

Exams, Relationship problems, Computer break downs, Traffic jams...

What do the above share in common?

They're all **STRESSORS**

We, students, are under constant pressure: academic pressure, job pressure, financial pressure, parental pressure, peer pressure, self-questioning pressure andthe list goes on!

It seems like there is just too much to do in too little time. Especially now, with exams just around the corner, it is evident that a lot of us are feeling overwhelmed.

You are NOT alone!

According to the Canadian Campus Survey (2004), a **third** of all undergraduate students reported experiencing symptoms of elevated psychological stress, such as: feeling under **constant stress, lack of sleep, and feelings of unhappiness and depression**. In the McMaster University Needs and Behaviour Survey (2007), **83%** of the respondents felt that managing intellectual stress in the university environment can be difficult at times.

So, what is stress?

Stress is a response to a demand placed on you – and it can be positive or negative.

Positive stress (short-term) is actually beneficial as it increases alertness, and helps you to meet a challenge. However, if you cannot relax after the stress, then stress becomes negative. And **negative stress** that is chronic or long-term can be quite harmful. One strategy for dealing with **negative stress** and making it **positive** is by discovering the sources of stress. Is it your perfectionism? Is it your poor eating patterns? By being aware of your stressors, you are more likely to develop ways to reduce or remove them.

So, how do you recognize stress?

When a person's coping skills are inadequate to handle the levels of stress in their lives they may experience symptoms, such as the following:

Physical symptoms: headaches, backaches, increased muscle tension, altered heart rate, rapid breathing, fatigue, and upset stomach.

Emotional symptoms: irritability, feeling overwhelmed, restlessness, anger, fear, and depression.

Cognitive symptoms: difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, poor judgement and negative thinking.

Behavioural Symptoms: eating disorders, sleeping disturbances, procrastination and boredom.

Other common symptoms can include increased use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco and even “comfort” eating to help alleviate stress. However, this way of dealing with stress can actually add stress to our lives. For example, smoking can impact sleep quality, ability to fight infection and overall health.

Furthermore, stress, overtime, can weaken the immune system increasing the body’s susceptibility to infections. You know, how around exam time - when everyone seems to be getting ill!!!!

So, how do you cope with stress?

The following are suggestions to manage stress effectively:

DOs

SEE (Sleep, Eat, & Exercise Right)

Sleep 7-8 hours/day

Keep a healthy diet

Exercise regularly

Prioritize!

Plan ahead and study in advance.

Keep realistic expectations

Talk to a trusted friend

DON'T's

Exhaust Yourself

Pull all-nighters

Eat junk food & load up on caffeine

Watch TV all day

Procrastinate

Agonize over past test results

Imagine failure

Bottle up your feelings inside

Most importantly, **take time for yourself!** Here are some activities that have been reported to reduce stress:

Listening to music, massage therapy (or self-massage), spending time with your friends and family, meditation, deep breathing exercises, and walking.

Lastly, dealing with stress alone can be difficult. **Seek help!**

Two resources available on campus for you are: Health & Wellness of Campus Health Centre – at MUSC B106; and the Centre for Student Development – MUSC B107.

Give your stress wings and let it fly away. ~Carin Hartness

Stress Stopper

Set aside some time for **laughter**: your body’s natural stress-release mechanism!

It improves the immune system, relaxes muscle tension, helps you to breathe deeper and lowers your heart rate and blood pressure.

- Rent your favourite comedy video
- Go to the library and borrow a book by an author who can make you laugh
- Read the daily comics in the newspaper
- Phone the funniest person you know

