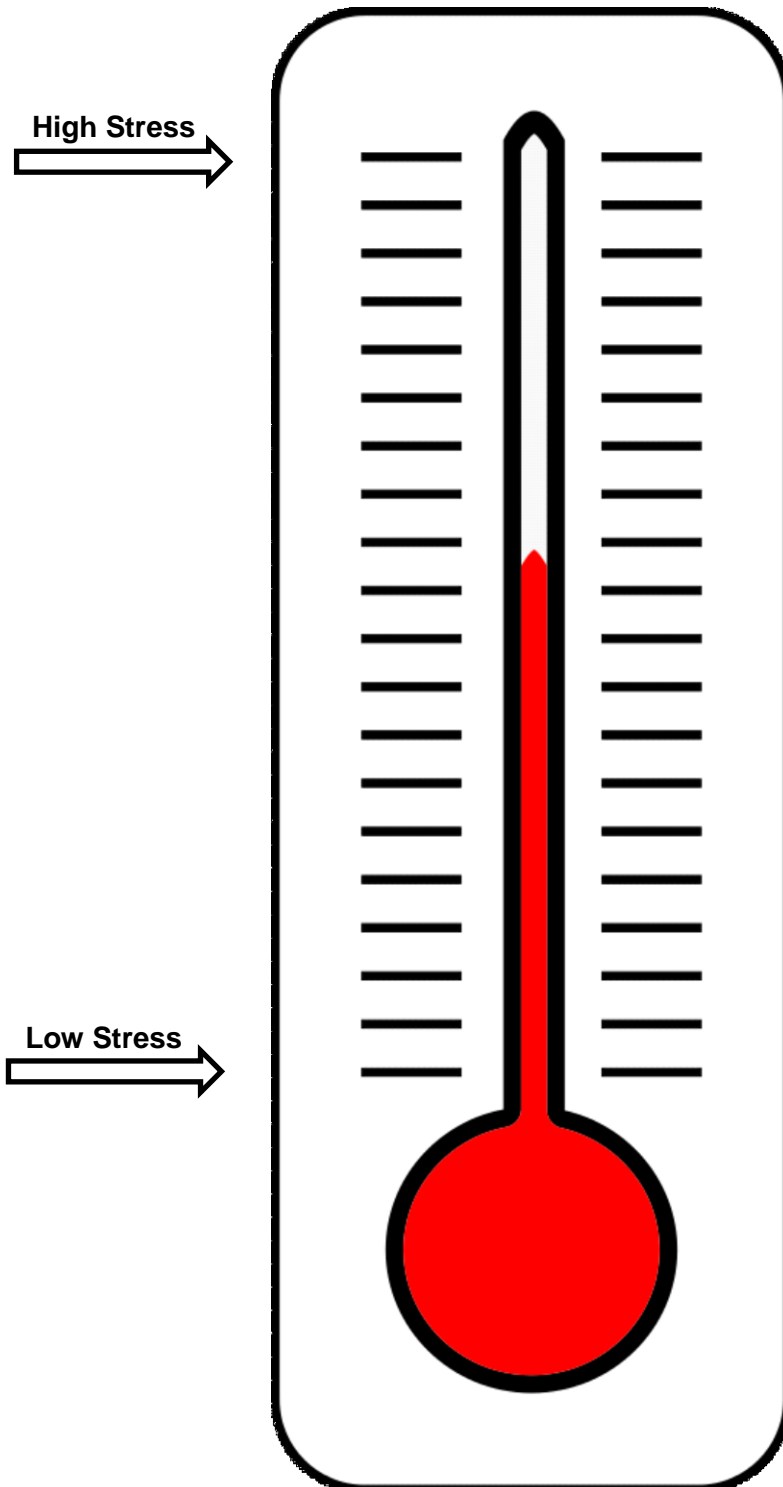


## Your Stress Thermometer

What are the daily hassles that stress you out? Are there more significant aspects of your life that are causing you stress? Where do they fall on your stress thermometer?



## **Diaphragmatic Breathing: A Deep Breathing Technique to Reduce Stress**

Taking deep breaths can be helpful in reducing stress. Diaphragmatic breathing has been found to be particularly calming. Take 5-10 minutes and introduce this technique to the group using instructions on the handout.

One way to think about diaphragmatic breathing is to visualize the way a baby or a puppy breathes: Their entire diaphragm or abdomen moves in and out. It may also be helpful to visualize a balloon filling as you inhale and deflating as you exhale.

### **Diaphragmatic Breathing Technique:**

1. Locate your diaphragm (the muscle just under your rib cage) by placing one hand on your abdomen just below your breastbone. Place the other hand on your chest.
2. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. Feel your diaphragm move under your hand as your abdomen expands.
3. Exhale slowly while pulling your stomach muscles in towards your spine.
4. Relax.

*Note:* The hand on your diaphragm should feel more movement than the hand on your chest. If you feel this more in your chest, you are probably taking shallow breaths. On your next inhale, focus on expanding your abdomen and inhaling air deep into your lungs.

### **Practice Diaphragmatic Breathing Daily**

- You can practice this breathing technique almost anytime or anywhere (examples: sitting at home, while driving, or even walking around). This breathing technique is also useful during exercise and other strenuous activities.
- When you're first learning diaphragmatic breathing, you may need to pause or rest after 3-4 breaths to avoid lightheadedness.
- With practice, you can make diaphragmatic breathing your normal breathing pattern, and you will be able to use diaphragmatic breathing whenever you find yourself in a stressful situation.

## Meeting 4: Stress Relief Resources

Check out [www.WoVeNwomenVets.org](http://www.WoVeNwomenVets.org) for other tools, including:

- ◆ Assessment of your daily stressors
- ◆ More information on helpful strategies for stress relief
- ◆ Template for creating your own self-care plan

**Additional resources that may be helpful:**

- ◆ VA Mindfulness Coach (app available for iPhone, iPad, or iPod Touch)
- ◆ Visit the American Psychological Association's website at [www.apa.org/topics/stress](http://www.apa.org/topics/stress)