Stress Reduction Module #5:

Building a Better Foundation for Stress Management, Part 1

### Stakeholder Sign Off

| **Name** | **Role\*** | **Initials** | **Date** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [Heather Muszynski](mailto:heather@kuarahealth.com) | Author | HM | 09.23.24 |
| Mollie Ewing | Approver | ME | 11.3.24 |
|  |  |  |  |

**\*\*Roles**: Approver, Reviewer, Author

### Version Update Management

| **Editor Name** | **Purpose of Revision(s)** | **Stakeholder(s) Notified?** | **Date** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

By the end of this module, you should have a clear understanding of:

##### The importance of consistency in habit formation

* Strategies that support building effective habits
* How aligning our energy levels with task management helps
* Why self-care isn’t just a buzzword

#### **Introduction**

Welcome to Module #5! In this module, we’ll explore the elements of stress management that make for a strong foundation– building healthy habits and effective routines. By learning how to establish consistency in your life, you’ll set the stage for long-term stress reduction. Let’s get started!

### **The Importance of Consistency in Habit Formation**

**Why Consistency Matters**

Building healthy habits isn’t just about making changes; it’s about making them stick. Consistency creates a framework of stability, reducing uncertainty and stress. When you know what to expect, you can navigate your day with greater ease and confidence.

**Recognizing Personal Barriers**

It’s common to face challenges when trying to establish a routine. Maybe you have a hectic family schedule, your work life is unpredictable, or you’re frequently traveling. Take a moment to reflect: what stands in your way? Identifying these barriers is the first step in overcoming them.

**Here’s an example from [ ] at Kuara:**

**[EXPANDED OPTION] Common Barriers**

* **Time Constraints**: Work or family obligations may disrupt your routine.
* **Motivation**: Initial enthusiasm can fade, especially when facing obstacles.
* **Environmental Factors**: External distractions or a lack of support from friends, family, or coworkers can hinder progress.

### **Strategies for Building Healthy Habits**

**The Habit Formation Process**

Charles Duhigg, author of “The Power of Habit,” described three key steps for creating a “habit loop”: cue, routine, and reward. This cycle helps solidify a habit in your daily life.

**[EXPANDED OPTION] Cue, Routine, and Reward**

* **Cue:** Identify a signal that reminds you to perform the habit (e.g., a specific time of day, a location, another action, or emotion etc.)
* **Routine**: Establish the behavior (habit) you want to integrate into your life.
* **Reward**: Reinforce the habit by rewarding yourself after completing it. Rewards can be internal or external, tangible or intangible, immediate or delayed.

**Here’s an example from Heather at Kuara:**

*“Every day, I set an alarm for the end of my workday, based on my schedule that day, ensuring it’s before sunset. When the alarm goes off, it’s my cue to pause my work, get ready, and go for a short hike. I reward myself by listening to my favorite podcasts during the hike.”*

**Experimentation is Key**

Not every strategy works for everyone, so it's essential to experiment. For instance, if you don’t have time to fit in a workout, consider taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Don’t be afraid to tweak your methods if something isn’t working– keep adjusting your methods until you find what consistently works for ***you***!

### **Effective Time Management Techniques**

**Enhancing Productivity and Reducing Stress**

Effective time management is essential for creating balance. Here are some popular techniques you can try:

* **Time Blocking:** Allocate specific periods during your day for different activities. This creates a structured schedule that minimizes distractions. *Example:* Reserve mornings for deep work and afternoons for meetings or emails.
* **Task Batching:** Group similar tasks to streamline your workflow, reducing the mental load of switching tasks.
* **Pomodoro Method:** Work in focused bursts (typically 25 minutes), followed by a 5-minute break. After four “Pomodoros,” take a longer break to help maintain focus and prevent burnout.

**Prioritizing Tasks**

Try different techniques, such as the Eisenhower Matrix, which categorizes tasks based on urgency and importance, to help you prioritize effectively and reduce decision fatigue.

**[EXPANDED OPTION] The Eisenhower Matrix**

* **Urgent and Important:** Do these tasks first.
* **Important but Not Urgent:** Schedule these tasks.
* **Urgent but Not Important:** Delegate if possible.
* **Neither Urgent nor Important:** Eliminate or minimize these tasks.

**Align Your Energy Levels with Task Management**

Recognizing your natural energy patterns can enhance your productivity. Take note of when you feel most alert and when your energy dips. Align challenging tasks with your peak energy times.

**Example:** If you feel most energized in the morning, tackle high-concentration work then and leave easier tasks for later.

**Integrating Stress-Busting Activities**

To combat stress, incorporate short breaks or activities that refresh you throughout your day. This could be a quick walk, meditation, or listening to music. Moments of self-care like these are essential for maintaining your energy levels and efficiency.

**Example:** If you tend to feel sluggish in the afternoon, schedule a 10-minute break to dance to your favorite song. This can boost your mood and productivity.

**Self-Care and Leisure Activities**

**The Role of Self-Care**

Self-care isn’t selfish; it’s necessary! You cannot pour from an empty cup. Make time for activities that bring you joy and relaxation, whether it’s reading, gardening, or spending time with friends. These moments will refill your cup, helping you to recharge and better manage stress.

**Stress-Reducing Activities**

Think about what activities calm you. Maybe it’s yoga, creative writing, or painting. Make these activities part of your daily or weekly routine to support overall well-being.

#### **Conclusion**

By focusing on consistency, effective time management, and healthy habits, you’re laying a strong foundation for managing stress. Remember, it’s about finding what works for you and adapting as needed. Keep experimenting, and enjoy the journey toward a more balanced life!

## Module #5: Activities and Exercises

### **Activity: Energy Level Self-Assessment**

**Objective:** Develop a clear understanding of your personal energy patterns.

**Instructions:**

* Throughout the upcoming week, as you continue to log your stress levels, also note what your energy levels through the day were (morning, afternoon, evening), as well as what tasks you were engaged in during each period.
* At the end of the week, take 5 minutes to review and reflect on what your peak energy times were. How might you use this information to begin to make changes in your routine?

### **Activity: Cultivating Calming Habits**

**Objective:** Incorporate new habits into your daily or weekly routine that promote relaxation and help reduce stress.

**Instructions:**

* Identify Relaxation Habits– Reflect on your “Stress-Free Moments Scavenger Hunt.” Consider the activities or environments that helped you feel relaxed and content.
* Choose one new habit you’d like to integrate into your routine. It might be tempting to start more than one new habit at a time, but focusing on one will improve your chances of success.
* Look at your weekly schedule and identify a specific time(s) when you can incorporate this habit. Aim for at least twice a week, at least to start.
* Identify any additional cues that you might use to help you integrate this new behavior.
  + Identify one physical cue (an object or place) and one behavioral cue (an action or part of your routine) that can help you remember and stick to this habit.
  + Write down your cues and how you plan to use them.
  + An example of a physical cue is "I will place my meditation cushion next to my bed so I see it in the morning." An example of a behavioral cue is “I will put my hand on my chest whenever I start to feel my heart rate increasing.”

**Reflection:**

* How did incorporating this new activity impact your stress levels?
* Your overall mood?
* Going forward, are there any modifications or changes you’d make, based on your experience?