

## **Stress Reduction Techniques**

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 live with stress, we must first understand it and how it affects us.

By definition, stress is a pressure, a force, or a strain placed on something. Stress is caused by how we respond to certain events in our lives, not by the events themselves. Each individual may respond differently to the same event. Some stress is inescapable. Avoidance is a responsive defense mechanism to stress, and trying to avoid stress will in turn create more.

Not all stress can and needs to be controlled. We need positive, high-energy stress to keep us going. We need to learn to control that negative emotional and physical stress that can be harmful. False perceptions are often stress producing. Find out all the facts before you get "stressed out" over a situation.

Stress is often an absolute in the lives of student leaders. To effectively cope with stress, you must first seek to understand stress and how it affects you.

Stress could arise from:

- Having a long, important meeting the night before a major exam
- Juggling multiple priorities as a student, like classes, work, activities, relationships, family
- Being away from your family support network and finding a new one
- Having a reputation as an outstanding student or leader
- Leaving your security behind and heading out into the "real world"

Stress facts:

- Stress is how we respond to events, not the events themselves. Individuals can respond differently to the same events, thus some events may stress you out, but may not bother your roommate a bit.
- Stress is ever present. Trying to avoid stress can create more stress.
- Not all stress is negative nor needs to be controlled. Some stress can create positive energy which motivates and challenges us.
- We should seek to reduce our negative emotional and physical stresses.
- False perceptions can often cause stress. Before you stress out, find out the facts for yourself.

There are three ways that most people deal with stress: avoidance, suffering or managing. The first two will only cause more stress. Managing stress is the best way to deal with it. Since stress is a holistic concept involving the entire self, it might be managed by using the following techniques:

### **Stress self-analysis**

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Identify aspects in your life that cause you stress. By identifying these situations, you can anticipate and manage your stress reactions.

### **Self-Awareness**

Be aware of YOU! Be aware of your needs, values, and desires. Listen to your body.

### **Assertive communication**

Assertive communication can reduce stress by allowing you to stand up for your personal rights without harming others. It can also make saying no to unnecessary commitments much easier.

### **Change your way of looking at things**

Being positive, not negative, can reduce a lot of stress. Put problems in a broader perspective. Step outside the situation and decide how important the whole thing is.

### **Relaxation**

Slow your body down, both mentally and physically. This includes such techniques as meditation, mental imagery, deep breathing, visualization, message, progressive relaxation, reading, and praying.

### **Develop a support system**

Talk about your problems, share thoughts and feelings with someone you trust, who understands you and is willing to listen. It's a medical fact that those who have close supportive relationships with others live longer, healthier, more stress-free lives. Giving and receiving love and care are basic needs for all of us.

### **Leisure Activities**

Schedule time and prioritize activities that give you pleasure. Have fun! Play to recharge.

### **Positive self-talk**

Ensure that your self evaluation and inner thoughts reflect a realistic image. By perceiving yourself in a more realistic light, you can prevent some stress and emotional distress.

### **Physical Wellness**

Good nutrition and exercise are important and help to reduce tension. Exercise can help reduce tension created by stress. When stressed, your need for proper nutrients increases. When your body is depleted of important vitamins and minerals, you can feel run down both mentally and physically.

### **Sleep**

Sleep lets your body reenergize. Completion of dreams is also important. A lack of sleep can leave you edgy and in no state to cope with everyday challenges.

### **Humor**

Laughter can help you overlook the unattractive, tolerate the unpleasant, cope with the unexpected, and smile through the unbearable.

### **Express your anger**

Learn how to fight fairly -- it can clear the air and relieve a lot of stress. Be sure the issue is worth fighting for; don't hassle over every little thing.

### **Time management and planning**

Prioritize, plan ahead, make "to do" lists. Using your time efficiently can free up time for leisure activities. Planning can eliminate last minute work. What are the most important things to do today? Make a list in order of importance and attack accordingly. Take on no more or less than you can handle. Learn to pace yourself.

### **Talk out your problems**

Seek out a trusted friend, etc. You'll be surprised how it lightens your burden. Problems, when kept to yourself, tend to appear much worse than when you share them with a friend.

### **Operate in a supportive environment**

Organize your personal space so it works for you. After being around a hectic, chaotic environment, you need quiet, private space, and fill it with things that are meaningful to you.

### **Rewards**

Give yourself a pat on the back for following these stress reduction techniques.

### **Don't Self-Medicare**

Relieving stress with cigarettes, alcohol, tranquilizers, and sleeping pills may help temporarily, but you pay a high price by impairing your health. Shouting, crying, or taking a bath may get you through, but they cannot be relied upon for a long-term solution.

### **Know what is important**

Take time to identify your core values and decide what is most important in your life. Eliminate those things that are unimportant or that don't contribute to your values.

### **Learn the art of mini-escape**

When pressures begin to mount too high, give yourself some breathing room and retreat. Take time out for a walk, see a movie, read a book, learn to relax and reenergize yourself. Putting distance between you and the pressure (even if it's only temporary) some times not only relieves stress, but also provides some helpful insight into your pressure.

Remember the learning how to deal with stress is a very important life skill. In order to lead a healthy, happy life, you must learn to accept, define, and cope with the stress in your life. Practice is the key.