

STRESS 101

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress in popular terms – that feeling of arousal that comes up when doubting whether one is up for the challenge or task ahead or when one just does not feel up for the challenge or task ahead. Every one of us experiences stress at some point in our lives. Some stress is good stress, however, when it alerts us of and prepares us for dangerous/risky situations and at lower levels it motivates and energizes us to do what is needed to achieve our goals and avoid any negative consequences of not responding. Stress only becomes an issue when, at moderate to severe levels, it gets in the way of our health and what we want to achieve in our lives. Symptoms can be physical, emotional, or behavioral (see below), i.e. when we feel too overwhelmed to get into action.

HOW COMMON IS STRESS IN COLLEGE?

American College Health Association – National College Health Assessment – Spring 2020

- 86.4% of students reported that their academics created moderate to high levels of distress within the last 12 months (highest scoring factor of stress compared to finances and career)
- Highest rating concerns of which students report they are negatively impacting performance in a class or delaying progress towards their degree are procrastination, stress, anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties

HOW DO I KNOW I HAVE STRESS?

- According to the Mayo Clinic, stress presents itself with a variety of symptoms. When under stress, you will usually experience more than one of the following symptoms:
- Physical Symptoms: headache, muscle tension or pain, chest pain, fatigue, changing in sex drive, upset stomach, sleep problems
- Emotional Symptoms: restlessness, lack of motivation or focus, feeling overwhelmed, irritability or anger, sadness, or depression
- Cognitive Behavioral Symptoms: overeating or undereating, angry outbursts, drug or alcohol misuse, tobacco use, social withdrawal, exercising less often

HOW DO I MANAGE STRESS?

- Take care of your overall wellbeing by:
 - Get 7-8 hours of sleep
 - Stick to a daily routine with set hours for working/studying, eating, and sleeping; check out our Tips & Tools page for more information on setting up a schedule and time management!
 - Eat a healthy/balanced diet
 - Engage with family/friends who support you
 - Incorporate exercise and relaxation in your schedule
 - Create a plan to address the source(s) and symptoms of your stress
 - Engage in positive thinking, humor, optimism, and/or gratitude
- Take your stress symptoms seriously and address them by:
 - Practicing Relaxation Techniques, such as:
 - Deep breathing
 - Meditation/Guided Imagery/Body-scan
 - Yoga
 - Tai Chi
 - Massage
 - Repetitive prayer(Adapted from Mayo Clinic, 2019)
 - Challenging negative thought patterns, by:
 - Replacing negative thoughts by positive thoughts, i.e. instead of “I am nervous” tell yourself “I am excited”
 - Contact your health care provider, when:
 - You are unsure if you are indeed experiencing stress or something else
 - Your symptoms do not diminish when after having tried out the do’s on the list (Mayo Clinic, 2019)

REFERENCES

- American College Health Association (2020). American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment III: Undergraduate student reference group executive summary spring 2020. Silver Spring, MD: American College Health Association. https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III_Spring_2020_Undergraduate_Reference_Group_Executive_Summary.pdf
- Mayo Clinic (April 4, 2019). Healthy lifestyle: Stress Management [Website]. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20050987>