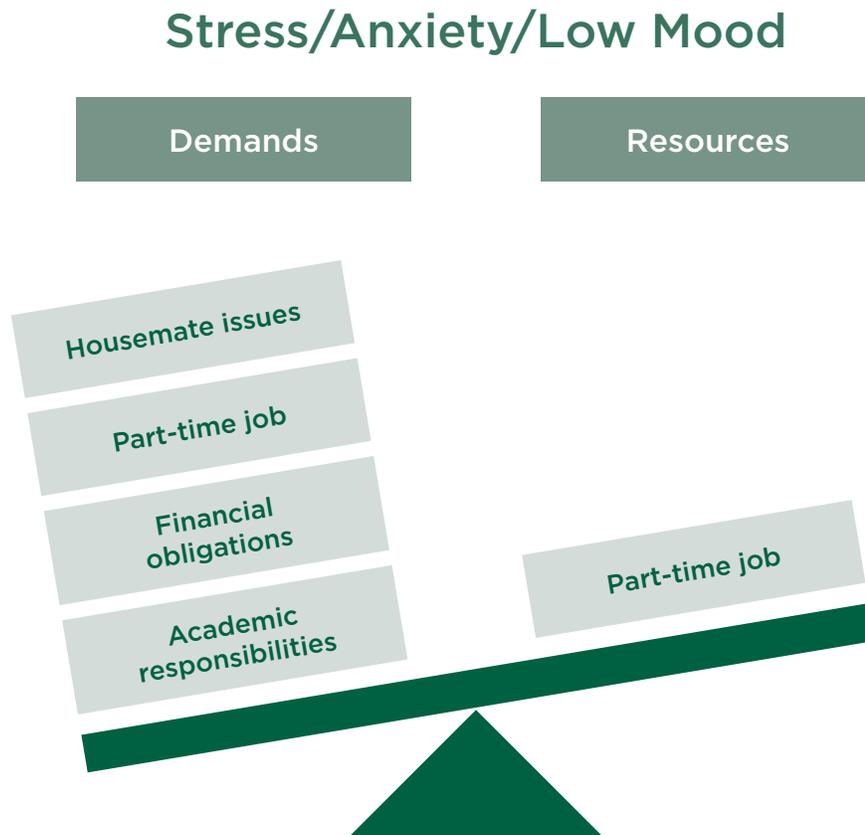
We all have demands placed upon our time and resources, and sometimes this feels overwhelming, especially at university! Looking at the simplistic example below, you can imagine how one might find balance and feel satisfied, content, and have a generally positive mood when there are enough resources to support the demands.

## Satisfied/Content/Positive Mood



Notice how one factor may be both a resource and a demand. For example, a part-time job may provide needed financial resources but also create a demand on your time and energy. Sometimes we need to assess whether the benefits outweigh the costs in particular circumstances. Also, keep in mind that what may be a resource for one person, may be a demand for someone else, and some demands or resources might be more important than others. For example, studying for an exam would likely be weighted more heavily than planning a party for Saturday night.

You can also imagine how an imbalance of demands and resources can lead to anxiety, low mood, or depression. When demands exceed resources there is usually an impact on mood. We tend to feel “stressed out” or anxious, and often sad or depressed.



Notice that sleep, diet and exercise are at the foundation of the resources in the “balanced” example on the previous page. When we lack adequate sleep, a healthy diet, and appropriate exercise, our resources can be severely compromised. It is more difficult to do anything if we lack energy. For tips on increasing energy refer to Appendix A.

Are your demands and resources generally balanced? Complete the worksheet on the following page to assess whether changes would be helpful. When we recognize an imbalance, it can help us to regroup and assess how we might be able to make improvements for ourselves. That is, how can we reduce demands, and increase resources? There may be obvious ways you may approach this now. The remainder of this workbook will describe particular strategies that can add to, or enhance, your existing personal resources.

# WORKSHEET 1.2

## Are Your Demands and Resources Balanced?

List your demands and resources below to evaluate whether your demands are exceeding your resources.

Demands	Resources
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



The following Chapter presents case studies depicting typical challenges faced by college students. Demands and Resources will be identified for each of these case studies at the end of Chapter 3.

# Chapter 2

## Case Studies

The following case studies reflect challenges faced by college students. While none of the cases presented are actual students, they are representative of students experiencing low mood. We will follow these “students” throughout the remainder of the workbook.

## Li's Story

Li is an 18 year old female in her first year of studies at Algonquin.

In high school, Li graduated in the top 10% of her class. She worked hard, had a close group of friends and enjoyed a great deal of love and support from her parents. Studying, good marks and close friends all seemed to come naturally for her.

Since arriving in Kingston in September, however, Li has begun to feel less like herself. She has been studying and working hard, but her first marks were much lower than she had expected. Since she believes that working hard will result in good marks, Li has begun to say “no” to social plans and has started staying home alone more and more to study. Li feels ashamed and sad about her marks.

She has started drinking coffee and energy drinks in an effort to stay up later and later to study. When she finally does go to bed she is unable to sleep and rarely sleeps more than 3 or 4 hours a night. Li is often tired and frequently irritable. She has rarely been hungry lately and often skips meals. She has had what feels like a bad cold for a few weeks, but has not taken the time to go to the doctor's office. Recently, her housemates commented on her weight loss. She feels both complimented and worried about these comments.

Li is now feeling quite lonely and isolated. She is beginning to feel like a failure both academically and socially. She feels sure she will not do well on her upcoming exams.

## Muhammed's Story

Muhammed is a 28 year old male student in the first year of his Master's program. He earned his undergraduate degree in four years, directly out of high school. He then took the next five years off in order to work and save money.

He started at Algonquin feeling like he would never fit in. He was sure he would be much older than everyone else and would, as always, have nothing in common with anyone. He has not met anyone with whom he has developed more than a casual relationship. He feels excluded from activities the younger students are involved in.

Moreover, he did not get the Teaching Assistant (TA) position he most wanted and had to settle for his last choice. He is sure his program supervisor is unimpressed with him, finds him unprepared, and thinks he is not as bright as his fellow students.

Subsequent to starting his program, he has stopped going to the gym and spends most of his time alone in his room playing video games or watching TV. He often stays up late and is getting up later and later in the day. He has an increased appetite, and on a recent visit home his mom noticed he had gained a lot of weight. While home he stayed in his room most of the time and didn't participate in the activities he normally enjoys with his family.

Muhammed is beginning to feel hopeless about his situation and feels he does not "have what it takes" to make changes. He feels lonely and often feels that he is simply not like other university students. He is worried that his situation will never improve.

## Alison's Story

Alison is a fourth year Engineering student. She has enjoyed her time at Algonquin and has done well academically and socially. She is outgoing and has bounced back quickly from upsetting and/or challenging events in the past. She has been in committed heterosexual relationships since early high school and currently has a boyfriend. Her boyfriend has finished school and is working in Toronto.

Everything was going well for Alison.

Three weeks ago, however, Alison was hanging out with a good friend, Liz. They were out drinking, dancing and having a good time. Eventually that night they hooked up. Although Alison enjoyed the experience, she has been overwhelmed with guilt, anxiety and fear since that night. She is quite worried that this will have a negative impact on their friendship. She is also very worried her other friends would not approve, both because she has a boyfriend and some of her friends have made anti-gay comments and jokes over the years at college. Additionally, Alison identifies herself as straight and can't resolve how this could have happened and that she enjoyed the experience sexually.

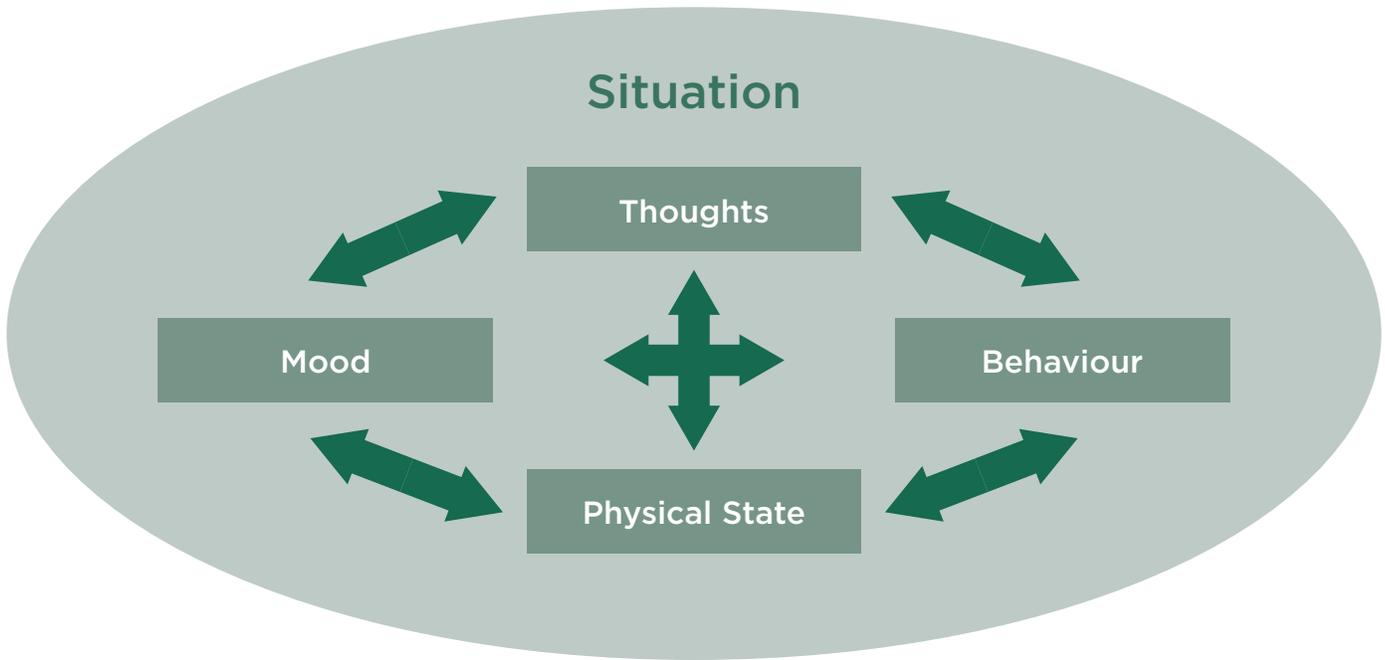
The thoughts and worry about this are occupying much of her time. She can't focus or concentrate on her studies and finds sleep almost impossible. She is eating dramatically more than normal and is sure she has gained a lot of weight. She is isolating herself from most of her friends and has been avoiding any contact with Liz. She is feeling as though she doesn't know who she is at all, and is beginning to feel hopeless and alone.

# Chapter 3

## Five Factor Model

As we have seen, when demands exceed resources we tend to feel overwhelmed and this typically has a negative impact on our mood. Many different aspects of functioning can qualify as either a Demand or a Resource, and in some cases, both. It is helpful to have a method of conceptualizing our functioning so we can better assess what is helpful and what is harmful. One way to think about the way we function is to think about five specific factors: our current **Situation**, our **Behaviours**, **Thoughts**, **Physical State**, and our **Mood**. All of these factors are interconnected, that is, they all have an impact on each other. Therefore, a change in one area will often produce change in another.

# Five Factor Model



To illustrate, let's use the example of someone experiencing difficulty sleeping (**situation**). This could lead to a number of different **thoughts**, such as 'I'm never going to get to sleep on time.' Depending on how they perceive the situation, their **mood** will change. In this case we might expect that they will feel anxious or upset. Being anxious might lead to an unpleasant physical state such as a fast heartbeat and feeling restless. These **physical symptoms** might then perpetuate the thoughts, 'I'm never going to get to sleep', while instigating certain **behaviours** such as getting up and watching TV. Everyone's pattern of how these five factors relate might be different, but if you look closely, you'll see that these factors do indeed intertwine in your life as well. By separating them and working on one area at a time, you can develop healthy coping strategies that will improve your mood and overall functioning. Each factor is discussed individually in the following sections.

# Situation

Our current situation has an impact on our thoughts, behaviours, physical state, and our mood.

Think of your current life situation: Living in Ottawa – at Algonquin.

Your living situation involves the type of housing you have and who you live with. Are you living in residence or in an apartment, with new people or old friends? Do you feel safe in your apartment, house or residence? Do you like your housemates?

Your situation as a student includes things like: your classes, your finances, your relationship status. Are your academics going well or are you struggling? Are you here with friends you had in high school or have you moved here and don't know anyone yet? Did you break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend recently? Do you have plenty of money or are you working, waiting for bursaries, or do you have no idea how you are going to pay for everything?

Working through this workbook will help you learn to recognise the situations that may be related to low mood and help you develop ways to change or cope with these circumstances.



# Thoughts

Our thinking impacts the way we feel and the way we act. Thoughts can be conscious, such as “I’m hungry, I’ll go to the cafeteria” or “I can’t wait until Friday night, it’s been a long week”. Other thoughts are unconscious, such as a thought that leads to feeling anxious upon waking in the morning or a thought that leads to feeling happy when you look outside on a sunny day. For example, waking in the morning and feeling anxious may have resulted from the conscious thought “I have an exam in an hour” and the unconscious thought “What if I forget everything I studied?”.

Over time we tend to develop automatic thought patterns – both conscious and unconscious – that typically have a considerable impact on our mood and functioning. When we bring our thoughts into awareness we can look at them and determine if they are accurate, inaccurate, helpful or harmful.



# WORKSHEET 3.1

## Record Your Thoughts

Think of a time when you felt happy and try to remember specifically what you were thinking. List as many thoughts as you can remember.

I thought:

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---

---

Circle the thought that influenced your mood the most.

Was this thought (circle all that apply):

Accurate

Inaccurate

Helpful

Neutral

Harmful

Think of a time when you felt **sad** or **depressed** and try to remember what you were thinking. List as many thoughts as you can remember.

I thought:

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---

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Circle the thought that influenced your mood the most.

Was this thought (circle all that apply):

Accurate

Inaccurate

Helpful

Neutral

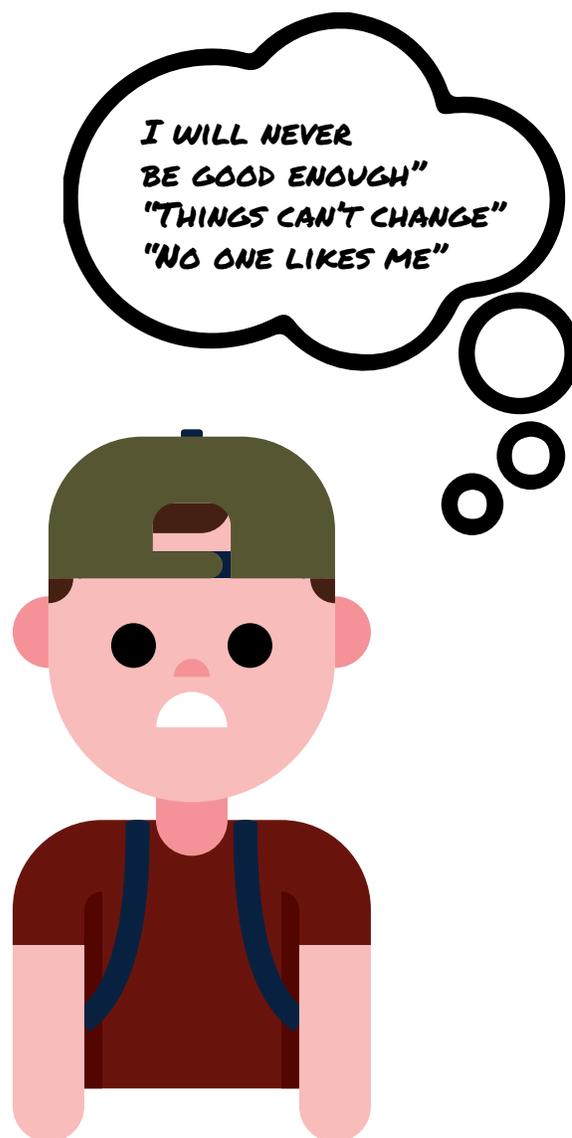
Harmful

When we notice a negative shift in our mood, this is a good time to bring our thoughts into awareness and determine whether they are accurate. We can modify inaccurate thoughts which can positively influence our mood.

There are some common thinking patterns that often result in inaccurate thoughts that have a negative impact on our mood. Several of these thinking errors are listed below and will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

### Common Thinking Errors

- All-or-nothing thinking
- Catastrophizing
- Predicting the future
- Overgeneralization
- Mindreading



# Behaviours

When we are feeling good, enthused or excited about life, we behave in a way that is reflective of those feelings. The same is true when we feel sad, lonely or insecure.

## WORKSHEET 3.2

### Record Your Behaviours

Can you think of a time when your behaviour impacted your mood?

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Can you think of a time when your mood influenced your behaviour?

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When people are depressed they often want to stay in bed and avoid the day. When we feel low we need to work harder to get up and get motivated.

The following behaviours are often seen in people with low mood and/or depression:

- Reduced social activity or work
- Reduced activity level
- Poor self-care
- Changes in sleep, diet and exercise

# Physical States

Our physical state is often reflective of our mood. Think of a time when you felt happy or elated about something that just happened. How did you feel physically? We tend to feel energized when we are happy, and ailments may seem to disappear, even if momentarily. The opposite is often true when we feel sad or depressed.

Some examples of physical symptoms or states include:

- High or low energy
- Fatigue
- Reduction or increase in appetite or weight
- Loss of sex drive
- Pain
- Headache
- Nauseous
- Tense
- Well rested
- Sense of wellness

## WORKSHEET 3.3

### Record Your Physical Feelings

Think about a time when something good happened and you were happy! How did you feel physically?

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Think about a time when you felt sad or depressed. How did you feel physically?

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# Mood

The preceding sections have noted the relationship between our mood and each of the following factors: Situation, Thoughts, Behaviours and Physical State. Each one of these factors is interconnected, that is, they all have an impact on each other. (See Case Studies on pages 31 – 33.)

Moods vary - day by day and even hour by hour. This is often in direct relation to one or more of the factors listed above. Fill in the following worksheets and think about the way in which these factors are connected with your mood.

## WORKSHEET 3.4a

### Connect Your Mood

Think of a time when you felt happy, and list your:

Situation

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---

Thoughts

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---

Behaviours

---

---

Physical state

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# WORKSHEET 3.4b

## Connect Your Mood

Now, think of a time when you felt sad or depressed, and list your:

Situation

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Thoughts

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Behaviours

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Physical state

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# WORKSHEET 3.4c

## Connect Your Mood

It is helpful to be able to identify your mood. Take a look at the list below and see which moods you identify with right now. Are there others you could add to this list?

### Moods

- Happy
- Sad
- Cheerful
- Unhappy
- Cranky
- Content
- Frustrated
- Irritable
- Miserable
- Angry
- Enthused
- Fearful
- Worried
- Nervous
- Elated
- Joyful
- Sorrowful
- Gloomy
- Excited
- Devastated

Right now I feel \_\_\_\_\_

Now list your:

Situation

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---

Thoughts

---

---

Behaviours

---

---

Physical state

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# Back to the Case Studies

## Li

**Situation:** upcoming exams, increased isolation, not measuring up to her personal standards, health concerns.

**Thoughts:** “I am not good enough” “I am failing” “I will get kicked out of my program”  
“If I just work harder, I will succeed”

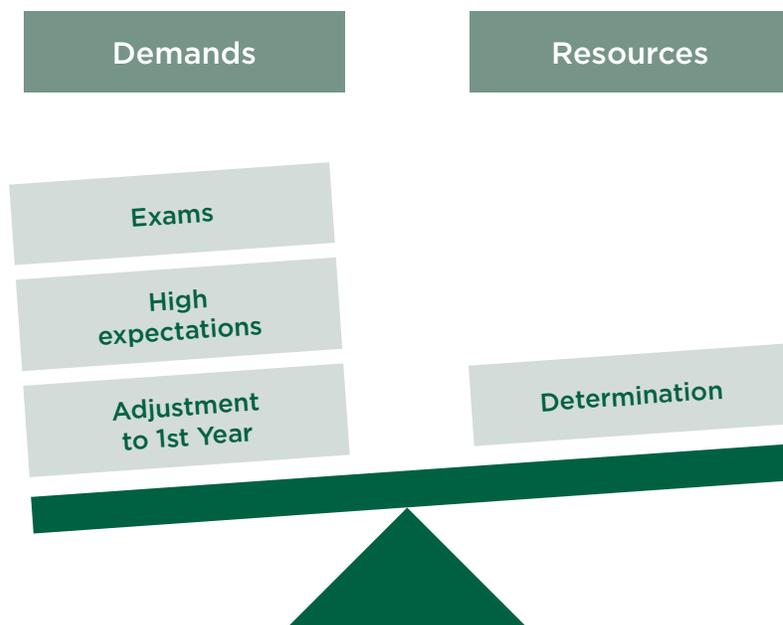
**Behaviour:** eating less, sleeping less, consuming increased amounts of caffeine, social withdrawal

**Physical Symptoms:** tired, irritable, cough, runny nose

**Mood:** worried, anxious, frustrated, unhappy, ashamed

Li’s thoughts that “I have to be the best” and her idea that she “should” get the marks she got in high school are causing her to alter her formerly healthy behaviour in a way that is causing problems with multiple aspects of her life. Li’s mood has gone from positive and upbeat to worried and anxious. Her behaviour used to contribute to her overall well-being.

Unfortunately, now she is isolating herself, not eating and is substituting energy drinks for sleep. Additionally, Li is not “taking the time” to see a doctor and may end up getting so sick that she will need to take time off from school. Li is no longer utilizing her usual resources: friends, family, eating healthy and getting enough sleep. Restoring her resources will reestablish balance.



# Muhammed

**Situation:** Adjusting to grad school, not getting top choice for TAs, concern about supervisor's feelings

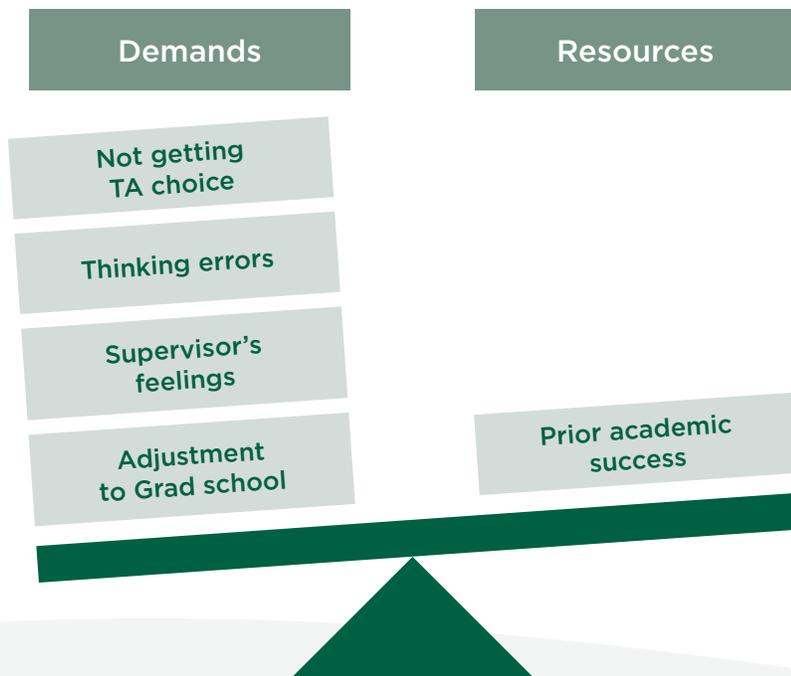
**Thoughts:** "I'm not good enough", "no one likes me", "no one wants anything to do with me" "things will never improve"

**Behaviour:** Stopped going to the gym, sleeping in, staying up late, playing hours of video games, being alone

**Physical Symptoms:** Lethargic, tired, loss of appetite, weight loss

**Mood:** Lonely, sad, disappointed

Muhammed's thoughts: "no one likes me," "things will never improve" directly influence his behaviour. As a result of these thoughts, Muhammed feels there is no point in trying to make new friends, he stays in his room, plays video games for long hours, and has quit going to the gym. Due to these changes in behaviour, Muhammed has limited his opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. This will make his situation more difficult. Muhammed's thinking errors - Mind Reading and Predicting the Future - have had a negative impact on his behaviour and mood (see pages 45 - 47 for more on Thinking Errors).



## Alison

**Situation:** Questioning her sexuality; concern regarding friends and boyfriend

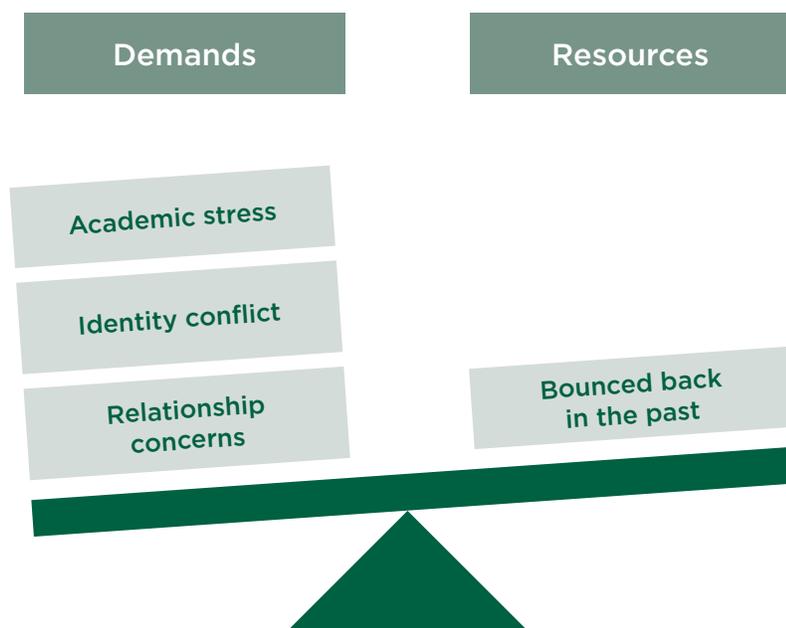
**Thoughts:** “What will people think of me?” “Who am I?”

**Behaviours:** Overeating, unable to sleep, stopped hanging out with friends

**Physical Symptoms:** Restless and agitated, weight gain, stomach problems, tired

**Mood:** Worried, anxious, irritable, helpless, alone

Alison’s situation has impacted all other aspects of her life. Her thinking has become imbalanced; her behaviours no longer contribute to her well-being. Her mood is worsening and she is developing unpleasant physical symptoms. The combination of demands outweigh her resources, thus increasing the likelihood of depression. Alison’s demands are outweighing her resources.



# Chapter 4

## Tools

Now that we understand the links between the five factors: situation, behaviours, thoughts, physical state, and mood, we can focus on learning ways to improve each of these. Often by making a change in one area, we create improvement in all areas.

Just like it takes practise to learn how to drive or do math equations, it will take practise to master these skills. This is not like a regular book, where you simply read information about a topic. This really is a WORK book. You will be asked questions and then given space to fill in answers, allowing you to analyze the relevant aspects of your functioning. It is easy enough to read something and think that you understand it, but it is another thing to be able to apply it to your own life and situations.

**This workbook is for you. So fill it in, write in it, make it your own.**

# Back to the Basics

As counsellors, we notice a common trend: when a student is struggling, the basics are often off track. Your first step to getting back on track is to look at the basics: diet, exercise and sleep. Without adequate diet, exercise and sleep, none of us function well.

## WORKSHEET 4.1

### Back to Basics

If you are feeling off track, answer the following questions:

How much sleep are you getting? Do you have trouble falling asleep? Are you waking often during the night?

---

---

What are you eating? Are you eating too little or too much? Are you enjoying food the way you would normally?

---

---

Are you exercising? Are you getting too much or too little exercise? Is your current level of exercise typical for you?

---

---

Diet, exercise and sleep are the foundation to YOUR BEST YOU!



Which part(s) of the basics are off track for you? What small specific change can you make TODAY? Remember, to be effective the change has to be realistic and you must be willing to commit to it. For additional information, and tips to achieve these Basics, see Appendix A.

Today I will

---

---

My plan for this week is

---

---

# Activities

When we experience low mood, it is common to withdraw from activities we would otherwise enjoy. People often spend more time alone, stay in bed longer or increase time playing video games or watching tv. People may avoid friends and activities for many different reasons, but as we have discovered, this withdrawal and isolation can become part of a negative downward spiral that leads to, and maintains, depression. The longer this goes on, the greater the impact in multiple aspects of our lives. It can be difficult to even remember what we used to enjoy.

Let's do something about this right now!

In the previous section you made a plan to get the basics back on track. The next step is to plan some pleasant activities. When your mood is on track, when you're feeling good: what do you enjoy? Do you enjoy the outdoors? Do you enjoy the gym? Do you normally like to go out to eat with friends? Take a look at the following list of common pleasant activities – circle the ones you currently (or used to) enjoy and add a few of your own in the blank spaces. Then circle the items you might enjoy trying.

# WORKSHEET 4.2

## Pleasant Activities

### Free

- Reading a book
- Lunch alone
- Lunch with a friend
- Window shopping
- Walking by the lake
- Going for a walk
- Watching TV
- Skyping
- Sex (safe sex ☺)
- Riding a bike
- Doodling
- Singing
- Listening to music
- Running
- Playing an instrument
- Journaling
- Hiking
- Playing a board game
- Yoga at home
- Cleaning
- Dancing
- Picnic
- Playing cards
- Thinking about the future

### Involve some expense

- Going to the movies
- Knitting baking
- Going out for a meal
- Stream videos
- Photography
- Going out for coffee
- Buying a new book
- Bowling
- Paint ball
- Cooking
- Cooking with a friend
- Yoga class
- Fishing
- Skating

### My own ideas

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Now that you have circled a few things you enjoy or might enjoy, make a commitment to do one item each day this week – even if it’s just for a few minutes a day! See the Activity Schedule on pages 42-43 for a handy way to record this commitment.

Today I will

---

---

My plan for this week is

---

---

**Pleasant Activities are important for creating a balanced, happier life and for getting back on track!**



# Small Attainable Goals

When you make goals, it is important to make them realistic. It will not be helpful or practical to say to yourself, "I will exercise and eat right every day." That is just too big! Helpful goals are realistic, allow for a busy schedule and your current mood. It is best that your goals are very specific. The best goal is small and attainable.

Instead of saying to yourself, I will exercise every day, which is both vague and too big, take a look at the demands of your week, for example: class times, work schedule, homework load, etc. and make a realistic goal based on all the factors that take your time and energy. Your goal might be, "I will exercise three times this week." Next, plan for each of those three times and schedule them. See the activity scheduling chart on pages 42-43.

The next important step is to determine what specific type of exercise you will do. Would you prefer to go to the gym, walk by the lake, take a run, or ride your bike? Is the weather going to cooperate with your goal? What is realistic? What are you most likely to do? If you haven't run in 6 months, then likely it would not be realistic to plan to run a half marathon! The idea is always a realistic goal that works with your schedule and current circumstances.

This week I will

---

---

(Be sure to include the days and times for your commitment!)

What if you don't meet all your goals or didn't stick to the planned schedule?

Don't give up! If you didn't stick to your schedule, take a look at it again. Did you plan too much? Did you allow enough time for each activity? Was your original schedule realistic? This may take a few tries. Start small, and remember to set realistic goals. Think about possible road blocks and plan for those.

# Plan Your Days One Day at a Time

GREAT! You are on your way to **YOUR BEST YOU!!!** You have come up with a list of pleasant activities and even made a plan for dates and times. Let's take a look at the activity schedule that follows. This is just an example... yours will be specific to YOU! There is a blank form to copy and use on page 43.

TIME	PLANNED ACTIVITY
8:30 - 9:30am	Wake up, shower, eat breakfast
9:30 - 10:30am	Class
10:30 - 11:30am	Class
11:30 - 12:30pm	FREE HOUR!
12:30 - 1:30pm	Lunch break, go to QP with friends, and then sit outside
1:30 - 2:30pm	Class
2:30 - 3:30pm	Work in the lab
3:30 - 4:30pm	Go to the library
4:30 - 5:30pm	Go to the library
5:30 - 6:30pm	Make dinner
6:30 - 7:30pm	Read textbook
7:30 - 8:30pm	Yoga class with Amanda
8:30 - 9:30pm	Homework
9:30 - 10:30pm	TV/get ready for tomorrow
10:30 - 11:30pm	Do relaxation exercise (15 mins) then go to bed
11:30pm - 8:10am	Sleep

# WORKSHEET 4.3

## Daily Activity Schedule

Fill out this blank schedule for your day tomorrow (remember small attainable goals!)

TIME	PLANNED ACTIVITY
6:30 - 7:30am	
7:30 - 8:30am	
8:30 - 9:30am	
9:30 - 10:30am	
10:30 - 11:30am	
11:30 - 12:30pm	
12:30 - 1:30pm	
1:30 - 2:30pm	
2:30 - 3:30pm	
3:30 - 4:30pm	
4:30 - 5:30pm	
5:30 - 6:30pm	
6:30 - 7:30pm	
7:30 - 8:30pm	
8:30 - 9:30pm	
9:30 - 10:30pm	
10:30 - 11:30pm	

# Automatic thoughts

As we have discovered, our thoughts impact the way we feel and the things we do (or don't do). Some of our thoughts are obvious to us. "I'm hungry" or "it's cold, I should grab my coat" may be examples of thoughts that make sense and are clearly related to the current situation. However, the focus of this section is on what we call **Automatic Thoughts**. These thoughts occur to us often without our conscious awareness. They are also the thoughts that can have an impact on our mood without us even realizing it.

Have you ever had the experience of suddenly feeling anxious or sad without understanding what just happened? Likely a negative automatic thought was the cause. When we notice a negative shift in mood we want to STOP and think about what just happened... what were we thinking? To help illustrate this lets re-visit Li.

Li described to her counselor an example of a sudden shift in mood that she did not understand. She was on her way to her exam. When she left her house, she felt optimistic: she had studied hard, gotten a good night of sleep and eaten breakfast – all things her counselor had suggested she do. She walked into the exam room and suddenly, out of the blue, she felt so sad that she had to fight back tears and the urge to run out and go back home and get into bed. She and her counselor looked at the situation carefully. Li realized that her thoughts as she entered the room were, "Maybe I am not ready" "What if I forget everything I studied?" "I am going to fail! I will be kicked out of Algonquin!"

**Li had fallen victim to the catastrophizing thinking error.**

Li and her counselor looked at the thoughts together, checked them for accuracy, and came up with a more balanced thought. Li's new balanced thought was, "I am worried. My marks are important to me AND I have studied hard and am prepared. I am smart, it is likely that I will do well." It is important that Li's balanced thought was 100% believable to her.

Take a look at the next section called **Thinking Errors**. See if you can find any patterns of thinking that look familiar to you.

# Thinking Errors

We all make generalizations in our thinking. If the sky is dark and cloudy, we may throw an umbrella in our backpack. We have to make generalizations or we would spend too much time everyday thinking through things that have become second nature for us. At times and often in depression, we develop patterns of thinking that are inaccurate and at times get in the way of our happiness. These are called **Thinking Errors** or you may have heard them referred to as Cognitive Distortions.

These errors in our thinking are so common that they have been categorized by many theorists into 10 or so common thinking errors. When we develop one or more of these patterns of thinking we tend to see the world and/or our interactions through the lens of these distortions.

**Thinking Errors** are listed in the Table on pages 46 and 47. Take a look at the list and see if you recognize yourself in any of these patterns of thinking. Make an "X" by the ones you think may be common for you.

## Balanced Thoughts

Our thoughts have a significant impact on our mood, therefore, it is important to be aware of negative inaccurate thought patterns discussed in the previous section. These types of thoughts tend to occur automatically and may be frequent. The more often we think a particular thought, the more likely we are to believe it. The repetition of a thought, however, does not mean it is valid.

Developing greater awareness of inaccurate thinking, and adjusting these thoughts to be balanced and realistic, can have a substantial positive impact on your mood. Methods to **Combat Thinking Errors** are listed in the Table on pages 46 and 47.

# 10 Common Thinking Errors

THINKING ERROR	WHAT IT MEANS	HOW TO COMBAT IT
<b>All or Nothing Thinking</b>	The idea that something is all: good or all bad, black or white, total success or total failure. E.g., - you get a 48% on 1 exam and think "I am a horrible student"	Be realistic - look at the evidence. E.g. "Most of my marks are pretty good. I am not happy about this mark...I will try harder" or "It is OK. This unit was hard for me...the next one will be better."
<b>Catastrophizing</b>	Overestimating the chances of disaster. When one thing goes wrong I imagine a series of worse and worse events leading to extreme and undesirable consequences. E.g., "I had a fight with my friend last night... she will tell everyone... everyone will think I am mean... No one will like me... I will never have any friends again... I will always be alone."	Take a step back... look at the evidence when you are calm. E.g. "I was irritable last night...when I left she asked if I was ok... and seemed worried, not angry. In the past we have worked out problems. I will give her a call now and apologize and talk to her about what happened."
<b>Predicting the Future</b>	When you predict an outcome and assume that your prediction is guaranteed to happen. E.g. "If I tell my friends I am depressed they will all stop talking to me."	Ask yourself a few questions..."Would I stop talking to a friend if they told me they were depressed?" "What are the other possibilities?" In the past people have been supportive when I've had a problem. Examine the evidence! A more accurate statement might be, "I'll tell my closest friend what is going on and see how she responds...she is usually very supportive."
<b>Overgeneralizing</b>	When someone comes to a definitive conclusion from a single piece of evidence. E.g., "My professor didn't call on me - he does not like me."	Look at all the evidence...try again...recall a time when it felt different. Come up with a more balanced response. E.g., "My professor saw my classmate's hand first... he called on me twice last week."
<b>Labelling</b>	This is a form of overgeneralizing in which someone gives themselves or someone else an extreme label. E.g. "I am a failure." "He is a careless jerk."	How would you counter this? What do you think would be a more balanced thought?
<b>Mind Reading</b>	When people think they know what another person is thinking. E.g., "My boyfriend's mom never smiles when I come over - she must hate me."	We really don't know what other people are thinking. We may be drawing a conclusion based on our own filters. Perhaps my boyfriend's mom is not friendly or is having a rough time herself. A more balanced statement might be, "Even though she doesn't smile, she does invite me to stay for supper."
<b>Emotional Reasoning</b>	When people mistake their feelings for facts or draw a conclusion based on a feeling. E.g., "I feel like a failure, therefore I am a failure." "I feel hopeless, therefore my situation must be hopeless."	When we are sad or depressed it can be difficult to view situations in a balanced way. Again, take a step back, try to be realistic and consider other options. E.g., "I feel hopeless today, but last week I felt much better - this will pass - I will feel more hopeful tomorrow." "I know this is my depression talking."
<b>Mental Filtering</b>	When you ignore the positive aspects of something and focus on only the negative aspects allowing the negativity to influence everything else. E.g., "That guy I like didn't even talk to me last night... I must be a loser."	Look at the bigger picture. Try to be realistic - take in BOTH the positive and negative information. A more accurate statement might be, "I am disappointed I didn't talk to him last night, but I did meet some new people and a few people seemed to really want to talk to me."
<b>Personalization</b>	This is when people blame things on themselves or take total responsibility for situations. E.g. "My parents got divorced because of me."	There are many reasons inside and outside of our control for why things happen. We do not control events. What would be a more accurate statement?
<b>Disqualifying the Positive</b>	This is when a person minimizes or ignores positive aspects and thus maintains a negative view of themselves or situations. E.g. "I got an 87 on an exam... oh it must have been easy".	How would you combat this? What do you think would be a more accurate, balanced statement?

# EAR – Listening to Yourself

Throughout this workbook we have discussed the interaction of five factors: your current **Situation**, your **Behaviours**, **Thoughts**, **Physical State**, and your **Mood**. We have noted that all of these factors are interconnected and thereby impact each other. Change in one area can produce change in another. Developing greater awareness of these interactions and utilizing adaptive coping strategies during difficult times can help you attain *Your Best You!*

The focus of this workbook is to improve your mood and overall functioning, and you can use the five factor model to help accomplish this goal. The first step is to develop greater awareness of your own personal process. How do each of these factors interact for you at various times? As discussed in the preceding sections, negative, inaccurate, automatic thoughts can have a substantial impact on mood and functioning. Identifying these thoughts, however, can be elusive and requires dedicated attention. Their automaticity and repetitiveness can be very persuasive – yet misleading! It is helpful to have a strategy to remind you to pay attention to these thoughts and consciously assess their accuracy.

**EAR** is an easy-to-remember strategy to remind you to assess your automatic thoughts and identify any other factors that are impacting your current state. From here you can make informed decisions regarding appropriate coping methods.

**Use EAR as a reminder to listen – to yourself!**

When you experience a negative mood – sad, irritable, depressed, angry, etc. – remember **EAR**:

<b>E - Event</b>	What Event has influenced your mood? What Situation, Behaviours, and/or Physical State have had an impact on your mood?
<b>A - Automatic Thoughts</b>	What are your Automatic Thoughts? Are they Accurate? Do you recognize any Thinking Errors?
<b>R - Response</b>	Is your Response appropriate? Can you think of more balanced thoughts? Can you make beneficial changes to your Situation, Behaviour, or Physical State?

## Sample Ear Chart

The following is a sample EAR chart for Muhammed:

<b>E - Event</b>	Did not get 1st TA choice; settled for 3rd choice
<b>A - Automatic Thoughts</b>	“I’m not good enough” Thinking Error: Personalization
<b>R - Response</b>	More balanced thinking:  Most people in program wanted to TA same course; we couldn’t all do it. More than half of the grad students got their 2nd or 3rd choice. The course I am TAing is a good match for my thesis topic. Maybe this is a better course for me to teach and maybe that is why it was assigned to me.

# WORKSHEET 4.4

## EAR

<b>E - Event</b>	What Event has influenced your mood? What Situation, Behaviours, and/or Physical State have had an impact on your mood?
<b>A - Automatic Thoughts</b>	What are your Automatic Thoughts? Are they Accurate? Do you recognize any Thinking Errors?
<b>R - Response</b>	Is your Response appropriate? Can you think of more balanced thoughts? Can you make beneficial changes to your Situation, Behaviour, or Physical State?

# Coping Cards

A coping card is a simple but extremely powerful tool. Create your own coping cards to remind you of whatever goal, thought, or tool that is relevant to you. Make a commitment to yourself to follow through on your strategy, and use index cards or sticky notes to make coping cards that will help to keep you on track. For example, Li made the decision to regain balance by focusing on Diet/Exercise/Sleep and Pleasant Activities. After careful planning with her counsellor she decided to begin with a focus on diet and pleasant activities. She planned to eliminate energy drinks and eat one meal a day with friends. In the morning when she first gets up she picks up and reads her coping card. This provides her with her goal and plan and gives her the motivation to stay on track. She also has another similar coping card in the front pocket of her backpack. She takes the card out prior to leaving class, when she is in the library studying and at night when she is at home.

## Sample Coping Card

**My Good Coping Skills**

---

**Diet/Exercise/Sleep**

When I eat well - I think more clearly

Eating with friends - helps me enjoy my time and maintain balance

Drinking water (instead of coffee) - helps me to sleep better at night, saves me money, and is part of my healthy, balanced plan

**Pleasant Activities**

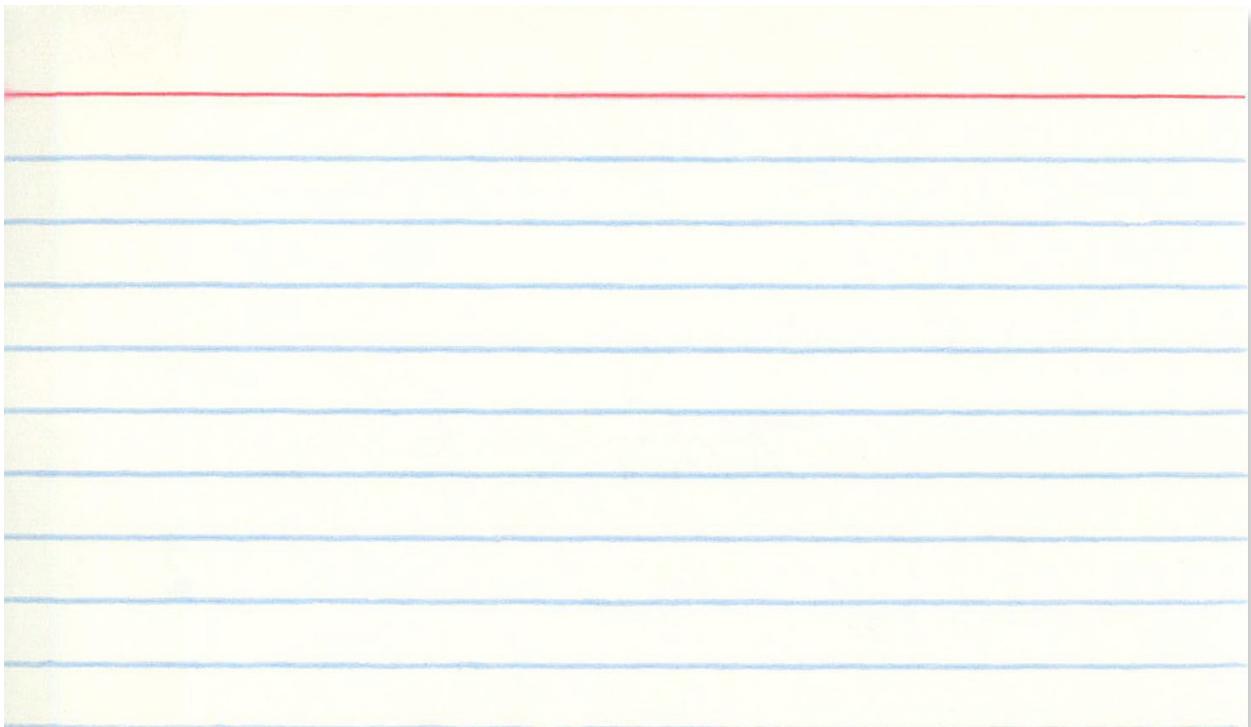
I will do my scheduled pleasant activity today because it helps me stay focused and maintain balance

Choose and use the TOOLS that will help you be YOUR BEST YOU!



## WORKSHEET 4.5

### Coping Cards



# Chapter 5

## Putting it All Together

A number of strategies have been presented in this workbook to help improve the skills you use to manage your mood and general functioning. These skills have proven effective for many people, however, like many other activities, you must practise to become competent. First, you must make a conscious effort to increase your awareness of the events and thoughts that impact your mood, and develop a plan to manage or overcome these issues. It's important to make a commitment to follow your plan, and think of ways to remind yourself to do so.

# Strategies

**What Strategies Have You Tried So Far?** Check these in the first column below.

**What Strategies Are You Planning to Try?** Check these in the second column below.

TRIED SO FAR	PLANNING TO TRY	STRATEGIES
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have assessed my Demands and Resources and made changes as needed (see pages 11-13).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have made improvements to The Basics – a good way to increase Resources (see page 36-37 and Appendix A for more information): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diet</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Sleep</li> <li>• Relaxation Strategies</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am making an effort to include Pleasant Activities in my daily routine (see page 38-40).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am setting Small Attainable Goals (see page 41).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am making a Daily Schedule for myself (see pages 43).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am following my Daily Schedule.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have started to notice my Automatic Thoughts (see page 44).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have started to assess my Automatic Thoughts to determine whether they are accurate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have noticed I tend to make the following Thinking Errors (see pages 46-47) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All or Nothing Thinking</li> <li>• Catastrophizing</li> <li>• Predicting the Future</li> <li>• Overgeneralizing</li> <li>• Mind Reading</li> <li>• Emotional Reasoning</li> <li>• Mental Filtering</li> <li>• Labelling</li> <li>• Personalization</li> <li>• Disqualifying the Positive</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have started to combat my Thinking Errors (see pages 46-47).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am formulating more Balanced Thoughts (see pages 45-47).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am using EAR to listen to myself and put my plan in action (see pages 48-50).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am using Coping Cards to remind myself to use the strategies that are effective for me (see page 51-52).

# Let's Do a Quick Check-in:

Where are you now?



Rate your mood today: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date Rating

How does this compare to when you began to work through this book? Look back to page 6. Remember, it is unrealistic to expect to be at the upper end of the scale for more than short periods of time. Hovering around the mid-range is typical and satisfying. When trying to climb up this scale, aim for small, manageable, sustainable changes.

Use the Mood Strategy Chart on page 58 to keep track of your mood, related events, and the strategy you used to manage or improve the situation and your mood. Keeping track of this information will help to identify and reinforce effective strategies and provides an easy reference when your mood is low. You can refer to this Chart to see what you have done in the past to deal with similar circumstances.

**Remember - change takes time and practise**

Be patient with yourself, make small attainable goals, adjust your plan if necessary, and stick to your commitment to be **Your Best You!**

## Sample Mood Strategy Chart

Remember Alison (see Chapter 2)? Here is one of her Mood Strategy Charts:

DATE	MOOD RATING 0 - 10	SITUATION	STRATEGY	OUTCOME
Nov 7	3	Alone in my room; eating a full bag of cookies; felt sad and lonely	EAR – assessed auto thoughts; looked for thinking errors; found more balanced thoughts	Had a shower and was able to fall asleep more quickly than usual
Nov 8	4	Couldn't focus on my homework; wasted an hour	Went for a brisk walk for about 15 minutes	Was able to read for ½ hour afterward; took another break and read some more
Nov 10	2	Saw Liz walking on other side of road; she did not see me; I felt sick, anxious; ran home and started eating potato chips	Looked at Coping Card that reminded me to exercise when I feel anxious; did some jumping jacks in my room, then some stretching; then used EAR to look for thinking errors and think of more balanced thoughts	Calmed down; started to think about how to talk to Liz



# Chapter 6

## Planning for the Future

The aim of this workbook is to increase your competency in managing your mood and overall functioning – now and in the future. Practise and planning are key components required to achieve this goal. Review this book – relevant sections, or in its entirety – as often as needed. Personalize and USE the strategies that work best for you. Assess their effectiveness and adjust as necessary.

**Effectiveness is dependent on practise**

Planning ahead is an important factor to help prevent a setback. It is well worth the time to take a few moments to reflect on what you have learned and think about how you can apply your knowledge to care best for yourself now and in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

# Plan Ahead

When are you most likely to feel anxious, sad or depressed (for example, during exams, holidays, end of school, applying for jobs or programs)? What can you do to be Your Best You during these difficult times?

Remember Muhammed (see Chapter 2)? Here is a sample of his Future Planning Guide:

DIFFICULT TIMES	COPING STRATEGIES
Biweekly meetings with my supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat some breakfast that morning, even a small amount, to give me energy.</li> <li>• Do some exercising (jumping jacks, sit-ups, push-ups) that morning in my room to relieve some of my anxiety and help increase my energy.</li> <li>• Use EAR in the morning before our meeting to look for thinking errors and find more balanced thoughts.</li> <li>• Make a short summary of the work I have completed since our last meeting and a list of my questions just before our meeting.</li> <li>• Look at my coping card to remind myself that my supervisor is there to guide me and help me learn - he doesn't expect me to know everything.</li> </ul>
Going home during reading week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember to eat at each meal, even a little, to increase my energy and so my mom will not worry.</li> <li>• Make an effort to spend time with my mom and dad and brother. Plan some time together - pick at least two or three activities to do together through the week. Watch tv with my family instead of by myself.</li> <li>• Make an activity schedule for each day of the week and include getting out of bed by 9 am, eating regularly, exercising at least 3 times that week, plan time for homework, activities with my family, and time to see my closest friend, Steve.</li> </ul>

# WORKSHEET 6.1

## Planning Ahead

DIFFICULT TIMES	COPING STRATEGIES

# Review, Review, Review

Apply your study skills! Remember to review this summary, and create easily accessible reminders for yourself (coping cards, sticky notes, etc.), to help reinforce healthy coping strategies. Do this NOW! Do this when the strategies are fresh in your mind, and you have the energy to do it. If you wait until your mood starts to slip, it will be more difficult – to remember and apply – your most effective strategies. Good self-care includes planning ahead, and developing confidence in your ability to recognize difficult times and respond in a healthy manner.

## Need Help?

Another aspect of healthy self-care includes reaching out to others for support when needed. This may mean calling a friend or family member, or accessing one of the services listed in Appendix B. Remember there is assistance available at:

### **Counselling Services**

Check in at the Welcome Centre (3rd Floor, Student Commons)

613.727.4723 ext. 7200

[algonquincollege.com/counselling](http://algonquincollege.com/counselling)

# Appendix A

## Back to Basics: Sleep, Diet, Exercise & Relaxation Strategies

### Basics

How difficult is it to function when your energy level is low? How does low energy impact your mood? A lack of energy often accompanies low or depressed mood and while you may be dealing with difficult circumstances, there are basic factors you can address that have a positive impact on energy and overall functioning. If your sleep, diet, and/or exercise level is compromised, your energy level, ability to concentrate, and general functioning are likely to suffer as well. The following tips can help provide a healthy foundation and positive energy level.

### Sleep

How much energy do you have if you have not had adequate sleep? Do you think clearly? The connection between sleep and energy sounds obvious, yet sleep schedules are often disrupted in the lives of university students. The disruption may be due to a heavy workload - or to more enjoyable activities - but the result can still be a blow to your energy level and your ability to concentrate.

It is ironic that many students stay awake late (or pull “all-nighters”) to study, yet sleep deprivation will impair their retention and recall of material studied. Research indicates a consistent sleep pattern will contribute to restorative sleep and help to improve academic abilities, increase energy level, and contribute to a positive mood.

Most adults require 6 to 8 hours of sleep per night (although some function well with only 5 hours, and others require 9 or 10 hours). We tend to function best when we go to bed at the same time each night and rise at the same time each morning (including weekends), maintaining a natural biological rhythm.

### If you have trouble falling asleep:

Develop a **pre-sleep routine** that will signal your body and mind to slow down:

- Turn off or stop using back lit devices (e.g. cell phone, lap top, computer, tablets, tv) at least half an hour before bed. The exposure to light can disrupt sleep.
- Avoid substances that interfere with sleep, particularly caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol, at least four hours before you go to bed.
- Avoid vigorous exercise 3 to 4 hours before bedtime.
- If your mind wanders, or races, at bedtime, take a load off your mind by writing your thoughts in a journal about half an hour before going to bed.
- Have a warm bath or shower 90 minutes before sleep (**NOT** immediately before bed as we are likely to fall asleep as our body cools down).
- **DO NOT NAP** in the daytime.
- Reserve the bed for sex and sleep.
- It is usually best to have the bedroom **dark** and **quiet** (try earplugs if necessary). Some people sleep better with background noise. Do what works.
- A good quality mattress is important to obtain restful sleep.
- Focus on relaxing, not insisting you must fall asleep. Avoid feeling stressed about trying to fall asleep. Try to distract yourself with pleasant thoughts, or relaxation techniques (see page 71-73).
- Avoid checking the time. Keep your alarm clock out of sight.
- **If you cannot fall asleep within 20-30 minutes, GET UP** and do something relaxing. Avoid allowing your body to become conditioned to being awake while in bed. Return to bed when you feel as if you can fall asleep. Still get up at your usual time in the morning (even though you will be tired). You are more likely to fall asleep at your usual time the following evening.

## Diet

We all know our bodies need adequate fuel to survive and thrive. We pay a price for skipping meals, or overloading on unhealthy types of “fuel”.

Lifestyles at university are often quite different than those at home, and sometimes this has an impact on diet. Some students skip meals completely, others fill up on the most accessible fast foods. Without adequate nutrition, our bodies are challenged, we may feel unwell, have difficulty concentrating, and lack energy.

Fast foods like hamburgers and pizza, and treats such as chocolate and cookies, are fine occasionally, if you have a generally healthy diet. The healthiest food choices include a variety of food types, several times each day, depending on age and gender, as shown below:

NUMBER OF SERVINGS PER DAY		
FOOD CATEGORY	FEMALES (19 - 50 YEARS)	MALES (19 - 50 YEARS)
Vegetables and Fruit	7 - 8	8 - 10
Grain Products	6 - 7	8
Milk and Alternatives	2	2
Meat and Alternatives	2	3

(Source: Health Canada; see page 66)

For detailed information about food groups, serving sizes, grocery shopping, preparing foods, eating out, and eating well despite a ridiculously busy lifestyle, see:

SERVICE	WEBSITE
Health Canada	<a href="http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/indexeng.php">http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/indexeng.php</a>
EatRight Ontario	<a href="https://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Adolescentsteengers/University-life-and-healthy-eating-%E2%80%93-Can-these-two-co-exist.aspx">https://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Adolescentsteengers/University-life-and-healthy-eating-%E2%80%93-Can-these-two-co-exist.aspx</a>

## Healthy Eating Tips

- DO NOT SKIP BREAKFAST - eat within an hour of waking up
- Aim for 3 meals + snacks every day
- Drink a full glass of water with every meal and several times through the day
- Have water, real fruit or vegetable juice, or milk, instead of pop
- Choose whole wheat over white bread
- Choose a baked potato, salad, or fruit, instead of fries
- Limit caffeine intake (especially 4 hours before bed)
- Select healthier choices In the cafeteria

## Quick and Easy Snacks

- Fresh fruit, such as, an apple, banana, pear, grapes
- Individual fruit cups (with light syrup )
- Fruit or vegetable juice boxes
- Dried fruit, such as, raisins, apricots, apple pieces, banana slices
- Raw veggies, such as, baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, celery sticks
- Trail mix (premixed bag or make your own at the grocery store in the ARC (Athletics and Recreation Centre))
- Nuts and seeds, such as, almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds
- Whole grain crackers or bagel with peanut butter
- High-fibre granola bar
- Whole grain muffin
- String or sliced cheese
- Unbuttered popcorn
- Yogurt
- Carry a personal water bottle for free fill-ups around campus

## Grocery Shopping Tips

- Plan to go grocery shopping about once per week (fresh produce will expire in about a week).
- Plan your meals and snacks for the coming week.
- Keep a running list through the week of items you run out of, and before you go shopping, add to the list the items you will need for your meals and snacks for the week.
- Eat before shopping! (Helps to reduce impulse purchases!)
- Basics first – shop the store perimeter first for items from the main food groups: fruits and vegetables, milk and alternatives, meat and alternatives, and grain products. Shop from the aisles (canned and packaged foods) only for specific items on your shopping list.

## Healthy Options On Campus

- Wholesome fresh foods, such as fruit, yogurt, trail mix, etc.
- Pitas
- Salads
- Sandwiches
- Breakfast
- Healthy options
- Gourmet grilled paninis
- Soups
- Signature salads
- Salad
- Sandwich
- Soup
- Smoothie
- Muffin
- Bagel or toast

## Exercise

How healthy would you feel if you remained stationary all day, every day? How much energy would you have? What would happen if you were vigorously physically active every waking moment? We all know we need to find a healthy balance between these extremes, but we often overlook the importance of this, especially when we become busy or stressed. Too often we feel as if we don't have time for exercise, or, conversely, some people exercise to an extreme in an effort to reduce stress. Neither is very effective.

Once again, it is ironic that students often feel they do not have time to exercise, while it is exercise that will increase energy, strength and endurance. Appropriate exercise is also one of the most effective methods we can use to relieve tension, stress, or anxiety, it helps to maintain clarity and concentration, and causes the release of endorphins – natural mood enhancers. Even brief (e.g, 10 – 15 minutes), regular periods (several times per week) of exercise can produce these benefits. Canadian physical activity guidelines for adults ages 18 to 64 recommend 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise per week, in periods of 10 minutes or more (ParticipACTION Canada website, see below). That is just 2-1/2 hours, out of 168 hours, in a week. Just 2.5% of your total time over one week. Less than 22 minutes a day – and that can be split into two 10 minute sessions!

A 10 minute run or brisk walk – even jumping jacks in your room – as a brief study break, instead of Facebook or coffee, is more likely to increase energy, concentration, and productivity!

There are numerous ways to enjoy getting exercise – alone or in groups, inside or out. Try to spend 30 – 60 minutes, 2 or 3 times a week, being physically active while doing something you enjoy. Browse through the many options offered on the following websites:

# Be More Active!

## On your way to class

- Walk or cycle to class
- Take a scenic route to spend more time walking/biking
- Take the stairs
- Walk up and down several flights of stairs (try this in the ARC or the JDUC)

## In class

- Do ankle rolls
- Flex your calf or thigh muscles (hold for 15 seconds, then release, repeat 5 times)

## While sitting at a desk

- Sit up tall in your seat. Contract your abs and lift one foot off the floor (maintaining a 90-degree angle with your knee). Hold for 10 seconds and then slowly relax. Repeat with the opposite foot; do five sets.
- Sit up tall in your seat. Turn your torso to one side slowly, and then return to centre. Repeat on the other side. Do this ten times for each side; do three sets.
- Stand up! Walk around while you read and memorize material. Stand up and use a tall counter, filing cabinet or bookshelf as your writing surface.

## While waiting for something to cook

- Do lunges or yoga poses
- Use soup cans as weights and do bicep curls
- Do jumping jacks, squats, sit-ups or push-ups

## While watching TV

- Every commercial break, see how many jumping jacks, squats, sit-ups or push-ups you can do before the show comes back on
- Make a game with housemates/friends: Every time a character says their catch phrase, everyone does 10 sit-ups/push-ups/lunges ..... be creative!

## Instead of TV

- Walk, run, cycle, toss a Frisbee, kick a ball, play catch, go swimming, play tennis, dance, do yoga.... use your imagination....check out the websites above

# Relaxation Strategies

## Breathing Techniques

Breathing techniques are one of the most effective methods to calm yourself, they require no special equipment, and they are absolutely free! When we are stressed or anxious, we tend to take shallow breaths, which can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety such as increased heart rate, and feelings of dizziness or light-headedness. Slow, deep breathing increases the amount of oxygen circulating through our body, which helps to produce a calming effect. There are numerous ways to practice deep breathing exercises – pick the one that works best for you. A very simple example is shown below.

### Just Remember: 4 - 4 - 8

1. Take a slow deep breath in through your nose to the count of 4
2. Hold for 4 seconds
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth to the count of 8
4. Wait a few seconds before taking another breath

#### Try this for at least five minutes twice a day

The key to effectiveness is **PRACTISE**. With practise your body becomes conditioned to automatically relax when you start to take slow, deep breaths. For this reason, it is best to practise often, at least once or twice per day – even for just 5 minutes. If you enjoy the relaxing sensation, indulge in longer periods when possible. Incorporate this breathing technique throughout your day by selecting cues to remind yourself to take one or two good slow, deep breaths, as you go about your usual routine. For example, every time your cell phone rings, every time you check the time, every time you stand up....use your imagination to think of cues and start working toward a calmer state of being.

**Select cues to remind yourself to take 1 or 2 slow deep breaths every time: your cell phone rings, you sit down, you turn on a light switch. Be creative....!**

Look for free apps to guide you through deep breathing techniques

# Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation provides a method to achieve a deeply relaxed state. When stress or anxiety seems to be a way of life, we can forget what a relaxed state feels like. The following relaxation strategy will help you to recognize the difference between tension and relaxation in various muscle groups, and help to train you how to relax your body.

Again, the key to effectiveness is PRACTISE. With practise you will: become more aware of tense versus relaxed states, be able to recognize this through your day, and be able to make adjustments to help relax. Practise will lead to this becoming an automatic process that will help avoid high levels of tension in your body. Try to practise at least 20 minutes per day – this is an ideal technique to use just before, or once you climb into bed.

The process is simple: tense one muscle group at a time, hold for about 10 seconds (count slowly!) and notice the increase in tension in that area. Release the tensed muscles abruptly and allow yourself to relax as deeply as possible for about 20 seconds. Continue with the next muscle group. See the following page for guidelines.

## Notice the difference between feelings of tension and relaxation

Look for free apps to guide you through muscle relaxation techniques

### How to do Muscle Relaxation:

Sit or lay in a quiet, comfortable place. Close your eyes and notice how your body feels – stay focused on physical sensations. Tense each area tightly for about 10 seconds, then release and relax for about 20 seconds. Start with your feet and systematically move slowly up your body:

#### Feet

- curl your toes downward

#### Legs and Feet

- pull toes toward you to tighten calf muscles
- push toes away from you (thighs relaxed)
- push toes away from you and tighten thighs

#### Buttocks

- pull buttocks together to tighten

#### Stomach

- suck your stomach in to tighten

#### Chest

- take in a deep breath to tighten

#### Hands

- clench fists tightly

#### Arms

- raise forearm toward shoulder, clench fists, and “make a muscle”
- straighten arms and lock your elbows tightly

#### Neck and Shoulders

- raise your shoulders toward your ears

#### Mouth and Jaw

- open your mouth as wide as possible
- clench your jaw

#### Eyes

- shut your eyelids and clench tightly

#### Forehead

- raise your eyebrows as far as possible
- clench your eyebrows tightly

#### Finally:

- **Tense Entire Body**
- **Relax Entire Body**

Breath deeply, slowly, for several minutes and enjoy the sensation of relaxation!

# Appendix B

## Worksheets

All worksheets used throughout the workbook have been reproduced here for easy downloading, printing or copying.

# WORKSHEET 1.1

What do you want to change?

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---

---

---

---

---

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# WORKSHEET 1.2

## Are Your Demands and Resources Balanced?

List your demands and resources below to evaluate whether your demands are exceeding your resources.

Demands	Resources
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



The following Chapter presents case studies depicting typical challenges faced by university students. Demands and Resources will be identified for each of these case studies at the end of Chapter 3.

# WORKSHEET 3.1

## Record Your Thoughts

Think of a time when you felt happy and try to remember specifically what you were thinking. List as many thoughts as you can remember.

I thought:

---

---

---

Circle the thought that influenced your mood the most.

Was this thought (circle all that apply):

Accurate

Inaccurate

Helpful

Neutral

Harmful

Think of a time when you felt **sad** or **depressed** and try to remember what you were thinking. List as many thoughts as you can remember.

I thought:

---

---

---

Circle the thought that influenced your mood the most.

Was this thought (circle all that apply):

Accurate

Inaccurate

Helpful

Neutral

Harmful

# WORKSHEET 3.2

## Record Your Behaviours

Can you think of a time when your behaviour impacted your mood?

---

---

---

Can you think of a time when your mood influenced your behaviour?

---

---

---

When people are depressed they often want to stay in bed and avoid the day. When we feel low we need to work harder to get up and get motivated.

The following behaviours are often seen in people with low mood and/or depression:

- Reduced social activity or work
- Reduced activity level
- Poor self-care
- Changes in sleep, diet and exercise

# WORKSHEET 3.3

## Record Your Physical Feelings

Think about a time when something good happened and you were happy! How did you feel physically?

---

---

---

Think about a time when you felt sad or depressed. How did you feel physically?

---

---

---

# WORKSHEET 3.4a

## Connect Your Mood

Think of a time when you felt happy, and list your:

Situation

---

---

Thoughts

---

---

Behaviours

---

---

Physical state

---

---

# WORKSHEET 3.4b

## Connect Your Mood

Now, think of a time when you felt sad or depressed, and list your:

Situation

---

---

Thoughts

---

---

Behaviours

---

---

Physical state

---

---

# WORKSHEET 3.4c

## Connect Your Mood

It is helpful to be able to identify your mood. Take a look at the list below and see which moods you identify with right now. Are there others you could add to this list?

### Moods

- Happy
- Sad
- Cheerful
- Unhappy
- Cranky
- Content
- Frustrated
- Irritable
- Miserable
- Angry
- Enthused
- Fearful
- Worried
- Nervous
- Elated
- Joyful
- Sorrowful
- Gloomy
- Excited
- Devastated

Right now I feel \_\_\_\_\_

Now list your:

Situation

---

---

Thoughts

---

---

Behaviours

---

---

Physical state

---

---

# WORKSHEET 4.1

## Back to Basics

If you are feeling off track, answer the following questions:

How much sleep are you getting? Do you have trouble falling asleep? Are you waking often during the night?

---

---

What are you eating? Are you eating too little or too much? Are you enjoying food the way you would normally?

---

---

Are you exercising? Are you getting too much or too little exercise? Is your current level of exercise typical for you?

---

---

# WORKSHEET 4.2

## Pleasant Activities

### Free

- Reading a book
- Lunch alone
- Lunch with a friend
- Window shopping
- Walking by the lake
- Going for a walk
- Watching TV
- Skyping
- Sex (safe sex ☺)
- Riding a bike
- Doodling
- Singing
- Listening to music
- Running
- Playing an instrument
- Journaling
- Hiking
- Playing a board game
- Yoga at home
- Cleaning
- Dancing
- Picnic
- Playing cards
- Thinking about the future

### Involve some expense

- Going to the movies
- Knitting baking
- Going out for a meal
- Stream videos
- Photography
- Going out for coffee
- Buying a new book
- Bowling
- Paint ball
- Cooking
- Cooking with a friend
- Yoga class
- Fishing
- Skating

### My own ideas

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

# WORKSHEET 4.3

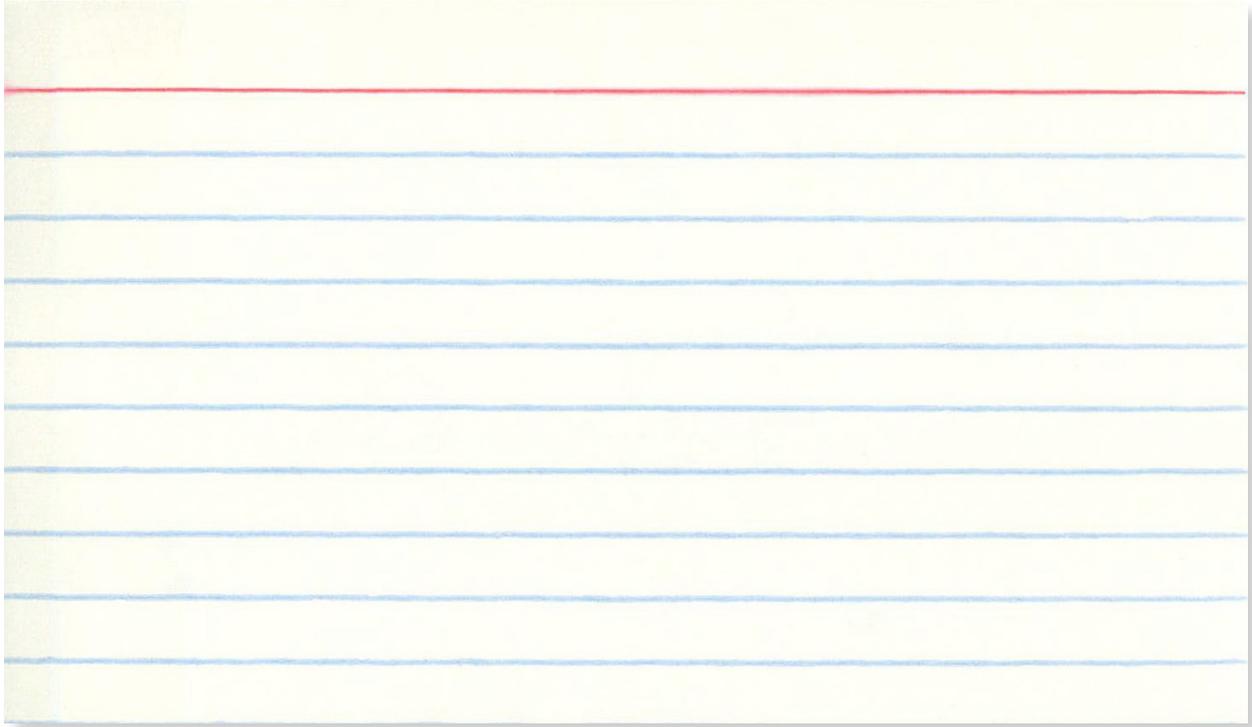
## Daily Activity Schedule

Fill out this blank schedule for your day tomorrow (remember small attainable goals!)

TIME	PLANNED ACTIVITY
6:30 - 7:30am	
7:30 - 8:30am	
8:30 - 9:30am	
9:30 - 10:30am	
10:30 - 11:30am	
11:30 - 12:30pm	
12:30 - 1:30pm	
1:30 - 2:30pm	
2:30 - 3:30pm	
3:30 - 4:30pm	
4:30 - 5:30pm	
5:30 - 6:30pm	
6:30 - 7:30pm	
7:30 - 8:30pm	
8:30 - 9:30pm	
9:30 - 10:30pm	
10:30 - 11:30pm	

# WORKSHEET 4.5

## Coping Cards





# WORKSHEET 6.1

## Planning Ahead

DIFFICULT TIMES	COPING STRATEGIES



**Algonquin College Counselling Services**

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