

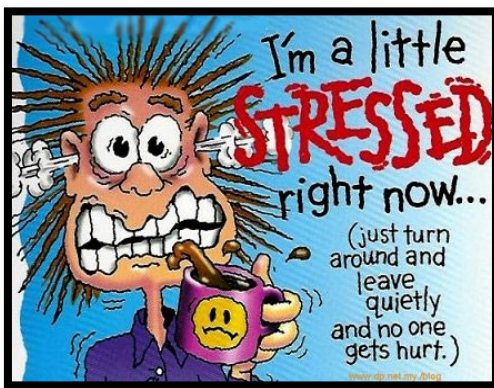
St. Cloud State University Student Health Promotions

Stress Management: April 2011

Stress

Preparing for Finals Week can be a stressful time. Learning how to cope with stress beforehand may provide you with the tools needed to pass your exams and graduate.

Stress is part of everyday life. The pressure of time, money, family, and relationships ensure that stress will always be with us. But stress need not be negative or overwhelming. It can be an opportunity to make important positive changes in your life.



What is Stress?

Stress is your response to events or situations that call for a change, threaten the order or safety or your life, or otherwise place an unusual demand on your physical, mental, and emotional resources. Reactions to stress vary and can take their toll, both mentally and physically. Common symptoms may include:

- Tense muscles that cause headaches, backaches, neck ache, or jaw ache
- Stomach pain, indigestion, bowel upset, ulcers
- Anxiety, nervousness, tension, depression
- Anger, irritability, restlessness, or exhaustion

Some people react to stress by eating or drinking too much, losing sleep, or smoking cigarettes. Others may “take out” their frustrations on those around them through yelling or abusive behavior. Managing stress is important not only for your health but also for successful relationships in your personal life or at work.

Stress is not always bad...

According to Paul J. Rosch M.D., “stress is difficult for scientists to define because it is a subjective sensation associated with varied symptoms that differ for each of us. In addition, stress is not always a synonym for distress. Situations like a steep roller coaster ride that cause fear and anxiety for some can prove highly pleasurable for others. Winning a race or election may be more stressful than losing but this is good stress.

Increased stress increases productivity – up to a point, after which things rapidly deteriorate, and that level also differs for each of us. It’s much like the stress or tension on a violin string. Not enough produces a dull raspy sound and too much an irritating screech or snaps the string – but just the correct degree of stress creates a beautiful tone.

Similarly, we all have to find the right amount of stress that permits us to make pleasant music in our daily lives. You can learn how to utilize and transform stress so that it will make you more productive and less self-destructive.”

The American Institute on Stress: www.stress.org

-Paul J. Rosch, M.D., F.A.C.P.

President, The American Institute of Stress Clinical Professor of Medicine and Psychiatry, New York Medical College Honorary Vice-President, International Stress

Choose Stress Management

Finding ways to control your stress and utilizing these techniques may help you live a better life.

Benefits of Relaxation Techniques

With so many things to do, relaxation techniques may take a back seat in your life. But that means you might miss out on the health benefits of relaxation.

Practicing relaxation techniques can reduce stress symptoms by:

- **Slowing your heart rate**
- **Lowering blood pressure**
- **Slowing your breathing rate**
- **Increasing blood flow to major muscles**
- **Reducing muscle tension and chronic pain**
- **Improving concentration**
- **Reducing anger and frustration**
- **Boosting confidence to handle problems**



Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is a stress-reducing technique, which uses your imagination as a means of relaxation. This requires quiet and concentration. Pretend you are walking through a quiet rainforest or lying on a warm beach – whatever it takes for you to unwind.

Guided imagery can also be used to preview or review any stress-related incidents or relationships that you want to improve. Picture in your mind, in color and sound, how you would like a particular relationship to be. “See” yourself as being successful in that situation. As you transfer the improved behaviors that you practiced into your real relationship, they will become a part of you. Stress that was part of the relationship will disappear.

Meditation

Meditation can give you a sense of calm, peace and balance that benefits both your emotional well being and your overall health. And these benefits don't end when your meditation session ends. Meditation can help carry you more calmly through your day and improve certain medical conditions. A few types of meditation include:

- ♦ **Mantra meditation.** In this type of meditation, you silently repeat a calming word, thought or phrase to prevent distracting thoughts. Transcendental meditation is a type of mantra meditation in which you achieve a deep state of relaxation to achieve pure awareness.
- ♦ **Mindfulness meditation.** This type of meditation is based on being mindful, or having an increased awareness and acceptance of living in the present moment. You focus on what you experience during meditation, such as the flow of your breath. You can observe your thoughts and emotions but let them pass without judgment.
- ♦ **Yoga.** You perform a series of postures and controlled breathing exercises to promote a more flexible body and a calm mind. As you move through poses that require balance and concentration, you're encouraged to focus less on your busy day and more on the moment.

Elements of meditation

Different types of meditation may include different features to help you meditate. Some of the most common features in meditation include:

- ♦ **Focusing your attention** is generally one of the most important elements of meditation. Focusing your attention is what helps free your mind from the

many distractions that cause stress and worry. You can focus your attention on such things as a specific object, an image, a mantra, or even your breathing. Don't fret when your mind wanders. Just return to your focus of attention.



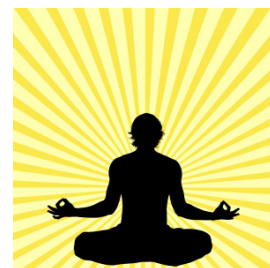
- ◆ **Relaxed breathing** involves deep, even-paced breathing using the diaphragm muscle to expand your lungs. The purpose is to slow your breathing, take in more oxygen, and reduce the use of shoulder, neck and upper chest muscles while breathing so that you breathe more efficiently.
- ◆ **A quiet location.** If you're a beginner, practicing meditation may be easier if you're in a quiet spot with few distractions — no television radios or cell phones.
- ◆ **A comfortable position.** You can practice meditation whether you're sitting, lying down, walking or in other positions or activities. Just try to be comfortable so that you can get the most out of your meditation.

Tips to practice meditation on your own

- ◆ **Scan your body.** When using this technique, focus attention on different parts of your body. Become aware of your body's various sensations, whether that's pain, tension, warmth or relaxation. Combine body scanning with breathing exercises and imagine breathing heat or relaxation into and out of different parts of your body.
- ◆ **Walking meditation.** Combining a walk with meditation is an efficient and healthy way to relax. You can use this technique anywhere you're walking — in a tranquil forest, on a city sidewalk or at the mall. When you use this method, slow down the pace of walking so that you can focus on each movement of your legs or feet.
- ◆ **Engage in prayer.** Prayer is the best known and most widely practiced example of meditation. Spoken and written prayers are found in most faith traditions. You can pray using your own words or read prayers written by others. Check the self-help or 12-step-recovery section of your local bookstore for examples. Talk with your rabbi, priest, pastor or other spiritual leader about resources.
- ◆ **Read or listen and take time to reflect.** Many people report that they benefit from reading poems or sacred texts silently or aloud, and taking a few moments to quietly reflect on the meaning that the words bring to mind. You can listen to sacred music, spoken words or any music you find relaxing or

15 Ways to Relax

1. **Exercise**
2. **Listen to music:** Website for free relaxing music
<http://www.podbean.com/podcast-detail?pid=17879>
3. **Take a nap**
4. **Get sunlight / Fresh air**
5. **Talk to a friend**
6. **Stretch**
7. **Do an activity you enjoy**
8. **Watch T.V.**
9. **Get off the computer and relax your eyes**
10. **Take a bath with candles**
11. **Control Your Breathing:**
Straighten up and take a deep slow breath through your nose, deep into your tummy, do not let the chest rise, relax your shoulders - then release the breath slowly through your mouth.
12. **Laughter**
13. **Get a massage**
14. **Take control of clutter**
15. **Take time for YOU**



inspiring. You may want to write your reflections in a journal or discuss them with a friend or spiritual leader.

- ◆ **Focus your love and gratitude.** In this type of meditation, you focus your attention on a sacred object or being, weaving feelings of love and gratitude into your thoughts. You can also close your eyes and use your imagination or gaze at representations of the object.

Coping Skills for Stress Management

Get organized – Organizing the details of daily life reduces stress. Plan, schedule, and keep good records. Use calendars and “to do lists”

Do it now – Do your most difficult and least pleasant tasks at the beginning each day when you are fresh. This avoids the stress of worrying about them all day.



Know your limits – Be realistic about what you can accomplish. Planning your goals will “even out” those stressful peaks and valleys.

Change your attitude – Train yourself to see stressful situations as challenges rather than obstacles.

Talk it over – Talking over difficult issues with someone you trust helps reduce stress and also helps you to form solutions.

Take a break – A two or three-minute break in the middle of a stressful situation can give you a new outlook on the problem. A short walk can clear your mind.

Learn to say “no” – There are some demands over which you have no control. Separate those from activates over which you do have some control, and learn to say “no” to demands that are unrealistic.

Positive self-talk – In the face of a stressful situation you can manage with positive statements, such as, “I can handle this one step at a time,” or “I’ve been successful with this before.”

Ways to Relieve Stress on Campus

- ◆ Soak up sun and fresh air while exercising on the **Beaver Island Trail** along the Mississippi River.
- ◆ **Halenbeck Hall** provides a variety of ways you can work off stress and become more relaxed:
 - Exercise using equipment
 - Take an exercise class
 - Yoga Classes
 - Massage
 - Climbing Wall
- ◆ Check out the **Health and Wellness Team** for events on campus.
- ◆ If you need to talk with a professional you can contact **Counseling and Psychological Services** on campus at (320) 308-3171
- ◆ Have fun with friends while **bowling** in the basement of Atwood.
- ◆ Involve yourself in a variety of activities, events, and shows throughout the year by **The University Program Board**.