

What is Stress?

Stress is the body's response to demands placed on it, an automatic response to harness energy that helps you cope with CHANGES or CHALLENGES.

Causes of Stress?

Any change, whether positive or negative can be a cause of stress.

- x Positive Stress Examples: new job, marriage, winning an award or promotion

- x Negative Stress Examples: illness, ~~essssssssseso~~ be successful!

of stress, positive and negative, often referred to as EUSTRESS and DISTRESS

od stress that is motivating and helps us focus our energy. This stress is short-term and often

Eustress is helpful in your academic endeavors!

Brain Food!

- x For Alertness: Tyrosine, in eggs, meats, cheeses, & nuts, activates epinephrine
- x For Memory & Concentration: Choline, in leafy veggies, beans, and eggs, activates acetylcholine
- x For Relaxation & Sleep: Tryptophan, in milk, veal, poultry, and many carbs, triggers serotonin
- x For Oxygen Flow: Potassium, in bananas, helps get more oxygen to your brain!

Daily Recommendations

- x For Meals: a protein, veggie, and high fiber carbohydrate will help keep you fueled
Consider grilled chicken, sweet potato, & broccoli
- x For Snacks: restore mental energy if you notice yourself slowing down
Try almonds and bananas

Limit Caffeine, Sugar, & Alcohol

These three are often our go-to substances for coping with stress but they will do more harm than good

- x Caffeine: Try to limit yourself to two daily doses of caffeine from coffee, tea, and soda

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Coping with Stress: Sixteen Suggestions

1. Talk it out with someone your trust – an RA, friend, relative or counselor. Contact SMU Counseling Services at 214-768-2277 or smu.edu/counseling for free and confidential counseling.
2. Escape for a while:
 - a. To somewhere real (movie, park) or just away from campus
 - b. Take a “one-minute vacation” an imaginary escape, by envisioning your favorite place on earth, your dream vacation, or a special day
 - c. decide to escape by delaying dealing with a problem until a specific time
ex. Monday morning I'll schedule an appointment with the professor to talk about the test grade
3. Schedule time for recreation; you'll accomplish more if you plan for rest and relaxation
 - a. set specific, measurable, positive, and reasonable goals
 - b. realize your own limits and others' and go easy on criticism; accept imperfections
 - c. ask for help when you need it (tutor, professor, classmate)
 - d. learn to say “no” sometimes; the stress of many unfinished jobs is worse than stress of saying “no”
 - e. expect and accept change in class and in relationships
 - f. be flexible and ready to adapt your personal and academic goals
4. Take pride in your accomplishments, past and present; dwell on the positive, not the negative. Remind yourself that you've done difficult things before, and, armed with that experience, you CAN do it again. Positive emotions fight stress that negative emotions will intensify.
5. Be good to yourself; treat yourself to a special reward when you've accomplished a difficult task.
6. Express your feelings, let them out -- tears, screaming, a punching bag, jogging, writing a letter you'll never mail -- to work out anger.
7. Take one thing at a time when you're overloaded. Establish priorities, then begin. Finishing one task gives a feeling of accomplishment that helps you tackle the next one.
8. Use music to reduce tension. Study classical or café music to set a calm and peaceful mood.
9. Make your room a home for relaxing. Separate “work” from “home” by studying elsewhere, perhaps at the library; then return to your room, free of work, to unwind.
10. Volunteer or do something for others. To keep your perspective and build a support system, make yourself available for friendship and support.
11. Pray or meditate; don't overlook the spiritual side of life.
12. Keep your sense of humor even if you have to search for it! Be able to laugh at yourself and life; laughter is good medicine. Watch a sitcom, rent a funny movie or video clips, or read comic strips!
13. Treat yourself to a massage.
14. Look for reminders to help keep life in perspective. Post them where you can see them easily & often.
15. Try a Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise. There are lots of options from a quick YouTube search!
16. Download a stress management app or listen to a stress management podcast. Some recommendations:
 - a. *Calm, Headspace, Smiling Mind, Stop Breathe Think, Untangle, Ten Percent Happier*

What is Test Anxiety?

Test anxiety is the inability to think clearly in spite of adequate preparation. It is triggered by unrealistic pressures and beliefs--fear of failure, expectation of failure, perfectionism, a need for approval, blocking, anxiety about anxiety. Armed with information, determination and a willingness to work at it, you can reduce test anxiety and perform better on exams.

Manage your Test Anxiety with these suggestions:

STUDY: The self confidence that comes with adequate preparation is an extremely important element in test taking. It is not enough to study "hard" or to study "a lot." You must study in ways that match the course content and type of test. There is security in knowing that you are studying more effectively. Visit

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Developing Positive Self Talk

What we say about ourselves is what we tend to believe, therefore, if you use positive self talk you are more likely to believe positive things about yourself. When preparing for a test be sure to utilize positive self-talk and develop a pattern of thinking that supports your success.

1. First, be certain that your skills in test preparation and in test taking are top notch. Feeling confident that you have prepared thoroughly for a test and that you are adept in test taking techniques can go a long way towards reducing anxiety. Evaluate your past test preparation with the Test Preparation Checklist. Then use “How to be Really Prepared for Tests” and the Five-Day Study Program to design a Test Preparation Plan for your next major exam. To earn the most possible points on any exam, review specific techniques for taking tests.
2. Second, deal positively with the negative thoughts that are one component of anxiety. Try this simple two-step process:

STEP 1: Realize that your thoughts are racing off, that your mind is cluttered with worries and fears, mentally yell “STOP!” Becoming *aware* of those worries is the first stage in preventing them. “STOP!” helps you to *break the cycle* of worry.

STEP 2: Once you’ve stopped the cycle for a moment, try any one of the following techniques to move from a negative to a positive emotional state

f DAYDREAM - Substitute thoughts of a favorite person or place

f VISUALIZE SUCCESS - Take time to rehearse success; visualize yourself successfully taking the upcoming test. The key to using this tip is detail: think of yourself in the classroom; notice your surroundings; see yourself receiving the test, previewing it, and knowing every single answer. See yourself writing confidently and quickly, handing the paper in with pleasure, and finally celebrating the A you receive. If you can’t imagine it, you can’t live it!

f FOCUS - Concentrate all of your attention on a single object--a tree outside the window, the surface of your desk, the hands of your watch. Occupy your mind fully to push out anxiety-related thoughts, again breaking the cycle of worry.

f PRAISE YOURSELF - Talk to yourself in a positive way; try “I’m very relaxed,” “I’ve prepared really well,” “I’m remembering what I studied,” or “I’m using my time effectively.” A positive self-script will help you take this step.

3. The final step is to deal with the physical feelings that accompany anxiety. Try these simple techniques to gain control:

f BREATHE - You can calm physical sensations by focusing your attention on your breathing. For two to five minutes, concentrate on taking long, slow, deep breaths. Deep, slow breathing also re-oxygenates your brain cells, giving you a mental boost.

f SCAN YOUR BODY - The key: deep muscle relaxation and anxiety cannot coexist! If you can relax your muscles, you can calm your mind. Become aware of tension in your body as the first step in reducing it. Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Focus your attention on your feet; are they relaxed? Let go of any muscular tension and feel your feet relax. Move to your ankles, calves, thighs, and lower back, relaxing each group of muscles. Do the same for your diaphragm, chest, upper back, neck, shoulders, face, arms, and hands.

- f* TENSE & RELAX - If one part of your body is particularly tense, “unwind” it with this method. Focus on the tight muscle and make it even more tense. For instance, if your shoulders are tense, pull them back, arch your back, and make the area as tense as you can. Now let go, and you’ll find that you can relax those muscles to a greater degree.

- f* USE GUIDED IMAGERY - Relax completely and take a quick imaginary trip. Close your eyes, relax your body, and see yourself in a favorite place. Create as much of the scene as you can, using all your senses. Imagine yourself at the beach; hear the surf and the seagulls; feel the sun and breeze on your face, the sand between your toes. See the rolling dunes, the ships on the horizon. Find a place that works for you and practice “getting there” mentally.

- f* DESCRIBE WHAT YOU FEEL - Focus on your anxiety. Describe to yourself how it feels. If you have a headache, nausea, or abdominal pain, tell yourself where it is located, how it feels. Don’t resist it; experience it. If you can focus on a physical symptom completely, it will often disappear or at least begin to fade.

- f* EXERCISE AEROBICALLY - This won’t work in the classroom during a test, but it’s an excellent way to reduce body tension. Do some rapid walking, jogging, swimming; play some tennis or basketball--anything to get your heart beating fast for 15 to 20 minutes. During a high-stress period such as midterm week or finals week, plan time for exercise. You’ll work off some stress, concentrate more effectively on your studying, and thus learn more and perform better

