

STRESS MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Stress is part of every day living. As college students you may experience stress meeting academic demands, adjusting to a new living environment, being separated from family and friends, adjusting to new study techniques, or developing new friendships.

Experiencing stress is not necessarily harmful. Mild forms of stress can act as a motivator and energizer. However, if stress levels are too high; medical, emotional, and social problems can result.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Many people tend to think of stress as caused by external events, however events in themselves are not stressful. Rather, it is the way in which the events are interpreted and reacted to that makes them stressful. People differ dramatically in the type of events interpreted as stressful and the way in which they respond to such stress. For example, speaking in public can be stressful for some people and relaxing for others.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

There are several signs and symptoms one may notice when experiencing stress. These signs and symptoms fall into four categories: Feelings, Thoughts, Behaviors, and Physiology. When under stress you can experience one or more of the following:

FEELINGS

- Anxious
- Scared
- Irritable
- Moody

THOUGHTS

- Worrying about the future
- Preoccupation with tasks or thoughts
- Unable to concentrate
- Forgetfulness
- Failure
- Low self-esteem – “I can’t do this”

BEHAVIORS

- Difficulty sleeping
- Nervous laughter
- Increased fatigue
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Easily startled
- Grinding teeth
- Stuttering or other speech difficulties
- Acting impulsively
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Increased smoking
- Increased alcohol or drug usage
- Being accident prone

PHYSIOLOGY

- Perspiration and/or sweaty palms
- Increased heart rate
- Trembling
- Dry mouth and/or throat
- Frequent urination
- Diarrhea/indigestion/vomiting
- Headaches
- “Butterflies” in stomach
- Neck and/or lower back pain
- Susceptibility to illness

CAUSES OF STRESS

Stress can be experienced as both positive and negative in relation to any life event. However, major life changes are the greatest contributors of stress for most people although environmental events are also stressors. These events place great demands on resources for coping.

MAJOR LIFE CHANGES

Geographic move
Going to college
Transfer to a new school
Marriage
Pregnancy
New job
New life style
Divorce
Death of a loved one
Fired from a job

ENVIRONMENTAL EVENTS

Time pressure
Competition
Financial problems
Noise
Disappointments
Car accident
Disasters

HOW TO REDUCE STRESS

Many stresses can be changed, eliminated, or minimized. Here are some stress reduction strategies:

- Become aware of your own reaction to stress
- Reinforce positive self-statements
- Avoid unnecessary competition
- Recognize and accept your limits – everyone is unique and different
- Eat a balanced diet daily
- Talk with friends or someone you can trust
- Develop assertive behaviors
- Exercise regularly
- Set realistic goals
- Set priorities
- Learn to use time wisely
 - o Evaluate how you are budgeting your time
 - o Plan ahead and avoid procrastination
 - o Make a weekly schedule and follow it
- When studying for an exam, study in short blocks
- Take frequent breaks
- Practice relaxation techniques

Adopted from Counseling Center, University of Buffalo

<http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/stressmanagement.shtml>

Useful websites:

Stress Management for Patient and Physician

<http://www.mentalhealth.com/mag1/p51-str.html>

www.teachhealth.com

www.support4learning.com/health/stress.htm