

# SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

Office of Leadership Activities

815 North Broadway

Saratoga Springs New York 12866-1632

## Skill Building – Managing Stress

### Introduction

Too much stress can seriously affect your physical and mental wellbeing. Recurrent physical and psychological stress can diminish self-esteem, decrease interpersonal and academic effectiveness, and create a cycle of self-blame and self-doubt. College can be a stressful time. Managing finances; living with roommates; and juggling work, classes, and relationships all contribute to the normal stress of being a student. In addition, it is not uncommon for students to feel stressed and anxious about wasting time, meeting high standards, or being lonely. Stress can also come from exciting or positive events. Falling in love, preparing to study abroad, or buying a car can be just as stressful as less-happy events.

There are things you can do to help yourself, but remember that you can ask for help. The Counseling Center, Residence Life, Health Promotions, Religion and Spiritual Life, etc. are all here for you!

### Stress Signals

Stress affects each of us in different ways, and it is important to be aware of your unique stress "signals". Stress signals fall into four categories: thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and physical symptoms. When you are under stress, you may experience any number of the following:

**Feelings:** anxiety, irritability, fear, moodiness, and embarrassment.

**Thoughts:** self-criticism, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, forgetfulness, preoccupation with the future, repetitive thoughts, fear of failure.

**Behaviors:** crying, increased or decreased appetite, "snapping" at friends, acting impulsively, alcohol or other drug use (including smoking), nervous laughter, teeth grinding or jaw clenching, stuttering or other speech difficulties, being more accident-prone.

**Physical:** sleep disturbances, tight muscles, headaches, fatigue, cold or sweaty hands, back or neck problems, stomach distress, more colds and infections, rapid breathing, pounding heart, trembling, dry mouth.

### Tips for Stress Management

There are many ways to manage unhealthy stress in your life. The key to stress reduction is identifying strategies that work for you. As you begin to understand more about how stress affects you, you will develop your own ideas

to help relieve tension.

Because each person is unique, some of these stress management strategies will be more helpful for you than others, and some will be new skills that require practice to be effective. Think about learning to ride a bicycle. There was a time when this was a new skill and felt very unnatural and awkward. You probably needed help at first. With some coaching and practice, stress management, like cycling or any other skill, becomes easier and more effective.

### **Take a Deep Breath!**

Stress often causes us to breathe in a shallow manner, and this in turn almost always causes more stress. Take a moment to mentally scan your body for physical tension. The next time you feel uptight, try taking a minute to slow down and breathe deeply. The more you practice deep breathing, the more effective a stress-reduction technique it becomes.

### **Manage Your Time**

One of the greatest sources of stress is over-commitment or poor time management. Plan ahead. Make a reasonable schedule for yourself and include time for stress reduction as a regular part of your schedule.

### **Connect with Others**

Being alone is fine, but being lonely is different. A good way to combat sadness, boredom, and loneliness is to seek out activities involving others.

### **Talk It Out**

Bottled-up emotions increase frustration and stress. Share your feelings. Perhaps a friend, family member, teacher, clergy person, or counselor can help you see your problem in a different light. Talking with someone else can help clear your mind of confusion so that you can focus on problem solving.

### **Take a "One-Minute Vacation"**

When you have the opportunity, take a moment to close your eyes and imagine a place where you feel relaxed and comfortable. Imagine a quiet scene can take you out of the turmoil of a stressful situation.

### **Monitor Your Physical Comfort**

Be as physically comfortable as the situation will allow. Wear comfortable clothing. Don't wait until your discomfort turns into a real problem.

### **Get Physical**

Physical activity plays a key role in both reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Academic life is often sedentary, and sitting around can mean letting stress accumulate in your body.

### **Take Care of Your Body**

Healthy eating and adequate sleep fuel your mind as well as your body.

Avoid consuming too much caffeine and sugar. In excess, the temporary

Adapted from the University of Texas at Austin Counseling and Mental Health Center "Managing Stress", [www.cmhc.utexas.edu/stress.html](http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/stress.html)

Last Updated 7/25/2014

burst they provide leads to fatigue or a crash later. Take time to eat breakfast in the morning. It really will help keep you going through the day! Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress.

### **Laugh**

Maintain your sense of humor, including the ability to laugh at yourself. Give yourself a break by reading or watching something humorous.

Laughter is good for you!

### **Know Your Limits**

A major source of stress is people's efforts to control events or other people over which they have little or no power. When confronted with a stressful situation, ask yourself: is this my problem? If it isn't, leave it alone. If it is, identify what you can do to address it now.

### **Seek Out Compromise**

Do other people upset you – particularly when they don't do things your way? Consider cooperation or compromise rather than confrontation. A little give and take on both sides may reduce the strain and help you both feel more comfortable.

### **Have a Good Cry**

A good cry during periods of stress can be a healthy way to bring relief to your anxiety, and it might prevent a headache or other physical consequences of bottling things up. However, if you are crying daily, seek a consultation with a counselor or a physician, as this can be a sign of depression.

### **Avoid Self Medicating**

While alcohol or other drugs may seem to offer temporary relief from stress, these substances only mask problems. In the long run, behavior while under the influence increases rather than decreases stress. Take prescription medications only on the advice of your doctor.

### **Look for the Positive**

It is easy to fall into a rut of seeing only the negative when you are stressed. Your thoughts can become like a pair of very dark glasses, allowing little light or joy into your life. What would happen if you committed yourself to actively noticing the positive moments throughout your day? These moments may seem like small events, but they can often raise your energy and spirits and help you begin to see things in a new, more balanced way.