

## Dealing with Stress

Being a student can be very stressful. There are a lot of demands on your time and energy, and sometimes too much stress can make it even harder to do what you need to get done, let alone enjoy the college experience. But the good news is that you don't have to let stress take over your life.

The first thing to do is identify the sources of stress in your life. They can be due to the circumstances in your life as well as issues that go on inside your head. Here are some examples of things that may be causing you stress:

- Deadlines – all of the things that have to get done in your classes: exams, papers, homework assignments, projects, etc
- Your job – pressure or problems at work, trying to fit in work and school, etc
- Money – trying to make ends meet, get enough for tuition next semester, dealing with debt, etc
- Relationships – tension with roommates, boyfriend or girlfriend issues, family problems, etc
- Annoyances – losing your keys, dropping your soda, getting stuck in traffic, a sink full of dirty dishes, not being able to find a parking place, etc
- Health – getting a cold, worries about unexplained symptoms you are having, dealing with chronic health issues, being pregnant, dealing with substance abuse issues, worries about the health problems of a loved one, etc
- Worries – feeling pressure to do well, expectations of your parents or yourself, fear of not doing well, negative thoughts about classes or professors, etc

Once you have recognized the sources of stress in your life, next it helps to notice what effects those stresses are having on you, both physically and mentally. Here are some common problems caused by stress:

- Physical: headaches, insomnia, acne, digestive problems like ulcers, gas, and indigestion
- Mental and emotional: having trouble concentrating, getting frustrated easily, poor problem-solving ability, lack of patience, depression, fear or anxiety, irritability, poor memory recall

Knowing what effects stress is having on you can motivate you to do something about it. You can't usually eliminate the sources of stress in your life, but there are things you can do to help you cope with them better, and avoid some of the negative effects. Below are some suggestions:

- Take action:

Deal with your problems head on. If there is something you can do about the things that are causing you stress, get on the ball and do it! End that unhealthy relationship, make an appointment with a doctor, clean up all of the dirty dishes, ask for fewer hours at work, go to the tutoring center and get help with your homework, etc.

- Get organized:

Make a plan. If you feel like you have too many things to do, you can run around in circles trying to get everything done and not end up finishing anything. Instead, make a list of everything that needs to get done, all the deadlines that you have, when exams or finals are, etc, and then plan when to work on each one. Prioritize your list so that you get the most important things done first.

Focus on one thing at a time. Identify the most important thing to be doing right now, and concentrate on that. Don't get distracted by everything else that needs to be done – you've already made a plan for when you will do them!

Eliminate non-essentials. If you have an lot of deadlines for school, put off other things you usually do that can wait. Don't get distracted by unimportant tasks.

- Shift your way of thinking:

Change your attitude. Hating every second of working on math homework, for example, only makes it worse. Accept that this is what you're doing now, and it may not be your favorite activity, but if you work at it, it will get done, and then you will be able to move on to other things.

Remember your goals. When things get tough, remind yourself of the higher purpose of all this stress. In a few years when you have a good, satisfying job, you'll be glad you made it through.

Use positive self-talk. Don't run yourself down by what you're thinking. Tell yourself that you can do this, you're going to make it, and it will be ok.

Don't expect perfection. Adjust your expectations to be realistic. You don't have to ace everything to fulfill your goals. Decide what things are most important, and do your best on those things.

Choose to laugh. Try to shake your head and chuckle at the craziness, rather than letting yourself get more and more frustrated.

Put it all in perspective. In 5 years, how much of this will matter? In 20 years? In 100 years?

Anticipate the ending. Remember that this, too, shall pass. Plan something fun to do when finals are over.

- Stay healthy:

Get enough sleep. Most people need around 7 hours of sleep each night. Lack of sleep decreases mental processing, can cause depression, and can interfere with memory (which you need for studying!). You are only about 50-70% as efficient if you're tired.

Eat good food. Make sure to eat balanced meals, including protein, whole grains, fruits,

and veggies. Junk food will stress your body and make it harder for you to cope!

Get some exercise. Staying active also helps your body and mind to deal with stress. You'll have more energy, sleep better, feel less stressed, feel better about yourself, and maybe even lose some weight! Go for a walk, run up the stairs, or something else that keeps you active. For best results, spend 30-40 minutes doing aerobic exercise 3 times a day, but if you haven't been exercising regularly, take it easy and just get moving. Get out in the fresh air if possible.

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco. Caffeine causes nervousness, headaches, irritability, insomnia, and stomach irritation. It gives you energy for a while, but then you pay for it by being more tired than you were before. If you are used to using a lot, taper off gradually to minimize withdrawal effects. Alcohol and tobacco are also stressful for the body. Seek help if you know you are abusing these or other substances.

- Practice some relaxation techniques:

Meditation. Practice learning how to clear your mind and relax. If you haven't learned how, find a comfortable sitting position, and try one or more of the suggestions below.

Deep breathing. Breathe slowly in through your nose for a count of 5, hold for a few seconds, then breathe out through your mouth for a count of 7, making a whooshing sound.

Progressive relaxation. Concentrate on relaxing each part of your body from your toes to your head. First your toes, then your feet, then your legs, then your torso, then your fingers, arms, shoulders, neck, face, etc.

Visualization. Picture in your mind a place or a situation where you feel safe and happy, adding all the details you can think of. If you practice this, you can train yourself to relax by recalling these details.

- Take short breaks, and reward yourself for meeting small goals by doing something else for a little while:

Offer or ask for a hug from a friend, family member, or roommate.

Give yourself a foot rub, or get a friend to massage your shoulders.

Play with a child or a pet.

Talk to a friend or family member (call your mother, your sister, or your best friend).

Write in a journal.

Pray.

Listen to relaxing or upbeat music.

Read or watch something that makes you laugh.

Take a short walk to get some fresh air.

Sit down at the piano, get out your guitar, or blast some music on your trumpet.

Play a video game.

Go shoot a few hoops, or kick a soccer ball around with some buddies.

Bake some cookies.