Managing Stress

Counseling and Psychological Services
University of Pennsylvania

215-898-7021
(availability: weekdays 9-5; evenings 4-7, weekends 9-1)
3624 Market Street, First Floor West
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MON | TUE | WED | THURS | FRI | SAT | SUN
9 am - 5 pm
9 am - 7 pm
9 am - 5 pm

www.spil.upenn.edu/caps

Managing Stress

What is Stress?

Stress is a set of feelings, thoughts, physical and behavioral symptoms that arise from any situation or event that requires adjustment or change.

College students often say stress represents the biggest threat to their academic performance. Stress is different for every student. Standing up to speak in class can be stressful for some, while tests and personal relationships challenge other students.

Symptoms of Stress

Stress can manifest itself in many ways:

FEELINGS:
- Dysthymic mood, anxiety, sadness, hopelessness, nervousness, fear, anger
- Scared, worried, nervous, anxious, tense, restless

THOUGHTS:
- Self-critical, perfectionist, repetitive, excessive, confusing

BEHAVIORS:
- Avoiding people, situations, social reactions, impulsivity, increased use of caffeine, alcohol, tobacco or drugs

PHYSICAL:
- Tight or aching muscles, insomnia, hyperactivity, loss of appetite, headaches, sweating, rapid heartbeat, dry mouth

Sources of Stress

College students typically experience four different types of stress: academic, social, environmental, or internal.

ACADEMIC:
- Work overload, deadlines, decision-making, career issues

SOCIAL:
- Autonomy, living away from home, making new friends, managing relationships, living with roommates

ENVIRONMENTAL:
- Limited privacy, weather conditions, pressures of an urban environment, noise, cramped living space

INTERNAL:
- Unreasonably high standards, unrealistic expectations, worrying about whether you can control, compete with, and compare yourself to, others

Good Stress / Bad Stress

Stress can be good! Stress can energize, help you relax, and improve performance. Good stress increases motivation and concentration. Good stress allows you to feel that you have control over your life.

Bad stress is characterized by disappointment, fear, stress, or exhaustion. Bad stress decreases your ability to perform and can threaten your health and well-being. Bad stress makes you feel helpless.

Coping with Stress

There are many ways to cope with stress. Some are simple and involve minor adjustments in lifestyle. Others require greater effort and practice.

Basic stress management strategies include exercising, eating regular meals, following a sleep schedule, and avoiding too much caffeine. Exercise will improve the body, and reduce headaches that can help cleanse your mind, so take breaks to work out or even to take a walk.

Understanding and challenging your thinking style can minimize stress. Perfectionism, “all or nothing” thinking, or catastrophizing events can increase stress by reducing options and making things seem worse than they are.

Learning to manage and prioritize your time effectively and learning to say “no” will help alleviate stress and prevent feelings of being overwhelmed.

Change your thinking pattern by creating a more realistic view of situations. Directly check your own assumptions and try to positive to lower your stress level. Connect with others and talk about your feelings. Finding support reduces loneliness and helps combat stress.

When to seek professional help

If your stress and anxiety persist or worsen despite efforts to cope, you may need professional help.

A clinical professional can help you determine the source of stress and help you develop coping mechanisms.

CAPS offers a range of confidential services including individual counseling, group therapy, and referrals to community providers.

Contact Caps

Call or stop by to have an initial consultation
3624 Market Street, First Floor West
215-898-7021

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Penn Resources

Caps
(503) 600-5900

Office of the Chaplain
215-898-8500

Help line
215-898-HELP (4357)

Bipeline
(Reach A Person, 999 - 1AM)
215-573-2929 (7277)

Special Services
215-898-6600

Student Health Service
215-746-3535

Office of the Vice Provost for University Life/Student Intervention Services
215-690-6001

Weinberg Learning Resources Center
215-278-2330

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For more information visit: caps.upenn.edu