



# reCAPS

**Counseling & Psychological Services**  
**University of California, Santa Cruz**

## Yoga for Mental Health

Yoga has been popular in the United States for decades. Many yoga practitioners note that it is not just good for balance, flexibility, and strength—it can also help relieve stress and improve mood. A number of studies suggest that this is true.

Research on a wide range of yoga practices suggests that yoga can reduce the impact of exaggerated stress responses and may be helpful for people with anxiety or depression. By helping to reduce stress, yoga may also help regulate pain, as lower stress makes people less sensitive to and affected by pain. Some studies also show that yoga can be effective in reducing the

symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. One reason that yoga is effective in combatting anxiety and depression is that most yoga practices include controlled breathing and can improve mindfulness and focus.

The style and pace of yoga classes varies from slow and relaxing to active and energizing. Most yoga practices combine asanas (poses) with attention to breathing. Often, a short meditation or resting pose is done at the end of a class as a way to relax and let the benefits of the practice sink in.

If you're new to yoga, taking a class can be helpful, so you can learn the proper form from a live

teacher to prevent injury and maximize your experience. There are many yoga studios in Santa Cruz, some of which offer what they call “community” classes—classes that are low cost or donation based (“pay what you can”). Some studios give discounts when you buy bundles of classes, and others may offer a free introductory class. Services like Groupon or Living Social may offer deals for yoga classes. With a little Internet research, you can find many good options locally or in your home town if you are leaving Santa Cruz for the summer or graduating.

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### All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year 'round:

- Helpful workshops and trainings around campus
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Brief individual and couples counseling
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services (in person Mon-Fri 8 am-5 pm; by phone 24/7 at 831-459-2628)

To make an appointment, call 831-459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!



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If you've done yoga before and know the basics, you can find some great DVDs and online yoga videos (such as on YouTube) so that you can practice on your own. For example, check out this short video on [yoga for stress relief](#) (which is also posted on the CAPS website [self-help page](#)). More experienced yogis and yoginis can even do yoga asanas from memory without needing a

class or video to follow. As when contemplating starting any new form of exercise, talk to a medical professional if you have any health conditions that could be exacerbated by yoga.

To read more about the research proving yoga's benefits, check out [this article](#) in the *Harvard Mental Health Letter*.



## Dear CAPS,

*I'm stressed about finals. How can I be prepared and feel less anxious?*

—Stressed About Tests

Most people don't love exams. They can be stressful, but there is a lot you can do to prepare and better manage any test-related anxiety.

### Starting Now

1. Start preparing early. Giving yourself enough time to review and study is important.
2. Consider studying with a friend or a study group.
3. Don't wait until the last minute to get help if you don't understand some of the material.

### On Exam Day

1. Be awake and alert—try to get good sleep the night before. (Of course, this means you studied

ahead of time and didn't stay up all night cramming!)

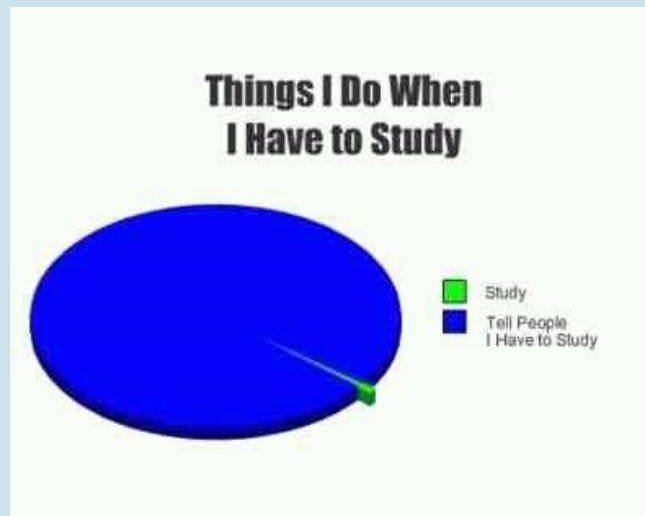
2. Eat a small but nutritious breakfast. Complex carbs (e.g., whole grain toast) and protein

4. Bring exam aids if allowed (e.g., calculator, notes); bring other stuff you might need, like tissues, cough drops, or water.

5. Visualize yourself doing really well on the exam. The mind is powerful—imagining a good outcome can actually improve your performance and confidence.

6. Be aware of the time allotted for the exam, and pace yourself accordingly. Read through the whole exam (especially the instructions!) before you start.

7. If you are feeling very anxious during the exam, take some slow, deep breaths. Attempt to talk back to or reframe any negative thoughts when they come up.



(e.g., milk, nuts, cheese, yogurt, soy, eggs, peanut butter) can give you the energy you need to focus during the test.

3. Avoid talking to stressed-out/stressful people before the exam. Listening to someone

## Wellness Tip: Sing Your Stress Away

Feeling stressed out? Try singing! Studies show that singing has positive psychological effects. The act of singing releases endorphins, the brain's feel-good chemicals. Goofing around with friends while singing brings the benefit of laughter and bonding as well as the physiological benefits of the singing itself. Singing in front of a crowd (e.g., karaoke) can build confidence, which has broad and long-lasting effects on general well-being.

Here are a few ideas to help you get your song on. Some come from research, and others are just things

that students have said help them blow off steam.

1. Create a playlist of your favorite songs and sing along. If this bothers your roommates, try singing while walking or running outside, in the shower, or in the car.
2. Download the Songify app, which turns spoken words into tunes, and make your worries into silly songs. Mental health experts have found that singing your anxious thoughts out loud can take away some of their

power. Read more about it [here](#).

3. Get some friends together for karaoke. There are places in Santa Cruz that have karaoke (Google it!), or you can download an app and organize a karaoke party yourself.
4. If you or your friends play instruments, get a band together. Whether it's just jamming for fun or you want to take your act on the road, making music can be a great way to express yourself and relax together.



## Common “Mistakes” in Managing Anxiety

Most people experience anxiety from time to time. While your level of anxiety may vary, chances are you try to find ways to avoid, minimize, and cope with anxiety. Some of these strategies work better than others, and even the most helpful strategies may not work all the time. However, knowing about some common “mistakes,” or less helpful ways, for dealing with anxiety can help free you up to try things that may be more effective.

Here are some of the most common maladaptive strategies for anxiety:

1. Being inactive. Anxiety can sap your energy and make it tempting to isolate yourself and/or lie on the couch to try and de-stress. However, getting physical exercise, being social, and doing things you enjoy will be better for your stress levels in the long run than doing nothing.
2. Letting your anxious thoughts run rampant. Yes, it's hard to

learn to control anxious thoughts. But it is possible. Therapy can help, and there are some good self-help websites, books, and programs out there to teach you how. Just recognizing that allowing yourself to worry when it's not leading to a solution or relief is a good first step in learning to control anxious thoughts.

3. Listening to sad or “mopey” music. Some people like to seek

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- out music that “matches” or even amplifies a bad or stressed-out mood, but this can be counterproductive. Listening to happier or inspiring music is often a better strategy. So is singing. (See the Wellness Tip box on p. 3.)
4. Spending time with anxious or negative people. While being social can be helpful in managing anxiety and bad moods, hanging with people who are constantly expressing worry and anxiety, complaining, or being critical of themselves and others can feed your anxiety. Try to spend time with positive and calm people, or if you are able to change the tone of a social gathering from negative to positive, that can also help.
  5. Relying on substances instead of using coping tools like therapy, exercise, relaxation, and self-reflection. Recreational drugs and alcohol may temporarily mask anxiety, but often, they can make it worse in the long run because of their physiological effects and because they may prevent you from trying to use other, more helpful, strategies. Prescription anxiety medications like Xanax, Valium, and Ativan are not sustainable anxiety treatments. They are meant to be taken rarely and for short periods of time because they are addictive and can cause increased anxiety during withdrawal. For those who may need medication, some antidepressants, which are nonaddictive, may help reduce anxiety with fewer side effects and risks. There are also some herbal remedies that may help and be safer than anxiety meds. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for suggestions. Meds are typically most helpful when combined with therapy and positive lifestyle changes.
  6. Giving up on a potentially useful strategy if it doesn't help right away. It can take time to get used to a new habit or see progress, so be sure to try a new strategy long enough to give it a chance. And, managing anxiety doesn't mean eliminating it. Unfortunately, it's not realistic to strive for never being anxious; however, anxiety can be reduced and coped with!



## Upcoming Events

**STRESS LESS WORKSHOPS:** These 90-minute workshops, led by CAPS' peer educators, provide valuable tips on stress management and include an interactive and fun relaxation exercise. Free, and no sign-up required. Several workshops are being held at CAPS this month! Check our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page or call CAPS at 831-459-2628 for the latest info on when and where workshops will be held.

**LET'S TALK:** Drop in to have a brief, confidential chat with a CAPS counselor. Let's Talk is held 2:00 to 4:00 pm Tuesdays at the Cantu Center, 12:30 to 2:30 pm Wednesdays at the Graduate Student Commons, Room 208, and 1 to 2 pm Thursdays at the Cove recovery space at Kresge (Building 393, Suite 153). All registered UCSC students are welcome at all locations of Let's Talk. The last Let's Talk times of the academic year will be held the week before finals. Let's Talk is not set up to handle crises—if you are experiencing a mental health crisis, go to the CAPS main office during business hours or call CAPS at 831-459-2628 any time. Read more on our [website](#).