

## 6.7: Persistence During Stressful Times

### Stress Management

*Being in control of your life and having realistic expectations about your day-to-day challenges are the keys to stress management, which is perhaps the most important ingredient to living a happy, healthy and rewarding life. —Marilu Henner, actress*

### Stress

As a student, you're probably plenty familiar with the experience of stress—a condition characterized by symptoms of physical or emotional tension. What you may not know is that it's a natural response of the mind and body to a situation in which a person feels threatened or anxious. Stress can be positive (the anticipation of preparing for a wedding) or negative (dealing with a natural disaster). As a college student, it may feel like stress is a persistent fact of life. While everyone experiences stress at times, a prolonged bout of it can affect your health and ability to cope with life. That's why social support and self-care are important. They can help you see your problems in perspective . . . and the stressful feelings ease up.

Sometimes stress can be good. For instance, it can help you develop the skills needed to manage potentially challenging or threatening situations in life. However, stress can be harmful when it is severe enough to make you feel overwhelmed and out of control. Strong emotions like fear, sadness, or other symptoms of depression are normal, as long as they are temporary and don't interfere with daily activities. If these emotions last too long or cause other problems, it's a different story.

### Signs and Effects of Stress

Physical or emotional tension are often signs of stress. They can be reactions to a situation that causes you to feel threatened or anxious. The following are all common symptoms of stress:

- Disbelief and shock
- Tension and irritability
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Difficulty making decisions
- Being numb to one's feelings
- Loss of interest in normal activities
- Loss of appetite (or increased appetite)
- Nightmares and recurring thoughts about a particular event
- Anger
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Sadness and other symptoms of depression
- Feeling powerless
- Crying
- Sleep problems
- Headaches, back pains, and stomach problems
- Trouble concentrating

It's not only unpleasant to live with the tension and symptoms of ongoing stress; it's actually harmful to your body, too. Chronic stress can impair your immune system and disrupt almost all of your body's processes, leading to increased risk of numerous health problems, including anxiety, depression, digestive problems, heart disease, sleep problems, weight gain, and/or memory and concentration impairment.<sup>3</sup>

That's why it's so important to learn healthy ways of coping with the stressors in your life.

### Ways of Managing Stress



The best strategy for managing stress is by taking care of yourself in the following ways:

- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** They may seem to be a temporary fix to feel better, but in the long run, they can create more problems and add to your stress instead of taking it away.
- **Manage your time.** Work on prioritizing and scheduling your commitments. This will help you feel in better control of your life which, in turn, will mean less stress.
- **Find support.** Seek help from a friend, family member, partner, counselor, doctor, or clergy person. Having a sympathetic listening ear and talking about your problems and stress really can lighten the burden.
- **Connect socially.** When you feel stressed, it's easy to isolate yourself. Try to resist this impulse and stay connected. Make time to enjoy being with classmates, friends, and family; try to schedule study breaks that you can take with other people.
- **Slow down and cut out distractions for a while.** Take a break from your phone, email, and social media.
- **Take care of your health.** Eat well, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, try a relaxation technique (such as meditation or yoga), and maintain a normal, predictable routine.

Not surprisingly, these techniques are similar to those recommended for supporting good mental health in general. If the self-care techniques listed above aren't enough and stress is seriously interfering with your studies or life, don't be afraid to get help. The student health center and college counselors are both good resources.

Stress isn't always all bad. A little bit of stress can motivate you to do well on your exams, assignments, and work. Watch this supplemental video on How to Make Stress Your Friend, a TED Talk by Kelly McGonigal.



Why Stress Isn't Always Bad

## Stress Management Plan

Complete the following activity to assess your stress levels and formulate solutions to help reduce it.

### ACTIVITY: My Stress Management Plan

#### My Key Symptoms of Stress

(List major physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual symptoms)

#### My Key Sources of Stress

(Consider internal, external, academic, job, interpersonal, and social stressors)

#### My Solutions to Stress

(Formulate some clear, specific strategies you will commit to applying to reduce or resolve stressors over the next week)

## My Results

(After one week, give a candid, honest assessment of what you did and did not do to implement your stress management plan and the impact this has had on the level of stress in your life)

## Journal Assignment

After reading the above content and watching the above video, take some time to consider each of the questions below and document your thoughts:

1. What are some stressors that might challenge YOUR ability to maintain a growth mindset?
2. How can adopting a growth mindset help you reframe stressful situations as opportunities for learning and development?
3. How can viewing mistakes as part of the learning process help to reduce stress in high-pressure situations (like presentations, job interviews, etc.)?
4. What role does resilience play in stress management, and how does a growth mindset contribute to building resilience?
5. What practical steps will you take to integrate stress management techniques into your daily routine to support a long-term growth mindset?

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