

MANAGING STRESS

College can be an incredibly stressful experience. Managing stress is a crucial skill for success in college and in life. Stress will always be present and can actually be a strong motivator when well-managed. However, if stress is managed in unhealthy ways, it will build and can cause harmful effects. To help you make the best of your college experience, this article covers some key information and the steps you can take to manage and use stress to your advantage.

What Is Stress?

Also known as the “fight or flight” response, stress is a physiological and psychological response to a real or perceived danger or threat. Any events that cause frustration or nervousness—positive or negative—are likely to cause stress.

Positive: Starting college, becoming a parent, getting married, etc.

Negative: Work, relationships, financial struggles, etc.

Symptoms

Stress can affect each individual in different ways, and it is very important to be able to identify your personal indicators for when and how stress appears. There are many possible combinations of the physiological and psychological symptoms (“stressors”), depending on the individual.

Physiological

- Increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Alertness
- Tension

Psychological

- Irritability
- Depression
- Racing thoughts
- Memory problems
- Sleeping problems

Types of Stress

Acute Stress

Usually short term, related to arguments or upcoming deadlines, and is relieved once the conflict is resolved.

- Most common type of stress to experience
- Can be a helpful motivator in a dangerous situation or during a time crunch.

Episodic Acute Stress

Can occur due to frequent stress triggers caused by too many commitments or poor organization.

- Leads to health problems

Chronic Stress

Can develop in individuals who are constantly prone to the effects of stress, and those suffering from chronic stress often stop seeking solutions (“learned helplessness”).

- When untreated, leads to mental breakdowns, violence, heart attacks, etc.

Healthy Stress Management

Remove the stress

In a perfect world, all stress could be conquered by avoiding unnecessary toxic situations. While there are many situations that can and should be avoided altogether, there are others that will cause stress but are necessary to push through in order to succeed.

Learn to cope

In a world where stressful situations are constantly present, it is necessary to learn techniques to cope with the reactions that accompany these events.

Alter mindset

One of the most helpful things to do in stress management is to think about stressful situations with a growth mindset perspective. If an individual approaches stress with a negative and self-defeating mindset, it is much more likely that the outcome of that event will be negative (“self-fulfilling prophecy”).

Growth Mindset

Believing that basic abilities can be developed through education and hard work. This ability is crucial for building skills, learning a new language, breaking a habit, or persevering through a

difficult time. Growth mindset is learned and can be improved throughout time, in conjunction with resilience and mental wellness.

“Although I am stressed now, I have the ability to work through it and do better.”

Fixed Mindset

Believing that basic abilities are fixed traits. This is one of the most common and toxic mindsets that hold individuals back from making positive changes and improvements to their life. In other words, if we believe it isn't possible, it will not be possible. Whenever stress comes up, always analyze the automatic thoughts that arise and be prepared to catch them and change them to ensure they are productive and positive.

“I am stressed and there's nothing I can do about it.”

Coping with College

The transition to college comes with many more responsibilities and much more autonomy than life in high school. Even for those who were very successful in high school, the more intense demands of college life can be overwhelming. The stress management techniques developed in college are crucial to academic and emotional success, and are likely to carry on long past graduation.

1. Assess

Once stressors are identified, it is possible to use techniques or mindset adjustments to utilize the stress in a beneficial way. Some events are more stressful to one person than to another, so it's important for each person to identify what is most stressful for them.

Stressors in College May Include:

- Exams
- Choosing classes/ a major
- Assignments
- Trying to find a sense of belonging

2. Act

One of the most common reactions to stress is shutting down and procrastinating. When this urge arises, there are a few possible steps one can take to get out of this funk.

Destressors will temporarily clear and distract the mind, decreasing stress levels.

- Hang out with animals
- Go outside
- Exercise
- Call a friend

Solutions: Unlike destressors, solutions might actually be somewhat stressful to undergo, yet in the long run will permanently end the stress of the situation. Solutions are necessary for most situations, especially those involving deadlines, decisions, and relationship struggles.

- Have an honest conversation
- Make a schedule for studying, free time, etc.
- Make a pro/con list
- Actually study

3. Ask

Reaching out for resources is one of the best ways to ensure success in college. Even though Avery Point is a small campus, there are many resources and opportunities available. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the following if they want to do well and enjoy their experience at UConn.

- *Tutoring and Accountability Buddies:* uconn.mywconline.net
- *Mental Health Counseling:* Jessica.musgrove@uconn.edu
- *Academic Advising:* nexus.uconn.edu

3. Accountability

Even if an individual knows and understands the techniques of stress management and the concept of growth mindset, finding the motivation to act on them can be difficult. Discipline and the ability to manage stress takes time and practice to develop, but like all skills, will improve when practiced long enough. *Don't give up!!*