



Managing Stress

Have you ever thought to yourself: "Oh, I'll think about that problem later." Or told your friends, "I work better under pressure." Or have you ever been a little apprehensive about going to the first meeting of a club you want to join? These are common occurrences in the life of a student leader, and all of them can cause stress. To effectively manage stress, we must first understand stress and how stress affects us.

Coping with stress

There are three basic approaches people use to cope with stress:

1. Avoid
2. Suffer
3. Manage

Managing stress is the best way to deal with it. Since stress is a holistic concept, involving the total self, it must be managed by a number of different techniques.

Stress Self-Analysis

Recognize aspects of your life that cause you stress. By looking at these situations, you can see them from a different perspective and analyze your reactions and feelings.

Time management and planning

By managing your time and prioritizing tasks, you can have personal time to relax and to socialize. Make lists of the things you need to be working on (for the short and long term) so you can use your time effectively.

Effective planning will help eliminate the stress of last minute work. One effective tool for planning is a month-at-a-glance calendar. This will help you to see the big picture and help you plan ahead for upcoming stressful weeks.

Get Organized

Try to keep your files organized. This will make it easier for you and other organization members to find important information and will eliminate the stress of trying to find lost items. Also, developing a good file system will help eliminate the stress of future student leaders.

Relaxation and massage

These techniques help to slow down the body both physically and mentally. Techniques to consider include:

- Meditation
- Mental imagery
- Progressive relaxation
- Yoga
- Exercise
- Praying
- Deep breathing
- Reading

Eat right and exercise

Good nutrition and exercise can help to reduce tension. Be sure to eat nutritious meals or snacks. Low blood sugar can further intensify stress by depleting your body's energy. Also, adequate physical activity can help you to work off the stress and tension while helping you to stay in shape.

Facts about stress

- Stress is how your body physically responds to events, not the events themselves.
- Stress is inescapable. Trying to avoid it will create it.
- Not all stress can or needs to be controlled. We need positive high energy stress to give us motivation and challenge. We need to control negative, emotional and physical stress for this stress discourages progress or encourages procrastination.
- False perceptions or misinformation are often causes of stress. Examine the details and facts before you get stressed.

Sleep

Sleeping allows your body to re-energize so you will not be continually exhausted. Lack of sleep can cause irritability and moodiness, making small, trivial problems seem more stressful. Proper sleep can help you to put things in perspective and not get too stressed out. Allow yourself at least seven hours to feel rested and re-energized.

Reward yourself

Give yourself a reward for following the stress reduction techniques. For example, if you follow your time management strategy for a week, maybe you'll let yourself sleep in for a day or take yourself to a movie.

Shun the "superperson" urge

Do not over commit yourself with too many projects and organization responsibilities. Taking on too much will inevitably increase your stress. Realize that you are human and you can only do so much.

Learn to say "no"

Do not take on projects you do not have the time or means to complete. Prioritize and learn to say "no" to projects you don't have time for (even if you really want to do them).

Learn to delegate

Share organizational responsibilities by delegating tasks. Delegate tasks to someone you know can do the job well; then don't worry about it. One of the advantages of delegating is that it eliminates some of the stress and pressure in your life. Learn to trust that you delegated the task to someone who will follow the task through to completion.

Develop a support system

Talking about some of your stressful situations may help you gain insights, get some things off of your chest, and help keep things in perspective. Talk about things with your roommate, friends or family. You might also use some of the counseling services at the university. University Counseling Services (UCS) is available at (818) 677-2366.

Learning how to deal with stress is a very important life skill. To live a healthier, happier life, you must learn to accept and cope with the stress in your life. Practice is the key.