

WEEK 16: TAKING CHARGE OF ONE'S HEALTH



The World Health Organization's definition of health is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (<https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>).

WHO asserts that physical and mental well-being is a human right, enabling a life without limitation or restriction. Taking charge of one's health starts with living a healthy lifestyle, managing stress, and taking care of one's self and wellness.

A. LIVING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Healthy lifestyle makes a big difference.

A healthy lifestyle is a way of living that lowers the risk of being seriously ill or dying early. Not all diseases are preventable, but a large proportion of deaths, particularly those from coronary heart disease and lung cancer, can be avoided. Scientific studies have identified certain types of behaviour that contribute to the development of non-communicable diseases and early death. Health is not only just about avoiding disease. It is also about physical, mental and social wellbeing. When a healthy lifestyle is adopted, a more positive role model is provided to other people in the family, particularly children (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/108180>).

A general rule of thumb is to moderate your workload and avoid taking on too much. Learning from the article **Healthy Lifestyles for College Students** can ensure you find and maintain a good balance in your academic life.

If the management tips do not help, seek advice from the University's Office of Guidance and Counseling or other professionals.

Healthy Lifestyles for College Students

Accessed July 27, 2020 from <https://miami.asa.edu/about-asu/news/maintaining-healthy-habits-college/#:~:text=LOAD%20UP%20ON%20HEALTHY%20FOODS,fresh%20foods%20for%20each%20meal>.



College is a time of dramatic changes. For some students, it's the first time that they've lived on their own with the responsibility to finally take charge of their own life. College courses are also much more difficult than any other previous schooling, leading to late nights of studying and plentiful amounts of stress. It's easy for new college students to feel overwhelmed and pick up some unhealthy habits, but with a little preparation you can make sure that your health is up to the challenge.

1. STICK TO SOLID SLEEP SCHEDULE

Getting enough sleep every night is a good way to keep your stress levels down and feel energized for each day of class. Make a sleep habit that you can stick to, even during the weekends. If you have trouble falling asleep, try to avoid using your smartphone or your computer for about 30 minutes before bedtime. Reading and drinking tea can help your brain start to relax and prepare for sleep. Be sure to avoid having excessive caffeine in the evening so that you can fall asleep easily.

2. LEARN TO SAY NO

College life usually means easy access to tasty foods, from the candy in the vending machines to the doughnuts in the bakery across the street. If you're now living on your own, you might feel emboldened to partake of delicious treats at any hour. Learning when to say no is a good skill that will help you keep the extra pounds off. Avoid eating when you're not actually hungry, and stick to light snacks when you need a little treat. Try to avoid eating too much late at night as well; this can cause heartburn and weight gain.

3. EAT REGULAR MEALS

When you're racing from one class to another with twenty different deadlines looming ahead of you, it's easy to forget to eat a meal now and then. However, if you start missing meals regularly, your body and your brain won't be properly fueled for the demands of college. Adjust your schedule so that you have enough time in the morning to get breakfast without feeling panicked about missing class. Start taking your lunch with you, or find a healthy place you can buy a lunch. Keeping a handful of healthy snacks in your backpack, such as peanuts or dried fruit, can help you get some nutrition when you unexpectedly are late for a meal.

4. FIND AN EXERCISE ACTIVITY YOU LOVE

Regular exercise is a great way to burn off some stress, boost your fitness levels and lose some weight. However, there's little point in picking an exercise that you hate. Instead, choose an activity that you that you enjoy and would look forward to. This can include:

- Yoga with friends
- Walking around campus
- Joining a gym
- Taking a sports class, such as badminton
- Making time for exercise, even if it's only for a few minutes a day, can help you unwind and take a break from your deadlines and homework.

5. UP ON HEALTHY FOODS

Filling up your plate with healthy foods, including vegetables and fruits, can help you avoid eating too much unhealthy junk food. Aim to build a colorful plate with a variety of fresh foods for each meal. A simple meal of grilled chicken, brown rice and roasted vegetables will keep you full and be easy on your waistline. If you want to indulge in the occasional calorie-rich meal, such as pizza, pair it with a nutritious salad with a light dressing.

While you're in college, maintaining your healthy habits may be a challenge. Including a little extra time each day so that you can take care of your physical health is a good way to reduce stress and become healthier.

6. STOP PROCRASTINATING

College students face tons of essays, courseworks and science papers during their years of study. And it's not a big deal when these works are just in the ordinary flow. But when it comes to a 90-page senior thesis, you have to spend at least 1 year on it. This is where procrastination finds and catches you. A way too big project presupposes planning an explicit strategy. Almost every student decides to start in the middle of a year in order to meet the deadline. What happens next? Months pass by and dust covers your thesis.

Then you invent another strategy – to start two months before the deadline. But two months turn into one, which turns into several weeks. So one sunny morning you come out of the oblivion with two days until the deadline without a word written. What a challenge, to produce 90 pages in 48 days. You don't sleep, eat or relax, struggling to be in time. Yes, you will get your mark, but results are nearly always frustrating. How to avoid this Procrastination Monster? You'll need to get rid of all the leisure temptations that prevent you from completing tasks. But let's face the truth: students are not so responsible. It is impossible to kill procrastinations, all of us are subjected to it. But you can optimize your work for the sake of your career. Consider your calendar, mind the whole process and don't let anything ruin your study goals.

7. TRY NOT TO BURN OUT

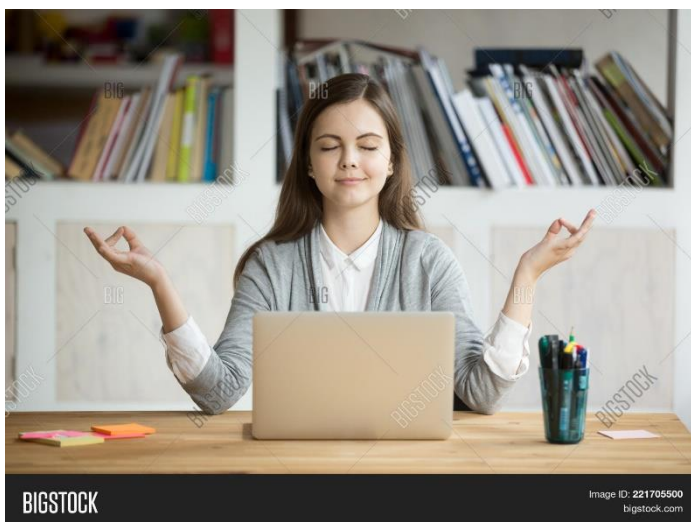
Life in college is full of activities. Most of them are odd and unwanted. But it takes time to get this fact. Various competitions, contests, matches, socials, soirees, rave-ups..how not to surrender? Moreover, every mate will try to drag you to a new party and resisting is tough! It is very dangerous not to have a time-schedule, because participating in the each and every scene, you will burn out quickly. Pick up the most significant events and don't violate your precious time. Set the priorities and maximize the advantage of your college experience.

B. MANAGING STRESS

Managing stress in its early stages can help make the most of the university experience and opportunities for students.

A mild amount of stress is very useful and acts as a motivation for students while too much stress can interfere with their daily lives. When built over time, stress can give rise to a host of serious problems such as depression and anxiety.

This article presents the pros and cons of stress, common indicators of stress, and ways of reducing and managing stress.



Managing Stress

Accessed July 29, 2020 from <https://campusmindworks.org/help-yourself/self-care/managing-stress/>

Many students find that they need to develop new skills in order to balance academic demands with a healthy lifestyle. Fortunately, the University of Michigan offers many resources to help students develop these skills. Many students find that they can reduce their level of academic stress by improving skills such as time management, stress management, and relaxation.

THE PROS AND CONS OF STRESS

Stress is anything that alters your natural balance. When stress is present, your body and your mind must attend to it in order to maintain balance. Your body reacts to stress by releasing hormones that help you

cope with the situation. That in turn takes energy away from the other functions of your brain, like concentrating, or taking action. There are two different sources of stress: **external triggers**, like transitioning to college or your parents getting a divorce, and **internal triggers**, like placing high expectations on yourself.

Stress is a part of everyday life. There are many instances when stress can be helpful. A fire alarm is intended to cause the stress that alerts you to avoid danger. The stress created by a deadline to finish a paper can motivate you to finish the assignment on time. But when experienced in excess, stress has the opposite effect. It can harm our emotional and physical health, and limit our ability to function at home, in school, and within our relationships. The good news is that, since we are responsible for bringing about much of our own stress, we can also do much to manage stress by learning and practicing specific stress-reduction strategies.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCING TOO MUCH STRESS?

Here are a few common indicators:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased worrying
- Trouble completing assignments on time
- Not going to class
- Short temper or increased agitation
- Tension
- Headaches
- Tight muscles
- Changes in eating habits (e.g., “stress eating”)
- Changes in sleeping habits

People with mental illness are more likely to notice that their specific symptoms re-emerge or grow worse during stressful times. In many cases, stress can act as the “spark” that ignites a mental health episode. But this does not mean that every time you are busy or face a difficult challenge you will have a mental health episode. Not everyone responds the same way to potentially stressful circumstances. For example, during final exams many students feel very overwhelmed and anxious, while others are able to keep their stress under control. If you, like many others, struggle with managing stress during difficult times, there are some helpful tips on this page that can help.

WAYS OF REDUCING AND MANAGING STRESS

- Practice time management skills to manage your academic schedule, social activities, and making time for yourself.
- Set and implement specific goals for yourself that will improve your mood and help you reduce stress. Start by filling out a goal-setting worksheet.
- Avoid procrastination. Procrastination can create more mental and physical stress. If you have trouble staying on task, consider downloading apps that will help keep you off things that are distracting. To learn more about procrastination, [click here](#).
- Exercise regularly. Physical activity can help you burn off the energy generated by stress.
- Practice good sleep habits to ensure that you are well-rested. Sleep deprivation can cause many physical and mental problems and can increase stress.

- Try mindfulness meditation.
- Limit (or eliminate) the use of stimulants like caffeine, which can elevate the stress response in your body.
- Pace yourself throughout the day, taking regular breaks from work or other structured activities. During breaks from class, studying, or work, spend time walking outdoors, listen to music or just sit quietly, to clear and calm your mind.
- Start a journal. Many people find journaling to be helpful for managing stress, understanding emotions, and making decisions and changes in their lives.
- Realize that you have limits. Learn to work within your limits and set realistic expectations for yourself and others.
- Plan leisure activities to break up your schedule. [Click here](#) for a list of fun things to do on campus.
- Recognize the role your own thoughts can play in causing you distress. Challenge beliefs you may hold about yourself and your situation that may not be accurate. For example, do you continuously fall short of what you think you “should” accomplish? When our minds continuously feed us messages about what we “should” achieve, “ought” to be, or “mustn’t” do, we are setting ourselves up to fall short of goals that may be unrealistic, and to experience stress along the way. Learn techniques for replacing unrealistic thoughts with realistic ones.
- Find humor in your life. Laughter can be a great tension-reducer.
- Seek the support of friends and family when you need to “vent” about situations that bring on stressful feelings. But make sure that you don’t focus exclusively on negative experiences; try to also think of at least three things that are going well for you, and share those experiences.
- Try setting a specific goal for yourself that will improve your mood and help you reduce stress. Start by filling out a goal-setting worksheet then help yourself stay on track by using your weekly motivator worksheet.

Relaxation Techniques

Research has shown that relaxation techniques are an effective way to reduce not only stress but many of the symptoms associated with mental illnesses. Try one or more of the following techniques for relaxing your mind and body and reducing the physical and psychological tension associated with stress. Take the time to experiment with these techniques to find out which ones work best for you.

- **Breathing Exercise:** Place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your rib cage. Inhale slowly through your nose, drawing a deep breath into your lungs. Your chest should move only slightly, while your stomach rises, pushing your hand up. As you exhale, just let yourself go and imagine your entire body becoming loose and limp. It should take you twice as long to exhale as it does to inhale. Practice three times per day for two to three minutes. For more information and resources on this technique, [click here](#).
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Pay a “mental visit” to your muscles, stopping at each area of the body from head to toe (or toe to head), paying attention to individual areas where tension exists. As you pause at each area, tense and relax each muscle, trying to release unnecessary tension. Spend a few more minutes on those areas that seem to be holding the most tension. For more information and resources on this technique, [click here](#).
- **Visual (Guided) Imagery:** Imagine tension flowing out of your body from top to bottom. Visualize tension draining down your shoulders and arms and out through your fingertips into the air, down your thighs and legs, and out through the soles of your feet into the ground. It’s also helpful to take a mental “vacation,” imagining yourself in a pleasant, relaxing place such as on the beach or in the woods. This can be a place where you’ve been or a place you’d like to be. Take time to imagine the specific details of what you see, hear and feel in this place. For more information and resources on this technique, [click here](#).

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness: Mindfulness is about noticing our thoughts, feelings or bodily sensations without judgment. It's a helpful tool in managing stress for those with a mental illness.

➤ ***Being Mindful of Everyday Activities.*** As a student, your life and your mind are often so busy that you forget to take notice of the everyday occurrences that keep your senses 'awake'. For example, as you walk across the Diag, you may be lost in thought while drinking a latte. You may not be aware of how you arrived at your destination or of the steam of the latte as you take a sip. Rather than allowing yourself to miss the moment, pause, take a breath and notice what you are experiencing. Your experiences may be pleasant and worth savoring. But even if they are unpleasant, you will be better able to cope if you face your experiences directly and strive to live "in the moment."

➤ ***How to practice Mindfulness through Meditation.***

- Find a comfortable position.
- While focusing on your breathing, allow your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations to flow over you, entering and leaving your awareness at their own pace. Recognize each sensation, but then let it fade away, allowing the next thought or feeling to enter your mind. Continue to acknowledge each sensation, then let it go.
- You will likely find that your mind is very busy with thoughts about all kinds of things – some pleasant, some unpleasant. Each time you notice that your mind has wandered, gently and without judgment shift your awareness back to your breath.
- It can be most helpful to practice mindfulness for 30 minutes a day until you become comfortable with the technique.

The goal of mindfulness meditation is not to change your thoughts in any way, but simply to **notice** them and as best you can, continuously returning to your breath. Learning mindfulness meditation is similar to learning any new skill. There are an abundance of website and apps for guided meditations. Keep it simple. Be patient and kind with yourself. Do not expect that you will be able to "empty" your mind of thoughts and enter a state of deep relaxation. Try starting with ten minutes each day, setting a timer to see what happens. Remember that each moment is a new opportunity to begin. With practice, meditation can allow you to develop clarity in your thoughts and feelings, decrease your negative thoughts, and promote a sense of peacefulness and centeredness.

Source: <https://campusmindworks.org/help-yourself/self-care/managing-stress/>