

## Manage time to manage stress

Effective time management is a key approach to preventing avoidable stress. Keep yourself organized and plan ahead. Anticipate your peak stress times and clear your schedule as much as possible to be able to focus on the most important assignments, exams and other schoolwork. Keep a running "to do" list, and keep doing the tasks on your list in order of their priority.

## Keep out of the rut with routines

Work on developing productive, healthy routines; you will likely notice a dramatic drop in your stress levels. Routines automate certain decisions about time management and work that can help you stay on top of your schedule. Adequate sleep, a good diet, and exercise are crucial to preparing your mind and body to handle daily stressors. Developing regular study routines will help you to keep up with school work and prevent the need for last-minute work on deadlines and cramming for exams which can add to your stress.

## Habits

Many coping mechanisms are not effective at alleviating stress and may, over the long term, be harmful. For example, smoking, alcohol and drug use, and indulging in junk food binges are simply means of masking the stress. Know what is best for your body and your emotional and mental health; break away from bad habits and form good ones.

Stress Management at University  
version 1/1  
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# Academic Stress Management

Tips to help you make the grade!



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## How do you know you're stressed?

How do you feel when you're stressed? Do you have physical, mental, or emotional signals that tell you you're stressed? Your first line of defense against stress may be to reduce your symptoms of stress. Taking a walk, doing yoga, meditating, and "venting" about your stress are common examples of symptom reduction strategies. They are geared to relieve the more common symptoms of stress. Once your symptoms are relieved a little, you'll be ready to identify the source of stress (if it isn't already apparent to you).

## Identify your stressors

Before you will be able to manage your stress effectively, you need to know where your stress is coming from. Time pressures, making the adjustment to university life, finances, leaving home, living independently, relationships, and balancing work, school and a personal life may all contribute to your stress. Knowing where your stress comes from can help you to concentrate your stress management where it will matter most. Taking time out to deal with your stressors head-on can make a big difference in your day to day experience of stress.

## Problem Solving

Problem-solving approaches help to eliminate the sources of stress. By cutting off stress where it starts, problem-solving strategies help you reduce the stress you carry on a day-to-day basis.

## Good/Bad Stress

Your frame of mind is crucial; your reaction to the stressor is the true source of your stress. Stress is not necessarily a bad thing. Stress may actually be good for you and, in moderation, may improve your ability to perform certain tasks. Too much stress, however, can leave you feeling anxious, overwhelmed, burnt-out, or even depressed. Not only negative events (e.g., failing a course) can cause stress; even positive events (e.g., starting university, graduating) can be stressful. Your goal is to moderate your stress level, not cut stress out all together.

## Let it Out!

Talk to someone during times of high stress – a close friend, family member, an academic advisor, a classmate, or the course instructor. Form a support group of classmates who share similar work- and stress-loads to help get you through difficult times. Just writing down your stressors can sometimes make them seem a little less frightening and can help put things into perspective. If your stress is getting out of control, it may be time to speak with a professional counsellor.

## Adaptation

Learn to adapt to life's unavoidable realities. There will be certain stressors that you cannot change. For example, exams, essays and deadlines are unchangeable aspects of university education. Learning to cope with these realities (perhaps by building needed skills) can help you to deal more effectively with the stress such realities cause.

## How to keep improving

As you implement your stress management techniques, it will be important to monitor how well they are working. Is there something that you are doing to manage stress that really works well? You'll want to keep doing that. Is there some way you respond to stress that tends not to reduce your stress very well or that tends to make your stress worse? You may want to change approaches and try something else. Persistently dealing with stress in ineffective ways will only add to your stress. Learn to evaluate and adapt your strategies. Give some thought to how you could respond differently and more effectively in order to moderate your stress.

## Links to information on the internet

Look under "Stress" at:

<http://counseling.uchicago.edu/vpc/>

MindTools:

<http://www.mindtools.com/smpage.html>