

Managing Stress in College

What is Stress?

Stress is a general term to describe physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension. The experience of stress comes from the body's heightened adaptive state in response to external or internal demand. It is when we remain in this heightened state for too long that our bodies become off balance, resulting in adverse physical, mental, and, emotional effects.

What are the Possible Effects of Stress?

- Feeling overloaded or overwhelmed.
- Sudden attacks of panic or excessive worry.
- Forgetfulness, disorganization, confusion, or stumbling over words.
- Difficulty making decisions.
- Weight gain or loss (without intention to do so).
- Headaches, chronic pain, frequent colds.
- Depression, irritability, frequent mood swings.

Ways to Manage Stress Effectively

- Set SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-based) goals that you are capable of achieving.
- Be aware of your support system, such as friends, family members, professors, and counselors, etc. and be open to asking them for help.
- Figure out a system for managing your time that includes sleep and time for relaxation.
- Reinforce positive self-statements. Tell yourself statements that help you to cope, e.g. "I can do this;" "It is not the end of the world—this is not tragic;" "I am enough."

Stop-Breathe-Reflect-Choose

Developed by Dr. Benson with the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, this short exercise can help reduce negative reactions to stress. The next time you encounter a stressful situation, try the following four easy steps:

Stop: Just for a few seconds stop what you are doing and the continuous flow of negative thoughts.

Breathe: Take 3-5 deep breaths, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.

Reflect: Ask yourself rational questions about the situation such as: Is this a crisis? Does worrying and becoming tense help to solve it? What action will really serve me in this particular situation? Will this matter to me in two weeks or six weeks? Consider all aspects of the situation.

Choose: You can make a choice about how you are going to react in a positive manner. You have the power to choose actions and feelings in the face of stress. You don't have to immediately become tense, irritable, or upset. With practice, you can take control of your reactions.

Information sourced from University of California San Diego Health and Counseling Services
S-B-R-C Technique developed by Dr. Herbert Benson and Eileen M. Stuart