



Get Gritty

Build Resilience | Manage Stress

2019 Get Gritty 10-Day Challenge Recap

The Get Gritty challenge was designed to help individuals improve resilience and develop ways to better manage stress over 10 weekdays.

What is resilience?

Resilience or resiliency is the process of adapting in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress... it means bouncing back from difficult experiences. Some tenets of resiliency include:

- B** Bad times don't last, and things get better.
- O** Other people can only help if you share with them.
- U** Unhelpful thinking only makes you feel worse.
- N** Nobody is perfect – not you, not your friends, not your family.
- C** Concentrate on the good things in life, no matter how small.
- E** Everybody suffers, feels pain and has setbacks; they are a normal part of life.

- B** Blame fairly. Negative events are often a combination of things you did, others did, and plain bad luck.
- A** Accept what you can't change and try to change what you can.
- C** Catastrophizing makes things worse. Don't assume the worst.
- K** Keep things in perspective. Even the worst moment is but one moment in life.

Being resilient doesn't mean that you don't experience difficulty or stress. It means you are better equipped to adapt and overcome difficulty or stress.

Day 1: Developing an Attitude of Gratitude

Developing gratitude reminds you of the good things, both big and small, even in the midst of adversity. Practicing gratitude helps you focus on the present and appreciate what you have now, rather than wanting more. Feeling, expressing, and practicing gratitude turns our mental focus to the positive and helps us feel happier, optimistic, and creates a cycle of positive thinking and behavior.

Activity

- Write down things that make you happy on a small piece of paper
- Place it into an empty jar
- Place the jar on a desk or bedside table
- When you need a "lift," take out one or multiple pieces of paper to remind yourself what you are grateful for

Gratitude is not all about the self! Showing gratitude to others or practicing random acts of kindness is a great way to promote happiness, and improve resilience. Looking for ways to do this?

Gratitude Cards: Print and cut these [gratitude cards](#) to send a note of appreciation to people in your department!

Random Acts of Kindness (RAK): Use this [RAK guide](#) to get to know what people in your department would appreciate. Then use the information to surprise someone with a random act of kindness. One act of kindness can start a chain reaction, creating a whole department that is full of kindness, appreciation, and positivity.

Below are other simple ways you can perform random acts of kindness for the people in your lives:

- Pay it backward: buy coffee for the person behind you in line
- Tip your barista for making your coffee with love
- Surprise a neighbor with freshly baked cookies or treats
- Write a kind message on your mirror with a dry erase marker for yourself, your significant other or a family member
- Post inspirational sticky notes around your neighborhood, office, school, etc.
- Leave a kind server the biggest tip you can afford

Journal Prompts

- List three things that you are grateful for.
 - List five people that you are thankful for.
 - In a few sentences, describe the best part of your day.
 - List and describe three challenges you are currently facing. Think about how these challenges could be potentially worse and express your gratitude that things are not worse. Now think about how you can learn and grow from these challenges.
 - How can I show more gratitude for people in my life?
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Day 2: Self-Compassion + Self-Care

Self-compassion allows you to look at your own mistakes and shortcomings with kindness and understanding. Self-compassion is embracing that we are all human and reminding ourselves that there is no need to defensively focus on only our positive qualities to protect our ego. Practicing self-compassion can lead to higher levels of personal well-being, optimism, happiness, as well as less anxiety and depression.

Practicing self-care is the act of taking time to do things that are meaningful to you and allow your body and mind to recharge. Self-care can build compassion for yourself, which in turns helps with stress management and building resilience.

Activity

Self-Compassion:

Use pen and paper or [this website](#) to write a letter to yourself to open after this challenge, a month from now, a year, or even five years from now. Fill it with positive affirmations and appreciation for the person you are. When it's time to open it up, your future self will thank you.

Self-Care:

Take time out to practice self-care today. Do these activities intentionally and meaningfully. Think of it as a reward or intentionally tell yourself "this is a treat" to transform what could be an everyday activity into an act of self-care.

Here are a few ideas:

- Look at videos or photos that make you smile ("smile file")
- Work on a passion project
- Cook your favorite meal
- Meditate

- Read a book you've been meaning to start for a while
- Listen to your favorite playlist
- Go to sleep early
- Get a massage
- Watch the sun rise or set
- Write out things that you value or enjoy most and do something off of this list

Journal Prompt

Think about a situation that is currently causing you stress or pain and how it makes you feel emotionally and physically. Write out affirmations that will help you practice self-kindness in this situation ("May I accept myself as I am," "May I forgive myself," "May I be patient," or "May I be strong.")

Day 3: Effective Time Management

One of the greatest stressors you may experience is feeling like you never have enough time to accomplish all that you need to do. Mastering effective time management skills can help you live and work more efficiently and lead to a sense of better work-life balance, which can positively impact your overall well-being.

Activity

- Use the first two pages of this [time management guide](#) to list out how you currently spend your time on a daily basis. As you do this, begin to identify where you "lose" time (ex. spending time scrolling on social media, worrying about things you cannot control, looking for "lost" items like a misplaced phone or keys).
- Then, use the third page in the guide to determine how you can minimize lost time. The overall goal of this activity is two-fold: first, to be more efficient with essential activities so they take less time and second, to identify and cut out nonessential activities. Both strategies create new pockets of time that can be allocated towards meaningful activities, like time with your family, time for self-care, or just time to do nothing.
- Write out your new routine on the last page. Feel free to adjust your schedule as you figure out what works and what doesn't work for your lifestyle. Remember everything is a learning process!

Journal Prompt

What are your three biggest distractions or nonessential activities and how will you go about reducing them?

Day 4: Stress-Free Productivity

The process of organizing, prioritizing, and delegating tasks is a key component in effective time and stress management. Efficiently categorizing everything that you have to do can increase your productivity and leave you feeling less overwhelmed or anxious about the tasks at hand.

Activity

- **Step 1:** Create a dump list – get every thought out of your head and put it on paper. This shouldn't be restricted to just "to-do" items; anything that is on your mind can go on this list.
- **Step 2:** Prioritize what to do and when it will be done according to the "Do it, Delegate it, or Defer it" rule.
 - **Do it** – The task can be done in the moment in under two minutes.
 - **Delegate it** – If tasks takes longer than two minutes ask yourself, "Am I the right person to do this?" If the answer is no, then delegate it to the appropriate entity.
 - **Defer it** – If the task will take longer than two minutes and you are the right person to do it, move the task to another list and do it at a later time that is most convenient for you.
- **Step 3:** Next create a to-do list with your immediate tasks to complete today or in the moment. If you have things that you deferred, create a separate list of those tasks and when you will complete them. Keep in mind that most of our "to-dos" are related to bigger projects that cannot be completed in one step. This list should contain the next immediate action on each of your projects that will get you one step closer to completion.
- Use this [flowchart](#) to help guide this process.

This activity and flow chart was adapted from the book "Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress Free Productivity" by David Allen. If you are interested in learning more, check it out on Amazon, your local bookstore or library!

Journal Prompt

List three things you can do in the next week to bring you closer to where you want to be in five years.

Day 5: Sleep

The connection between sleep and stress is a two-way street. Just as stress can make it difficult to get quality sleep, lack of sleep or poor sleep habits can increase stress and decrease the

ability to cope with the obstacles life throws at us.

Activity

Try to incorporate one of the following healthy sleep habits into your routine tonight:

- Take a warm shower or bath an hour or so before bed
- Knock down the temperature in your room (research shows that 65° – 73° F is the ideal sleeping temperature)
- Avoid consuming alcohol before bedtime
- Try aromatherapy like candles (don't forget to blow them out before falling asleep) or essential oils (lavender, chamomile, peppermint, eucalyptus, ginger)
- Dim all lights an hour before bed and limit exposure to bright lights (use nightlights when using the restroom or book lights if reading before bed)
- Turn off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime
- Avoid eating a large meal before bedtime (if you are hungry at night, opt for a light, healthy snack)
- Try a sleepy time tea, but not too close to bed
- Avoid consuming caffeine in the late afternoon or evening.
- Reduce your fluid intake before bedtime
- Try meditation or 'beditation' to soothe your mind and body to sleep (check out this 10 minute video [here](#) or search "beditation misp" on YouTube)

Looking for more guidance or really struggling with poor sleep? Consider completing GatorCare's 14-Day Sleep Challenge found [here](#)! This challenge helps you fall asleep and fall *back* asleep if you wake in the middle of the night.

Journal Prompts

Sometimes we can't fall asleep because our mind races. If you find yourself in this situation, use one of the journaling prompts below to get your thoughts out on paper. For this activity, consider keeping a small notebook by your bed. Once your thoughts are on paper, allow yourself to relax for the night. If those thoughts are important, you can revisit them in the morning.

- I can't sleep because I'm worried about...
 - I can't sleep because tomorrow I have to...
 - I can't sleep because I'm thinking about how to fix...
 - I can't sleep because I'm mad about...
 - I can't sleep because I have an idea about...
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Day 6: Cultivating and Practicing Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the act of consciously focusing your mind in the present to become more aware of what is going on both internally and externally. In essence, we focus on the “right now.” Practicing mindfulness has a wide array of benefits including emotion regulation, decreased stress, decreased anxiety and depression, increased clarity in thinking and perception, increased immune function, and enhanced ability to overcome setbacks.

Activity

Cultivating and practicing mindfulness can be done in many different ways and in as little as a few minutes each day! Incorporate one of the following mindfulness practices into your day today:

- Practice mindful meditation – find a quiet place, get comfortable, and relax your body. Slow down and focus on your breath; use a meditation video to help guide you through this process ([10 min guided meditation](#) or [20 min guided meditation](#)). When the thoughts come, take notice of the thought and allow it to pass. If you find yourself lost in a thought, return to your breath, noticing each inhale and exhale.
- Take a mindful walk – focus your attention on the actual experience of a walk; notice the sights, sounds, smells, and feels of the world as you move through it. As thoughts pop up, recognize the thought, and then direct your attention back to the world around you.

Journal Prompts

- I reflect on the people in my life who have made me feel loved and supported. I feel grateful for...
 - I spent time today being fully present and engaged with someone I care about. This is how I spent my time with him/her, and how this time together made me feel...
 - Today I sat outside in a quiet spot in nature. I closed my eyes and took a few deep, cleansing breaths. Then I just listened. I noticed all of the sounds around me. This is what I heard and experienced by listening to nature...
 - Before I ate a meal that I or someone else prepared, I took time today to notice the food, smell the aromas and feel gratitude for the bounty before me. Taking this moment made me feel...
 - As I sit quietly, I notice each breath I take, following the intake of air through my nose and into my lungs, and the slow exhalation as I release the air through my nose. As I repeat this mindful breathing for several minutes, I notice my body...
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Day 7: Cognitive Restructuring

When we face stress or adversity, the way we think about the situation can either exacerbate it or minimize it. When we restructure our thoughts and alter our perceptions, we can actually change our body's physiological response to stress. As a result, we can relieve significant amounts of stress and create a happier life without actually making any changes in our circumstances (which are often outside of our power to change).

Cognitive restructuring is a widely used method in psychology to help individuals cope with stressful events and conditions by helping them replace negative or stress-inducing thoughts with more positive ones.

There are four steps to cognitive restructuring:

1. learn about thinking patterns
2. notice thoughts
3. challenge thinking
4. replace thoughts with more positive ones

Practicing cognitive restructuring helps you develop a growth mindset and build resilience by viewing challenges and adversity as an opportunity for learning and growth.

Activity/Journal Prompt

Think about a certain event that has caused you significant stress over the past few weeks or is currently causing you stress right now. Use [this cognitive restructuring worksheet](#) or your journal to go through the following prompts:

- What is my negative or unhelpful thought towards this event?
- How does this thought make me feel?
- What does this thought make me want to do?
- What would I tell my best friend if they had this thought?
- What is a more positive or helpful thought towards this event?

Day 8: How What You Eat and Drink Affects Your Stress

When you are stressed, your body experiences a fight or flight response, using up important nutrients and energy. When your body is in a stressed state, your nutrition can exacerbate or improve the situation. Making poor nutrition choices, like choosing processed foods over fresh foods, under- or over-eating, or consuming foods/drinks that are extremely high in fat, salt and/or sugar can greatly contribute to stress. Over time, our body is at risk for developing illnesses such as depression, obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, and eating disorders.

Activity

Often when we think of eating healthier, we think of all the foods we should cut out. For today, aim to **add in** something beneficial to your diet. Try one of the following tips:

- Replace a sugary beverage with a glass of water
- Incorporate two servings of fruit throughout the day
- Incorporate a lean protein such as chicken, beans, or no-sugar-added yogurt
- Swap a processed snack (like chips) for a vegetable based snack (like cucumbers, bell peppers, or carrot sticks); make healthy snacks convenient by pre-cutting different veggies for a quick grab-and-go snack
- Swap out candy for trail mix or nuts; place the candy out of plain sight so you are less likely to reach for it

Journal Prompts

- Is my current pattern of eating bringing me closer-to or further-from my goals?
- What am I craving in life that I'm using food to fulfill?
- The times where I'm able to choose healthy, nourishing food could be described as...
- When I choose healthier options to eat...I feel...

Day 9: Get Moving!

There is endless research that demonstrates the impact of physical activity on stress. Physical activity releases endorphins, "feel good" hormones which work to improve our mood. Physical activity also allows us to refocus so that we are better able to solve problems and deal with challenges.

Activity

Today, aim to exercise for about 30 minutes. Can't find the time in your schedule? Two 15-minute workouts or three 10-minute workouts are just as effective!

Not sure what to do for physical activity? Whether it's running, yoga, hiking, or swimming, virtually any form of exercise or movement can increase your fitness level while decreasing your stress. The most important thing is to do something that you love or that matches your fitness personality. [Take this fitness personality test](#) to help you discover your unique fitness personality, learn activities that correspond with your unique fitness personality, and design a physical activity routine that you are more likely to stick with!

Getting physical activity at work is a great strategy if you have a busy schedule and can not find

or make the time after work. Check out [GatorCare's video library](#) for workout videos that will get you moving while at work, all under 10 minutes.

Journal Prompts

- After I exercise, I feel...
- Write about the best workout you ever had.
- The best part of exercising is...
- How does your body feel after you exercise?
- What emotions do you feel when you exercise?

Day 10: Accepting What You Cannot Change

We inadvertently create excessive and avoidable stress by worrying about things that are beyond our control. It is important to divert your energy instead to the things you can control (thoughts, feelings, actions, and responses to stress). This saves us energy, helps us find perspective, and overall builds resilience.

Activity

- Think about a current situation that is causing you strife right now in your life. List the elements of this situation that are **outside of your control** and elements that are **within your control**.
- Cross through each element that is outside of your control. As you cross through each item, tell yourself, "I cannot control you, therefore I will not worry about you."
- Reread the list of things you can control. Focus your energy on these things. Create one actionable step related to the things you can control, and complete that step today.

Journal Prompt

- Think about a time when you found yourself in a situation that was beyond your control. If you could go back to that situation, knowing what you know now, how would you choose to better respond to that situation?

Wrap Up

Resilience isn't built overnight... or even in ten days. Developing effective stress management techniques and becoming more resilient requires regular and routine nudges in your daily thoughts and actions. You did this in ten different ways during the Get Gritty challenge! Let's recap:

- Day 1:** An Attitude of Gratitude
- Day 2:** Self-Compassion + Self-Care
- Day 3:** Effective Time Management
- Day 4:** Stress Free Productivity
- Day 5:** Sleep
- Day 6:** Cultivating + Practicing Mindfulness
- Day 7:** Cognitive Restructuring
- Day 8:** How What You Eat and Drink Affects Your Stress
- Day 9:** Get Moving!
- Day 10:** Accepting What You Cannot Change

Becoming resilient requires optimism that even if things can't get better, some things are already good. It's knowing that while you may not be able to change the situation, you can change your thoughts about the situation. It requires a sense of gratitude for what you have, an acceptance of stress as part of life and a peace of mind knowing that you can handle, or will handle, whatever comes your way. It requires an acceptance of yourself, your strengths and your weaknesses. It also requires that you take time to move, sleep, nourish and breathe because you know it makes you physically better equipped to handle the storms. And when the storms hit, resilience means, in the face of those winds, you know how to **bend, not break**.

Finding yourself dealing with extreme difficulty that you cannot overcome? It's okay to seek further help. Utilize your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or find an in-network provider for professional counseling. Graduate Assistants (and their covered spouses/dependents) on GatorGradCare also have access to [Talkspace](#), a free, confidential and convenient way to connect with a therapist.

UF Employee Assistance Program: (352) 392-5787

UF Health Shands Employee Assistance Program: (352) 265-5493

What now?

Your journey to resilience and effective stress management does not end here! Continue to incorporate the activities from the last ten days in to your regular routine. Use this compilation of all ten activities as a guide. Feel free to save it to your computer or print it so you can always reference back!

"Life doesn't get easier or more forgiving, we get stronger and more resilient."
— Steve Maraboli