

Stress and College

Everyone has heard of stress. Most people will readily admit that they have some in their lives. It is helpful to understand stress and learn how to cope with it.

Understanding Stress

Stress is defined as “the body’s non-specific physiological response to an outside stimuli.” Examples of these responses include appetite changes, headaches, muscle tension, fatigue, inability to concentrate, increased heart rate/blood pressure, sweating, irritability, upset stomach, sleeplessness, and/or mood swings.

Stressors are the stimuli that cause the stress. Stressors can be anything—loud noise, traffic, academic pressure, or conflicts with people. Interestingly enough, not all stressors cause the same stress in every person. How a person chooses to respond to the stressor is the key issue.

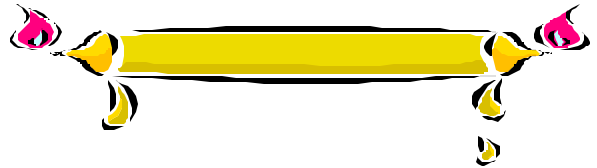
Some stressors are perceived as positive, such as graduating or getting married. The stress caused by these events is called “eustress.” Even though the events are considered positive, they are still stressful and may cause the reactions listed above. “Distress” is the term used to describe stress reactions from negative stressors, such as not getting the job you wanted, breaking up with a significant other, or losing your car keys.

Stressor Management

Stressors cannot always be predicted; there will always be issues that “come up.” Still, there are helpful and simple strategies that can help alleviate some of the stressors, thus decreasing overall stress and anxiety.

- Stay organized—maintain a planner or organizer. Keep your exam dates, work schedules, group meetings, etc. written down. You won’t over schedule yourself and will know what is coming next.

- Prepare for exams—schedule the time to prepare adequately. Feeling prepared helps alleviate stress reactions.
- Manage your time efficiently—Get some help if time management is not your greatest strength. Time is a valued commodity.
- Resolve conflict effectively—Anger and worrying does not enhance our ability to make good decisions.
- Deal with criticism—Look for the positive in feedback that you receive. Evaluate the feedback and
- Develop good communication skills—The better we say what we mean, the less likely we are to be misunderstood.
- Set reasonable personal expectations—Having goals that are unachievable set us up for failure. Set as a goal that which is attainable and reasonable.



Stress Management

No matter how much we plan, we will still have stress reactions. Try some of these techniques to help you manage your stress:

- Exercise—works the body and gives a fresh perspective
- Progressive muscle relaxation—alternating tensing and relaxing muscles relieves muscle tension
- Guided imagery—focuses the mind
- Massage—relaxes tense muscles
- Meditation—quiets and clears the mind
- Slow, deep breathing—slows the body and clears the mind
- Remember to eat regularly and nutritiously

If you are not able to free yourself from distress, consider seeing a counselor.

