



## **The Basics of Stress Management**

Read through the following material and identify one or two things to work on this week. Select things that 1) are currently causes of stress in your life and 2) you have confidence in your ability to change. To start, set small, achievable goals.

### **I. Take Care of Your Health and Well-Being**

- A. Get enough sleep: Failing to get an adequate amount of sleep builds up over time and impairs your memory, concentration, and decision-making ability. It also makes you more likely to become frustrated and angry at minor difficulties and inconveniences.
- Stick to a regular sleep schedule. Waking up early some days and late other days causes stress on your system.
  - Figure out how many hours of sleep you need each night and make sure you get it. If you wake up to the sound of your alarm clock, instead of waking up by yourself, then you are not getting enough sleep. Most people need 6-9 hours of sleep each night.
- B. Eat healthy foods: What and when you eat will affect your mind and body's ability to cope with the stresses of everyday life as a student.
- Eat breakfast every day. This will give you the energy you need to get started in the mornings.
  - Get as many fruits and vegetables as you can and avoid too much fat, sugar, and alcohol (all of which can be detrimental to your mental and physical health).
- C. Get regular exercise: Exercise leaves you feeling alert and relaxed. If done regularly, it reduces tension, anxiety, and depression.
- Set aside at least 30 minutes 3 times per week to exercise. Find exercises that are enjoyable (or the least objectionable) and make them part of your weekly routine.

## II. Develop a Positive Mental Attitude

- A. Learn to relax: Having a variety of relaxation techniques that you can employ when you're feeling stressed will give you more control over stress and provide relief when you need it most.
- Try a deep breathing technique (find a quiet location if possible).
    1. Inhale slowly through your nose while silently counting to 3.
    2. Hold your breath for the count of three.
    3. Exhale slowly through your nose while silently counting to 3.
    4. With your breath expelled, count to three.
    5. Repeat the cycle several times.
  - Try progressive muscle relaxation (also in a quiet location if possible).
- B. Take greater control over your life: Stressors that would normally be manageable can be overwhelming if you feel little control over them. When facing a stressful situation, consider what aspects you do have some control over.
- Use some form of time management and use it regularly. This will give you much more control over what you spend your time and energy on.
  - Reduce procrastination. Although everyone procrastinates, the more you can overcome this, the less stressful your life will be. Letting a major project wait until the last minute is incredibly stressful, but ultimately under your control. Try setting small goals each day.
- C. Improve your self-confidence
- Every once in a while take a step back and write down all of the things you have accomplished, no matter how small or large they may seem. Getting caught up in past failures will only create more stress as you fear repeating those failures. Thinking about your strengths and accomplishments will boost your self-confidence which will also improve your performance.

Adapted from: Pauk, Walter (1993). How to study in college (5<sup>th</sup> edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin