**Stress**

**What is Stress**

“Stress is a physical and emotional reaction that people experience as they encounter changes in life. Stress is a normal feeling.” (National Institutes of Health, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health – Stress)

“Stress can be positive (e.g., planning your student organization’s amazing event) or negative (e.g., having trouble with a course).” Positive stress (also called eustress) is stress that is helpful and motivates to complete tasks and meet challenges.

Common types of stress include acute stress and chronic stress. Acute stress is the most common and comes from the pressures of recent past events and upcoming events. Deadlines for final projects and papers, upcoming exams are all sources of acute stress. Acute stress is short term and is very manageable.

***Signs and Symptoms***

Common reactions to a stressful event include

* Tension and irritability
* Fear and anxiety about the future
* Difficulty making decisions
* Feeling numb
* Loss of interest in normal activities
* Loss of appetite
* Nightmares and recurring thoughts about the event
* Anger
* Increased use of alcohol and drugs
* Sadness and other symptoms of depression
* Feeling powerless
* Crying
* Sleep problems
* Headaches, back pains, and stomach problems
* Trouble concentrating

**Stress Statistics**

***National Data***  
According to the American College Health Association’s Fall 2019 National College Health Assessment, 40.2% of undergraduate students reported that stress was as impediment to their academic performance within the past 12 months.

In Fall 2019, 76.5% of undergraduate students reported experiencing moderate to high stress within the past 12 months.

***University of Tennessee, Knoxville Data***

According to the Fall 2019 American College Health Association’s National College Health Assessment III conducted at UT,

47.4% of UT students reported that stress was as impediment to their academic performance within the past 12 months.

In Fall 2019, 79.9% of UT students reported experiencing moderate to high stress within the past 12 months.

**Treating Stress**

Stress is a part of life and while you may not be able to prevent stress, there are many ways to manage stress.

***Tips for Stress Management***

* Identify your sources of stress. What events or situations trigger stressful feelings? Are they related to your family, health, financial decisions, work, relationships or something else?
* Learn your own stress signals. People experience stress in different ways. You may have a hard time concentrating or making decisions, feel angry, irritable or out of control, or experience headaches, muscle tension or a lack of energy. Gauge your stress signals.
* Recognize how you deal with stress. Determine if you are using unhealthy behaviors (such as smoking, drinking alcohol and over/under eating) to cope. Is this a routine behavior, or is it specific to certain events or situations?
* Avoid alcohol and drugs. They may seem to be a temporary fix to feel better, but in the long run drugs and alcohol can create more problems and add to your stress—instead of taking it away.
* Find support. Seek help from a partner, family member, friend, counselor, doctor, or clergyperson. Having someone with a sympathetic, listening ear and sharing about your problems and stress really can lighten the burden.
* Connect socially. After a stressful event, it is easy isolate yourself. Make sure that you are spending time with people you care about it or family. Consider planning fun activities with your partner or friends.
* Take care of yourself.
  + Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet
  + Exercise regularly
  + Get plenty of sleep
  + Give yourself a break if you feel stressed out—for example, treat yourself to a massage
  + Maintain a normal routine
* Stay active. You can take your mind off your problems with activities like helping a neighbor or roommate or volunteering in the community. These can be positive ways to cope with stressful feelings.
* Recognize when you need more help. If problems continue, reach out to the Student Counseling Center or 974-HELP (865-974-4537)- a 24hr referral line for students in distress.
* Try not to compare yourself with your peers because someone who looks calm and collected may still be struggling with stress.

***Relaxation Techniques***

Relaxation techniques have been found to be helpful for reducing anxiety in people with ongoing health problems, and with older adults with anxiety. Relation techniques are generally safe for healthy people as well but may not be the most effective for those with mental health conditions (such as general anxiety disorder).

Relaxation techniques include deep breathing, guided imagery, yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. Many of these techniques can be self-taught so you can do them on your own.

Free apps for relaxation (for iPhone and Android, may have in-app purchases) include

* Calm
* Headspace
* Shine: Calm Anxiety & Stress
* Omvana
* Smiling Mind
* Stop, Breathe, and Think
* Insight Timer

**Fact Sheets & Images You Can Use**

5 Things You Should Know About Stress  
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/19-mh-8109-5-things-stress_142898.pdf>

Health Disparities and Stress  
<https://www.apa.org/topics/health-disparities/stress.pdf>

College Student’s Guide to Stress Management Infographic<https://www.purdueglobal.edu/blog/student-life/guide-stress-management-full.jpg>

**Resources**

**Center for Health Education & Wellness**  
Student Health Building, 2nd Floor  
1800 Volunteer Blvd  
Knoxville, TN 37916  
M -F: 8:00am – 5:00pm

The Center for Health Education & Wellness (CHEW) provides resources and information for stress reduction such as the Survival Guide to Stress booklet available at wellness.utk.edu/stress. CHEW also hosts events and outreach efforts about stress reduction throughout the year.

**974-HELP – Dean of Students**  
413 Student Services Building  
1331 Circle Park  
Knoxville, TN 37916  
865-974-4357

974-HELP is a help line for distressed students. It is available 24hrs a day. If you are concerned or worried for a fellow Vol, observe a behavior that makes you uncomfortable, or you feel like a fellow Vol may harm themselves or others, 974-HELP is where you can call for support. Students can also call 974-HELP for themselves. (It is not a resource for immediate emergencies. Contact 911 or UTPD at 865-974-3111 for emergencies.)

**Student Counseling Center**  
Student Health Building, 2nd Floor  
1800 Volunteer Blvd  
Knoxville, TN 37996  
865-974-2196

The Student Counseling Center provides individual sessions, group therapy, and workshops on stress management.

**Sources**

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