

Handling Stress

What is stress?

A college student frantically trying to cram 10 chapters the night before the exam

The day before a student graduates

The first day of a new job

A student with a stack of bills who doesn't have enough money to pay them off

Speaking in front of a large group of people

Each situation described above can cause stress. Stress can be described as "the brain's response to any demand". There is good stress (eustress) and bad stress (distress). Everyone experiences stress from time to time, and everyone responds to stress differently. A situation that one person enjoys may be stressful for someone else. The key is managing stress effectively because chronic stress can increase your risk of developing health problems.

Effects of stress

Stress exists at many levels, each with its own effects. Everyone has their own way of dealing with stress. Some people may handle their stress positively; however, some may express it in ways that can be harmful. The effects of stress can be temporary or long term. Most people perform best (like on an exam) under moderate stress; but too much stress can damage health and well being. Too much stress can cause or contribute to:

- Absenteeism
- Accidents
- Alcoholism
- Apathy
- Burnout
- Change in appetite
- Depression
- Exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Irritability
- Negativity
- Repressed immune system
- Sleep disturbances
- Strained relationships
- Isolation

Prolonged or chronic stress can compromise the functioning of your immune system, and can exacerbate many illnesses or infections.

Dealing with stress?

Since no one can avoid stress completely, you must learn how to manage it. When stress does occur, it is important to recognize and address it with appropriate and healthy stress responses. The following are some suggestions for ways to handle stress. As you begin to understand more about how stress affects you, you will come up with your own ideas to help decrease stress.

BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

Running, jogging, walking, tennis, volleyball, and dancing are just a few great stress relieving activities. The body and mind work together. By getting your body moving, you will help to improve your emotional state.

SHARE YOUR FRUSTRATIONS

It helps to talk to someone about your concerns and stress. A friend, family member, professor or counselor can help you deal with things when they start to feel overwhelming. Make sure the person you share with will be supportive. Knowing when to ask for help can prevent serious problems later.

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KNOW YOUR LIMITS

If a problem is beyond your control and cannot be changed at that moment, don't fight it. Simplify by eliminating relationships that are draining and activities that you don't enjoy. Learn to accept what you cannot change and address those things you do have control over. Do not place unrealistic expectations on yourself and don't spread yourself too thin.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

You are worth both time and energy. Getting enough rest and eating well will help you deal with life's unexpected twists. The healthier you are, the more prepared your body will be to handle the stresses that everyone experiences. If your level of stress is keeping you from sleeping, see a health care provider for strategies to decrease stress and improve sleeping patterns.

MAKE TIME FOR FUN

Schedule time for both work and play. Doing things that are enjoyable is just as important to your well-being as work; you need a break from the daily routine to relax and take time out. Don't procrastinate and leave things until the last minute.

BE A PARTICIPANT

Being alone can make you feel frustrated or helpless. Don't feel sorry for yourself. Get involved and participate in different activities. Volunteer, help others, or join a club or sports team and interact with other people.

MAKE A LIST OF TASKS

Get organized and schedule what needs to be done. Trying to do everything can seem overwhelming and as a result, you may not accomplish anything. Instead, make a list of things to do, prioritize them, and check them off as they are completed.

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES

Don't make a big deal over small disagreements or inconveniences. Save that emotional energy for issues that are very important to you. Don't sweat the small stuff.

IT'S OKAY TO CRY

A good cry can bring healthy relief to your anxiety. It can even prevent a tension headache or other physical consequences of stress. Take some deep breaths and give yourself permission to express some emotion.

MEDITATE

You can't always run away, but you can take a mental break by finding a quiet place (where you will not be disturbed) and just relax. Breathe evenly and deeply. Let go of all the events going on in your life and just relax for a little while. A hot bath/shower or massage may help.

AVOID SELF MEDICATION

Alcohol and drugs do not remove the conditions that cause stress. They may temporarily relieve physical symptoms of stress, but the origin of the stress does not go away with drug use. It will be there as soon as the drugs wear off. Alcohol and drugs can be habit forming and will create more problems in the long run. Drugs should only be taken under the supervision and advisement of your medical provider.

For More Information:

- Student Health Services619-594-5281
- Health Promotion.619-594-4133
- Visit Our Website at shs.sdsu.edu
- Facebook/Twitter.Facebook.com/aztechealth &
@AZTEHealth
- Counseling & Psychological Services619-594-5220

