

Stress Management

Stress may actually be good for you and, in moderation, may improve your ability to complete certain tasks. Too much stress, however, can leave you feeling anxious, overwhelmed, burnt-out, or even depressed (see Table 2). Not only negative events (e.g., failing a course) can cause stress; even positive events (e.g., starting College) can be stressful.

Four primary sources of stress include:

- **Environment** (e.g., noise, pollution, crowding etc.).
- **Physiological** (e.g., illness, injuries, hormonal changes, inadequate sleep or nutrition, etc).
- **Your thoughts** (e.g., negative self-talk, perfectionism, etc.).
- **Social stressors** (e.g., financial problems, work demands, social events, bereavement, etc.).

Table 2: Symptoms of stress

Physical symptoms	Emotional symptoms	Cognitive symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • muscular tensions • colds or other illnesses • high blood pressure • indigestion / digestive problems • ulcers • difficulty sleeping • fatigue • headaches • backaches • worsening of asthma or skin eruptions • aches and pains • faster heart rate • increased sweating • cold hands and feet • feelings of nausea • rapid breathing • dry mouth • urge to void bladder • diarrhoea • change in appetite • feelings of intense and long-term tiredness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • irritability and or impatience • depression • anger • restlessness • helplessness • frustration • fear or anxiety or worry • feeling overwhelmed or out of control • feeling confused • inability to concentrate or make decisions • mood swings • feeling ill • start to drink or smoke more or use medication more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forgetfulness • unwanted or repetitive thoughts • difficulty concentrating

Source: Adapted from University of York. Stress Management. Retrieved August 12, 2003, from www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/presentations/Academic-Stress-Management-Fall-2001.html

Managing your stress

Get to know and understand your stressors

You need to identify your stressors in order to manage them. Examples of stress include:

adjusting to post-secondary education; financial problems; leaving home; living independently; relationships; and balancing study, work and home.

Taking time out to deal with your stressors will make a big difference in your day-to-day experiences of stress, and develop the necessary coping skills. However, there will be certain stressors that you cannot change. For example, exams, papers and deadlines. With these, you need to set in place coping strategies that work for you. Below are some examples of strategies that you could use.

Effective time management prevents stress - keep organized and plan ahead

- Anticipate your peak stress times and make sure you allow time in your schedule to focus on the most important assignments, exams and other schoolwork.
- Keep a "to do list", and stick to the tasks on your list in order of their priority.
- Develop a healthy study routine, so that you are not completing assignments at the last minute (see ***Time Management*** handout).

Maintain a healthy lifestyle

- Make sure you get adequate sleep.
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet and avoid indulging in junk food binges.
- Avoid alcohol, smoking and drugs. These are often the symptoms of stress. Break away from bad habits and develop good ones.
- Exercise regularly (e.g., take a walk, or carry out some other form of exercise that you enjoy).

Talk to someone

- Talk to a close friend, family member, classmate, Instructor or Student Support Counsellor. This will allow you to vent, express your thoughts, put things into perspective and problem-solve.
- Form a support group with your classmates to get through academic work loads and stresses.
- Keep a journal or write how you feel. This makes the stress less frightening but also allows you to gather your thoughts and problem-solve.
- If your stress is getting out of control, it may be time to seek professional help.