



# Healthy Dancer Canada

The Dance Health Alliance of Canada

## 10 STRESS MANAGEMENT TOOLS FOR YOUR DANCE BAG

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Our internal dialogue can often be a running commentary full of judgements. “Shoulds” and self-defeating thoughts can be the greatest source of stress. What we tell ourselves and how we perceive stress creates our experience of stress. To deal with mental stress, one must recognize the stressful thoughts, release them, and replace them with positive and accurate thoughts. One simple yet effective way to manage anxious feelings is to use the breath. Take 1 to 2 very slow, deep breaths into the abdomen to the count of 1-2-3-4, hold for 1-2, and breathe out 1-2-3-4. This will elicit a relaxation response that counteracts the physical symptoms, and produces a relaxation response in the brain. It may be necessary to repeat the breathing cycle a few times, with regular breathing cycles in between, to achieve an adequate response. It is important to breathe evenly and slowly. If you feel yourself getting lightheaded, slow your breathing down even more.

Mind calming breath can also effectively reduce anxiety. Place the middle finger of your right hand on the point between your eyebrows and apply gentle pressure for 10 seconds. Place the thumb of that same hand on your right nostril and inhale slowly and deeply into your lower abdomen through the left nostril. Imagine bringing your breath to the 3rd eye point. Now close off the left nostril with your ring finger and hold your breath for 4 counts. Release your thumb and exhale through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril again, close it with your thumb and pause for 4 counts. Release the ring finger to exhale through the left nostril. Try repeating the breathing exercises until you feel more at ease.

Below is a list of other weightless stress reducing tools you can try – carry them with you in your dance bag and dance through life!

### ***Dealing with your Thoughts***

#### **1. Gaining Awareness**

Identify your stressors:

- What are the things that cause you stress? Include both external and self-generated causes. Write them down.

Ask yourself:

- How do I know I am stressed? What happens to my body? How do I feel?
- What happens to my thoughts?
- How do I deal and not deal with stress?
- What has been working?

- What has not been working?

## **2. Letting It Go Exercise**

Write down all the things that stress you and the negative feelings and thoughts associated with them. When you feel complete let it go. Make it physical: rip up the paper, burn it, crumple it up and throw it away, or walk away from it. Notice the changes in your body, mind, and emotions.

## **3. Thought-Watching**

Sit quietly without distraction.

Simply watch your thoughts.

Notice “Mental Traps” (any unnecessary thought or mental work).

## **4. Transform Worries into Solutions**

Set aside time for worries. Write down your concerns, thoughts and feelings. Dwell and reflect.

Identify the problem.

At the end of your session, write down an answer to the question: What is the solution?

Now set the problem aside and do something relaxing that you enjoy!

Schedule repeat sessions until your worries are solved.

## **5. Changing your Thoughts**

Look at your thoughts with curiosity like you are examining an object, not a factual statement.

Ask yourself: Are they true? Do they help or hinder?

Thought Changing Exercises:

- Divide a paper with a line down the middle. On one side, write down evidence that your thought is true. On the other side, write down evidence that your thought is false. This helps you find another way of looking at things.
- When you notice yourself thinking or making anxious or self-sabotaging thoughts, immediately ask yourself to, “Pause” and “Change the Channel.” Replace the negative thoughts with positive, respectful inner dialogue. Notice your emotional and mental shift.

For example: “I’ll probably blow this audition.” Ask yourself to, “Pause” and “Change the Channel” to: “I’m going to give it my best no matter what. I’m not afraid to try.”

## **Relaxation Tools**

### **6. Relax your Stress Triangle (Neck and Shoulders)**

Gently and slowly roll your neck in an oval. Bring your right ear to your right shoulder then roll your chin to your chest; continue bringing the left ear to your left shoulder and then gently lift your nose to trace a rainbow as you bring the right ear to shoulder again. Continue until the movement feels smooth.

Shrug your shoulders, squeezing up, then breathe out and release them down.

Roll your spine forward and back up, vertebra by vertebra.

Stretch your mouth open as wide as you can and stick out your tongue at stress and make a sound as you let out a deep breath. Imagine you are a lion roaring.

### **7. Relaxation Response (Progressive Muscle Relaxation)**

Lie down on a comfortable surface and close your eyes. Breathe deeply, slowly and fully.

Contract the muscles of your feet. Hold. Release. *\*Remember to continue breathing during this.*

Do the same thing with your legs, hips, belly, and the rest of your body to the top of your head.

When you have squeezed and released every segment of your body, squeeze all your muscles at once. Hold. Release. Let your whole body sigh. Relax and rest.

### **8. Constructive Rest, Constructive Rest Position**

Lie on the floor with your knees bent and your arms resting at shoulder height.

Bend your arms – elbows at 90 degrees, fingers pointing up toward your head.

Breathe deeply with minimal effort, allowing your abdomen to rise and fall.

*\*\* For more benefit, try placing rolled towel lengthwise under your sacrum and along your spine to the middle of your upper back during constructive rest.*

### **9. Brush Away Stress**

Physically brush away your reaction to stress! Gently stroke down your arms, shoulders, neck, legs, or wherever you are feeling tense with the intention of brushing away both the physical tension and any worries or feelings of anxiety.

### **10. Meditate**

Focus on your breath as a meditation. Use creative visualization that engages all of your senses to let go of stress. For example: See a beautiful sky, feel and hear the breeze, see the white fluffy clouds gently floating by; then you can send your stress into the clouds and let it be carried away!

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