



TIP SHEET: STRESS MANAGEMENT



Are you feeling stressed? You are not alone! Students need to juggle the academic demands of college life, as well as financial pressures and worry about meeting their parents' expectations. At the same time, they are trying to fit in, make friends and perhaps to live independently for the first time in their lives. Older students may need to balance families and jobs with the demands of studying and attending college.

Some stress is useful and productive, for example a bit of stress about your upcoming test can motivate you to study and sharpen your mind. However, too much stress can start to have a negative effect on performance, causing you to avoid study or have sleepless nights. The good news is that you can take control and learn to cope with stressful situations. When you do, stress can become a positive force, leading to problem solving and effective action.

What is stress? Stress is how we respond to situations that we think are difficult or threatening. These responses are in your **brain**, your **body** and your **actions**.

YOUR BRAIN:

Different people get stressed in different situations. Some people enjoy speaking in front of the class or acting in a play, while others find this extremely stressful. Starting to notice what triggers your stress is an important first step to taking control and reducing stress levels.

TAKE CONTROL:

1. Be aware – notice what causes stress in your life and how you react to it.
2. What can you do differently? Focus on what you can control and learn tools to reduce stress.
3. Take action – start to apply what you learn. This may take some time and practice, but the more effort you put in, the more improvement you will see.

YOUR BODY:

Our brains are always on the alert for possible threats and if they sense a danger they trigger a fear or stress response in the body. So, you may feel your heart beating faster, the blood running to your arms and legs so that you can either fight or run away, and your senses heightened.

If you are tired, or unwell, the fear system is more easily activated. It can also be influenced by alcohol and other substance abuse. So, taking care of your body is essential to reducing stress.

TAKE CONTROL:

1. Get plenty of sleep (7-9 hours a night)
2. Eat regular, healthy meals
3. Reduce caffeine, sugar and energy drinks
4. Do regular exercise to release tension and stay healthy. Aim for 30 minutes, at least 3 times a week.
5. Avoid alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. They will only reduce stress in the short term, and overuse can lead to more serious problems.
6. Practice deep breathing to reduce the physical symptoms of stress
7. Make time for relaxation

YOUR ACTIONS:

Stress and anxiety often cause us to avoid or escape difficult situations. Unfortunately, this response usually leads to more anxiety; for example, procrastinating and avoiding starting to write an essay, leads to increasing stress as the deadline approaches. It's important to start facing up to worries and anxieties, to break this cycle.

TAKE CONTROL:

1. Start a journal to write down your worries, then brainstorm possible solutions
2. Start to notice your negative beliefs and challenge them. You may think "I'll never be able to answer this math problem, I'm too stupid." Is that really true? More realistic would be to say "I'm going to try my best to solve this problem, if I can't I will ask my instructor for more explanation"
3. Talk to a trusted friend or family member
4. Work on time management and organization skills. Use a planner to record all deadlines and exams and create schedules to complete work on time.
5. Ask for help. If you feel overwhelmed, ask for help from family and friends. Draw on resources at your college, make an appointment with a counsellor, peer tutor or careers coach
6. Lighten up, hang out with friends or watch your favourite comedy. Laughter is probably the best stress reliever out there!

You can start to take control, by noticing what triggers your stress and starting to react in positive and effective ways. This will reduce the stress response in your body and the negative actions associated with stress.

If you try these strategies and are still feeling a lot of stress and anxiety, contact the Manager of Student Learning Support and Disability Resources, or your Family Doctor.