



Stress Management

College is a stressful time. To cope with stress, learn how to recognize the signs of stress overload, understand your style of coping with everyday stress, and manage stress in effective and healthy ways.

How do you know when you are over-stressed?

Physical Signs:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Appetite disturbance (over/under eating)
- Nausea/vomiting
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Sexual problems
- Sleep disturbance
- High blood pressure
- Sweaty palms
- Trembling hands/knees
- Heart palpitations
- Dry mouth/excessive thirst
- Shortness of breath
- Injury prone
- Tense muscles
- Low resistance to illness

Behavioral Signs:

- Irritability
- Crying
- Aggressive behavior
- Increased smoking
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Social isolation
- Skipping or sleeping through class
- Compulsive shopping
- Reckless behavior
- Easily startled/jumpy (hyperalert)

Thoughts/Cognitive Signs:

- Memory difficulties
- Indecisiveness
- Disorganized thinking
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor judgment
- Fears of failure
- Self-criticism
- Decreased motivation

Feelings/Emotional Signs:

- Feeling out of control
- Overwhelmed
- Easily upset
- Mood Swings
- Feeling depressed
- Anxious
- Restless
- Helpless
- Trapped
- Hopeless
- Desperate



COPING WITH STRESS

- Become aware of your own reactions to stress.
- Let go of negative, discouraging self-talk. Avoid the “snowball” effect of dwelling on the negative.
- Learn from past “mistakes” and move forward.
- Practice positive, encouraging self-statements.
- Focus on your good qualities and accomplishments.
- Develop assertive behaviors.
- Get a hobby or two. Relax and have fun.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a balanced diet daily.
- Talk with friends or someone you can trust about your worries/problems.
- Change worry into action. Focus on the next step.
- Learn to use your time wisely.
- When studying for an exam, study in short blocks, and stay focused. Take frequent, short breaks.
- Make a weekly schedule and try to follow it.
- Set realistic goals. Take one step at a time.
- Avoid unnecessary competition.
- Recognize and accept your limits. Remember that everyone is unique and different.
- Practice relaxation techniques such as breathing, meditation, yoga, imagery, etc. For example, whenever you feel tense, slowly breathe in calmness and breathe out tension for a few minutes.
- **Stop-Breathe-Reflect-Choose >>>**

Stop-Breathe-Reflect-Choose

You are unique, and managing stress in your life is about finding what works for you. True, stress is inevitable, but you do have options. You can choose how you are going to react to the situation in a way that will serve you in a positive manner. This is your decision and no one else gets the advantage of making this decision for you. One method that can help remind you of this is the SBRC, or Stop-Breathe-Reflect-Choose. It only takes about two minutes, you can do it anywhere, and it can help you to reduce your negative (and harmful) reactions to stress.

The next time you encounter a stressful situation, try these four easy steps:



Stop. Just for a few seconds, stop what you are doing and the continuous flow of negative thoughts about the situation.

Breathe. Take in a deep breath, feeling your abdomen rise and fall, releasing any tension in your body as you exhale.

Reflect. Considered what is really going on. Is the situation a crisis? If so, will worrying and becoming tense help to solve it? Will this situation matter to you in two weeks? Six weeks? What action will really serve you in this particular situation? Is there anything productive that you can do to make the situation better? Make sure to ask yourself rational questions and listen to your rational answers. Talk to yourself in an encouraging, constructive way.

It might seem that getting upset with someone when they have upset you is a rational response. But, really think through the response and consider whether it will make the situation better or simply add to your stress level. Consider all aspects of the situation, the consequences of different responses, and what you want to achieve in the long run.

Choose. Now, make a choice. You can make a choice about how to react to achieve a positive effect. A choice that serves you and your goals. This choice may differ depending on the situation, but through this process you will realize that you have the power to choose your actions in the face of stress. You don't have to become tense, irritable, or upset. You will also recognize that holding onto tension or negative thoughts often makes situations worse, and it can have harmful effects on you. With practice, you can take control of your reactions.



Additional Support

The University Counseling Center offers different services to help students with academic and personal issues. Services include short-term individual therapy, group therapy, crisis services, academic skill enhancement, and psychoeducational workshops.

If you feel stressed regardless of what is going on around you, or if your anxiety is interfering with your sleep, appetite, social life, or academics, you might have an anxiety disorder. You can take a free, online screening on the University Counseling Center's website <http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel>.

For more information on stress management please visit:
<http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/OutreachSelfHelp/StressManagement/>