



Today's Collegian



Mr. Breitsprecher's Edition

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FREE!



Managing Stress



When people are faced with situations that require change, many experience stress. Stress can be good – it is a normal response to situations that can be threatening. Stress that overwhelms or causes negative feelings can prevent us from doing things we want or need to do.

In many ways, we create stress by the way we look at situations. Feeling “stressed-out” is a result of how we interpret a situation. Different people can look at the same situation and have very different levels of stress. For example, getting an “F” on a quiz is likely to upset most students.

Some might interpret this as an “early warning” that it is time to change their study habits – probably a positive reaction. Others might see this failure as a devastating setback of their dreams and ambitions. This second response can be a problem.

College Stress

An education changes a person in many ways – change can cause stress. Part of the value of a college education is learning to handle and succeed when given constant challenges and demands to meet higher expectations. These are important life-skills and represent an important aspect of a good education.

Students are not only challenged in class, however, the college experience is also about “finding yourself,” developing independence, responsibility for our lives, acceptance from peers, exposure and acceptance of the different values of others, and even intimate relationships.

During their college years, students experience constant challenge and demand for adjustment and change. Along with academic pressures, students are seeking independence and autonomy from their parents and responsibility for themselves, acceptance from their peers in a world of mixed values, and a variety of personal relationships.

Of particular concern to many students is “*test anxiety*” -- the brain’s reduced ability to process information while under severe stress.

One of the most effective ways to deal with stress is to turn to and share the burden with others that care about you – developing and using a support system to cope. Most students, however, are away from “home” and their families.

Not only can the college experience itself create stress, many will need to develop new support systems and techniques to manage that stress. Learning how to cope with stress and turn it into power and purpose will be a valuable skill.

Effects of Stress

Stress can affect us physically, emotionally, behaviorally and mentally.

Physical. Adrenalin is released into the bloodstream. The heart rate and respiration increases. Muscles become tense.

Emotional. Many feel irritability, anxiety, irritability, depression or sadness, or even exhilaration and extreme happiness.

Behavioral. Some experience stress as a loss of physical coordination and control, lose sleep, or act irrationally.

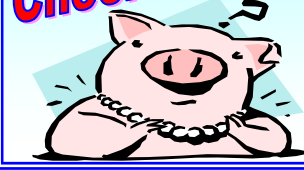
Mentally. Stress can also reduce one’s ability to concentrate process and store information in memory, and solve mental problems.

Dealing With Stress?

Perhaps the first step in learning to cope with stress is to remember that it is a necessary part of life. It cannot be eliminated – we need some stress in our lives to conquer challenges and to grow.

Getting the most out of college means learning to deal with stress by applying physical, behavioral and cognitive coping strategies. There are many different ways to accomplish this. Each of us needs to find strategies that work for us.

Check It Out! Coping with Stress: More Resources



The Unabridged Student Counseling Virtual Pamphlet Collection maintains a huge collection of useful links for a variety of college related issues. If you want more information about managing stress, be sure to scroll down (or click *Stress* in the index) and look at some of these great resources.

<http://www.dr-bob.org/vpc/>

Let's look at some general principles:

Physical Strategies. This starts with learning to relax. With relaxation training, offered by many university health and counseling services, students learn to balance stress responses while enhancing their ability to think clearly. Another technique for relaxing is meditation. Often, we can balance stress in our lives by simply maintaining regular exercise, eating properly, and getting an adequate amount of sleep. Some students are shy about getting involved with student health services – try to take advantage of as many on-campus resources as possible.

Behavioral Strategies. How we act and react can influence our perceptions of stress. Learning to efficiently manage

time is a great way to start dealing with stress. Make and maintain a schedule of available time, assignments, work hours, social commitments, and every other activity of the day. Then, determine priorities among the things that are to be accomplished on the schedule. Many of us can avoid stress if we effectively use our time. The key is to establish realistic and achievable goals and create balance between academic, work, and social demands and activities.

Attitude Adjustment. Physical and behavioral strategies are important, but it is also important to developing healthy thoughts and beliefs about stress.

Keeping situations in their proper perspective can alleviate many stressful situations. Sometimes, what first appears to be a threatening situation is not really as bad as it seems. It can be helpful to ask yourself, "What is the worst that could happen?" Deciding what it will take to live a meaningful life can help keep things in perspective. If we are being honest with ourselves, most of the time the "worst case" is something that we can work to overcome. For some, it can be helpful to clarify what one wants out of life and to re-examine choices we are making.

Talk About Stress. Often, the most effective way to deal with stress is to discuss the problem with a friend or counselor. This can be especially important when getting started with a stress management plan. Just speaking your mind is sure to help and the dialog with another person will provide valuable insight to the situation. Don't be afraid to start this important stress management technique with a professional counselor – learning to talk through problems is an important life-skill.

Relaxation Techniques. Stress and relaxation are essentially opposites. Anything we can do to calm down will tend to make us feel better about a stressful situation. Different things work for different people. Some techniques are as simple as finding humor or listening to soft music. Practicing a musical instrument, meditation, deep muscle relaxation, visualization, and even hypnosis are all ideas that work for some people.

Remember, stress is caused by events that affect us – often, beyond our control. It isn't actually the event itself; however, that causes the stress. It's how we look at the stressful event.

People are powerless over their emotions, but we can change how we feel about things by change the way we act and think. Creating a new understanding about a situation can eliminate stress. Being able to honestly say we have done everything that is within our control to help the situation can also help.

Tips for Reducing Stress

Learn To Plan. Disorganization can breed stress. Having too many projects going simultaneously often leads to confusion, forgetfulness, and the sense that uncompleted projects are hanging over your head. When possible, take on projects one at a time and work on them until completed.

Recognize And Accept Limits. Most of us set unreasonable and perfectionistic goals for ourselves. We can never be perfect, so we often have a sense of failure or inadequacy no matter how well we perform. Set achievable goals for yourself.

Learn To Play. You need occasionally to escape from the pressures of life and have fun. Find pastimes which are absorbing and enjoyable to you no matter what your level of ability is.

Be a Positive Person. Avoid Criticizing Others. Learn to praise the things you like in others. Focus upon the good qualities those around you possess. Be sure to give yourself credit and appreciate your own good qualities, as well.

Learn To Tolerate And Forgive. Intolerance of others leads to frustration and anger. An attempt to really understand the way other people feel can make you more accepting of them. Accept and forgive yourself also.

Avoid Unnecessary Competition. There are many competitive situations in life that we can't avoid. Too much concern with winning in too many areas of life can create excessive tension and anxiety, and make us unnecessarily aggressive.

Get Regular Physical Exercise. Check with your physician before beginning any exercise program. You will be more likely to stay with an exercise program if you choose one that you really enjoy rather than one that feels like pure hard work and drudgery.

Learn A Systematic, Drug-Free Method Of Relaxing. Meditation, yoga, or any of a variety of relaxation techniques can be learned from various accredited teachers and licensed psychotherapists.

Talk Out Your Troubles. Find a friend, member of the clergy, faculty member, counselor, or psycho-therapist you can be open with. Expressing your "bottled up" tension to a sympathetic ear can be incredibly helpful.

Change Your Thinking. How we feel emotionally often depends on our outlook or philosophy of life. Changing one's beliefs is a difficult and painstaking process. There is little practical wisdom in the modern world to guide us through our lives. No one has all the answers, but some answers are available.