



STRESS & YOU



Introduction

Stress is a part of day to day living. As college students, you may experience it while adjusting to a more challenging environment, social pressures, juggling a full schedule, lack of finances, and changes in eating or sleeping habits, to name a few.

The stress you experience isn't necessarily harmful. Mild forms of stress can actually act as a motivator. However, managing high stress is important to good health and sanity!

What is Stress?

Although we tend to think of stress as caused by external events, events in themselves are not stressful. **The way in which we interpret and react to events creates the actual stress.**

People differ dramatically in the type of events they interpret as stressful. For example, speaking to a large group of people can be stressful for some and relaxing for others.

Symptoms of Stress

There are numerous signs and symptoms that you may notice when you experience stress.

Emotional/Mental

Low self-esteem - Fear of failure - Inability to concentrate - Embarrassing easily - Worrying - Preoccupation - Forgetfulness - Anxious - Depressed - Irritable - Impatient

Behavioral

Stuttering - Crying for no apparent reason - Acting impulsively - Grinding teeth - Increased smoking, drinking or drugging - Accident prone - Withdrawal from others

Physical

Increased sweating - Increased heart rate - Trembling - Dryness of throat and mouth - Tiring easily - Urinating frequently - Sleeping problems - Vomiting - Headaches - Pain in the neck and or lower back - Loss of appetite or overeating - Susceptibility to illness

Causes of Stress

Both positive and negative situations can create stress (a wedding and a funeral). Major life changes are the greatest contributors because they place the greatest demands on resources for coping.

Evaluate your Stressors

- Things that are important & controllable -- **Take charge of these ASAP**
- Things that are important & uncontrollable -- **Practice positive coping strategies**
- Things that are unimportant & controllable -- **Prioritize and complete these**
- Things that are unimportant & uncontrollable -- **Develop serenity and acceptance**

40 Stress Busters

Many stresses can be changed, eliminated, or minimized. Here are some ideas you can do to reduce your stress. Pick and practice a few that work for you!

- Become aware of your own reactions to stress
- Recognize and accept your limits
- Focus on positive self-statements and attitude
- Exercise regularly - a walk around the block is just fine
- Eat a balanced diet and take a vitamin supplement (esp. C and B complexes)
- Watch your intake of caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and sugar
- Talk with friends or someone you can trust about your worries
- Make a daily "to do" list and/or plan ahead with a weekly master schedule
- Schedule "realistic" days - avoid back to back appointments if possible
- Set SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-oriented)
- Determine priorities (urgent and important activities take priority)
- Practice relaxation techniques - deep breathing using the diaphragm
- Let go and delegate tasks to capable others
- Organize your living and work spaces AND don't let paperwork pile up
- Say "no" to extra commitments and obligations - they will understand!
- Read an uplifting article or listen to a relaxing piece of music
- Schedule in time to de-stress - hot bath, lunch with a friend, etc.
- Relax your standards when appropriate
- Use your peak energy time for the tough-to-tackle issues
- Remind yourself of your strengths, talents, and accomplishments
- Avoid unnecessary competition
- Try a new hobby for relaxation and fun
- Don't hit the snooze button and/or get up 15 minutes earlier
- Prepare for the morning the evening prior - lunch made, workout bag packed, etc.
- Write things down - appointments, special events, when library books are due, etc.
- Take stretch breaks or a quick walk
- Make friends with non-worriers for a balanced perspective
- Journal your thoughts and feelings as a release
- Do something for someone else/volunteer - walking a dog is great
- Find joy in at least one activity each day
- Take a lunch break, if even for just 15 minutes
- Have a forgiving view of events and people
- Visualize success when approaching a stressful activity or event
- Try to get 15 minutes of sun exposure each day
- Take a mini-vacation in your mind
- Try aromatherapy/light a scented candle - especially lavender
- Give a hug, get a hug
- Tense then relax the major muscle groups one set at a time
- Break it up - complete daily mini tasks for a large and looming project
- Shake it up - avoid doing the same activity for more than 2 consecutive hours



Are you **STRESSED** Out?

This self assessment is an adaptation of the popular Holmes and Rahe’s Life Events Scale for measuring stress levels (from Rutgers University @ New Brunswick/Piscataway campus website). To determine your stress score, circle the numbers adjacent to each event which has occurred to you in the **past 6 months**. Then add them up!

Event	Points
▪ Death of spouse	100
▪ Female unwed pregnancy	92
▪ Death of a parent	80
▪ Male partner in unwed pregnancy	77
▪ Divorce	73
▪ Death of a close family member	70
▪ Death of a close friend	65
▪ Divorce between parents	63
▪ Jail term	61
▪ Major personal injury or illness	60
▪ Marriage	55
▪ Fired from a job/loss of job	50
▪ Loss of financial support from college	48
▪ Failing grade in an important/required class	47
▪ Sexual difficulties	45
▪ Serious argument with significant other	40
▪ Academic probation	39
▪ Change in major	37
▪ New love interest	36
▪ Increased workload from college	31
▪ Outstanding personal achievement	29
▪ First semester in college	28
▪ Serious conflict with instructor	27
▪ Lower than expected grades	25
▪ Change in college (transfer)	24
▪ Change in social activities	22
▪ Change in sleeping habits	21
▪ Change in eating habits	19
▪ Minor violation of the law (e.g. traffic ticket)	15
▪ Add you own!	
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TOTAL	_____

Score considerations:

<150: You appear to have a “reasonable” level of stress

150-299: You appear to have a risk for stress-related health issues

300 and above: You appear to have an elevated risk for stress-related health issues

Note: This is an “awareness activity”, **not** a diagnostic tool to determine your **actual** stress level and/or the health implications. Please seek professional help if you deem it necessary.



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