STRESS

Definition of Stress – *a negative response to environmental stimuli, external stimuli or any life event and/or perception of the mind that results in either a physiological response, mental distress or both*. A stressor is an entity or thing that causes stress. It can be environmental, physical, psychological or a combination.

Stressors

- **Psychological**: Albrecht’s Four Types of Stress:
  1. Time Stress: deadlines
  2. Anticipatory stress: e.g. first day of school, meeting new people, planning for an oral presentation
  3. Situational stress: e.g. your backpack is stolen with all your notes, text book and wallet
  4. Encounter Stress: this type of stress revolves around people, e.g. meeting up with a study group, being around an angry or violent person or group of people
- **Environmental**: e.g. noise, too much stimuli e.g. living in a city; pollution, extreme temperatures
- **Physical**: e.g. lack of sleep, poor diet, too little exercise, or even too much exercise

Body Responses to Stress: Fight or Flight - *an evolutionary adaptation to danger that protected us from predators and other aggressors*

The release of cortisol (stress hormone) results in an increase in heart rate and blood pressure, stimulates the release of glucose (for energy) and narrows the focus of the brain. “*Long-term activation of the stress response system - and the subsequent overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones can disrupt almost all your body’s processes.*” Mayo Clinic

Chronic stress can therefore result in: anxiety, depression, upset stomachs, headaches, difficulty sleeping, irritability, restlessness, memory and concentration problems, weight gain and heart disease.

Perceptions of Stress - latest research

Studies have shown that adults who have higher levels of perceived stress have earlier deaths (heart attacks & strokes) compared to those who don’t. Stress is a serious risk factor for poor mental and physical health and causes premature aging on a cellular level, and memory problems. A really unhealthy lifestyle, or chronic stress can increase the expression of genes that can lead to mental health problems. Promising new research has to do with the benefits of changing our thoughts and perceptions of stress. Watch: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGyVTAoXEU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGyVTAoXEU)
STUDENT RESPONSES TO STRESSORS IN THEIR LIVES:

1. Smart phones
2. Social media – everyone else’s life looks perfect (creating false personas)
3. News and information 24/7
4. Family: responsibilities/expectations/mixed messages/demands
5. Lack of support from parents – sometimes parents haven’t been to college, and therefore they don’t understand the demands of college
6. College applications/scholarship forms & applications/FAFSA
7. Negative Self-Beliefs
8. Money
9. Finding a group in college with similar interests, backgrounds, values
10. Not being able to maintain the same grades in college
11. New environment of college
12. Romance
13. Friendships: maintaining old ones, creating new ones
14. Exams
15. School Projects
16. Competing demands e.g. need to attend class and study for an exam scheduled later in the day
17. Social life – rejecting others by refusing to attend a party.
18. Fear of sexual assault or bodily harm
19. Physical Illness or mental health problem
20. Knowing what I want to be
21. Knowing what I want to study
22. Finishing college in 4 years
23. Peer pressure

ASK & REFLECT:

Which stressors are in your control? Which stressors are perceived? In other words, are stressors real or are they real because we believe them to be real?
CASE STUDY

Tomas, a sophomore student, learns that his cousin has passed away. Upon hearing the news and hearing his mother cry, he feels devastated for himself and the whole family. At first, it doesn’t seem real, so he goes to class as usual and “pretends” nothing has happened. However, Tomas soon learns that he is having difficulty concentrating in class. He is constantly thinking about the last time he saw his cousin, what he is going to say to the family and how difficult it’s going to be to return home for the memorial service and face all his relatives. He worries about all the calls that have to be made to give support and condolences to family members.

1. First, he decides to notify his professors of what has happened and that he will attend class, but may not be as engaged or focused.
2. Second, he decides to take one day off for self-care, reflection, and getting things done that he is obligated to do under the circumstances. (Again, he notifies his professors why he will be absent.)
3. Third, he finds a good friend or empathic person to talk to.
4. Fourth, Tomas maintains those activities that bring him relief from stress and he decides to attend his intramural soccer game. He got a really good workout, and a break from thinking about the family tragedy.
5. Lastly, he made an appointment with the school psychologist, for a few weeks in the future, in case he still feels the need to talk to a professional about his feelings.

Discussion:

Tomas couldn’t change what happened, and to some extent the feelings or emotions that erupted from the loss. However, he acknowledged his feelings and allowed himself the space to talk about them with friends and family. He also gave himself some time to clear his mind by playing soccer. He took control and realized that he needed to reach out for support. Tomas communicated with his professors and he made a plan to get extra support from a professional on campus. Once again he acknowledged his feelings of being distracted and unable to concentrate in class and notified his professors.
“The best decision I made was reaching out to other individuals going through the same issues to see how they overcame them! Problems are always at ease once you build a foundation with other individuals who’re in the same shoes. You need people in your life in order to come out as a stronger individual to the real world.”

P.U. College Freshman and Bella Scholar

What can be done about stress?

Self Care: Regular sleep habits, and healthy eating is important for proper physical and emotional health, especially brain health. Stay away from high fat, high sugar foods. Turning to drugs, food or alcohol provides only very brief relief from stress and usually leads right back to MORE STRESS! Some studies have shown that Vitamin C, Omega 3s fatty acid, meditation & mindfulness all improve brain function. Exercise, walking, jogging, or yoga produces endorphins, the feel-good brain chemical. Regular exercise improves sleep, reduces anxiety, and in many studies, exercise is as effective as medicine in treating depression.

Mindfulness/Meditation Practices

The practice of mindfulness increases awareness of what you are feeling at any given moment. We can live with stress if we are aware of it and learn techniques of resilience. Regular practice of mindfulness and/or meditation results in less ruminating with our thoughts (neuroticism), less worrying about the past or future, and decreases emotional negativity. Over time the practice creates inner peace and a sense of well-being even through adversity or stressful events. Meditation Is Not: A Religion, A Dogma, Or A Belief System.

The Practice is the Teacher.

The practice brings clarity of mind. Just as a snow globe is opaque when it is shaken, but clears as the snow settles; the mind if given the chance to settle during meditation results in more clarity.
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What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a simple concept: it brings us home to the present moment. Mindfulness is an acceptance of thoughts, and or emotions as we experience them in the present. Whenever we acknowledge a negative emotion we can focus on our breath, the sights or sounds around us, and bring our mind to the present moment.

Meditation

Our mind is always running to the future, experiencing fear, and anxiety, or it is caught in a prison of past experiences, especially traumatic ones. When we are thinking about the past or future, our minds experience a variety of emotions: fear, anger, rejection, regret, pain, happiness, gratitude, hopefulness or joy. Whether those emotions are negative or positive we are missing what’s happening in the “NOW”. For meditation advise for beginners go to: https://www.mindfueldaily.com/livewell/meditation-advice-for-beginners-in-10-basic-steps/?rq=meditation

There are lots of free apps too. HEADSPACE app offers free guided or unguided meditation at various levels, and for different situations, e.g. sleep, relaxation, and during exercise. You can even choose the length of guided meditation; 10-15-20 minutes. If you’re having trouble regulating emotions, such as losing your temper, being frustrated a lot, feeling overwhelmed; with a subscription to HEADSPACE you get more access and meditations to help deal with these emotions.

Review & Summary:

Suffering is unavoidable and we have to live or co-exist with stress. Challenges that energize us and motivate us are probably good, even if it causes some stress. Healthy activities such as working out, meditation, mindfulness, journaling, practicing daily gratitude, doing activities you enjoy; like listening to music, playing an instrument, or other creative endeavors can bring more joy, balance and even equanimity in your life. Equanimity means mental calmness, a sense of peace or cool headedness, especially in times of stress.
Calming Breathing Techniques

**Belly Breathing**

Belly breathing calms the mind and body, engages the relaxation response, and helps cure insomnia.

**Instructions:** Place both hands on your belly and feel it expand as you inhale and release towards the spine as you exhale. Try to make your exhalation longer than your inhalation, letting go of any tension in your body as you exhale.

**Variations:** If you find it difficult to draw the belly in on the exhalation, you can gently press your belly in with your hand on the exhalation. Placing the hands or a block on the belly while doing this exercise is helpful to feel the movement of the abdomen with the breath. This breath may be practiced seated, standing, or lying down.

**Alternate Nostril Breathing**

This technique calms the body, focuses the mind, and balances the left and right hemispheres of the brain. It is also a good preparation for meditation.

**Instructions:** Sit comfortably and close your right nostril with your right thumb. Inhale fully through your left nostril and then close your left nostril with your right ring finger. Hold. When ready, release your right thumb and slowly exhale through your right nostril. Inhale through your right nostril and then close your right nostril with your right thumb. Hold. When ready, release your right ring finger and slowly exhale through the left nostril. Continue in this pattern for several breaths. When you’re ready, release your fingers from your nose and take a few deep breaths.

**Variations:** Repeating a mantra during alternate nostril breathing, or counting the breath. Gradually work towards lengthening the exhalation to twice the length of the inhalation. (for example, 2:4, 3:6, or 4:8 ratio of inhalation to exhalation)
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**Cooling Breath**

This breath cools the body and calms the mind. It is great to practice on hot summer days or if the room is stuffy.

**Instructions:** If you can, roll your tongue, curling the outsides toward the center, making a tube-like shape. Breathe in through it as if your tongue were a straw. If you cannot roll your tongue, place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth for the same effect. Exhale through your nose with the mouth closed. Repeat for several breaths.

**Take 5**

This technique helps improve concentration and relaxes the body.

**Instructions:** Inhale slowly to the count of five, and then exhale slowly to five.

**Balancing Breaths**

**Three-Part Breath** *(Deergha Swaasam)*

**Benefits:** Utilizes full capacity of the lungs, calms and energizes the body, and focuses the mind.

**Instructions:** Students will be breathing slowly and deeply in three parts. Begin by exhaling fully through the nose. To inhale, first let the belly expand, then allow the lungs to expand, and finally the upper chest rises. As you exhale, first release the upper chest, then the rib cage releases inward, and then the draw the belly. Continue breathing this way for 1-3 minutes.

**Variations:** Students may practice this breath seated, standing, lying down, or in various yoga poses. One hand may be placed on the belly and the other hand placed on the abdomen to feel the movement of the breath in different parts of the torso.

**Breath of Joy**

This technique releases tension in the body and calms the mind.

**Instructions:** This technique is done standing. Inhale as you lift the arms overhead. Sigh loudly as you exhale, coming into a forward bend and letting the arms dangle. Hold the breath as you come up to stand. Repeat 5-8 times.

* If you feel dizzy or light-headed during any of the breathing practices, please stop and let your breath come back to normal or rest in child's pose.
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BOOKS/RESOURCES FOR TEENS:

Add more “ing To Your Life by Gabrielle Bernste
Breathe: Yoga for Teens by Mary Kaye Chriyssicas
Just Say Om! A Teenager’s Guide –Your Life Journey by Soren Gordhamer
The Seven Steps for Highly Effective Teens, by Steven Covey, Jr.
Um, Like…OM: A Girl Goddess’s Guide to Yoga by Evan Cooper
You’re Accepted, by Katie Malachuk
Indigo Teen Dreams: Guided Relaxation Techniques Designed to Decrease Stress, Anger, and Anxiety, while Increasing Self Esteem and Self Awareness, by Lori Lite
Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul, by Jack Canfield

The 54321 Game

This quick and easy game is a sensory awareness exercise. It works like this:

5 Name 5 things you can SEE right now (“A spot on the wall” or “The clouds outside.”)

4 Name 4 things you can FEEL (“My feet in my socks” or “The breeze on my face.”)

3 Name 3 things you can HEAR (“Traffic outside” or “The coffee maker.”)

2 Name 2 things you can SMELL (“My lotion” or “The flowers on the table.” If you aren’t in a stimulating environment, feel free to move to where you can smell something or simply think of 2 smells you enjoy)

1 Name 1 good thing about YOURSELF

As you concentrate and try to find answers for each of the prompts, you’ll be distracted from distressing feelings and be drawn into the here and now.
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Anita’s Video Recommendations:

- **The New Science of Stress**: How you think about stress matters. TED Talk by Kelly McGonigal
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGyVTAoXEU

- **UCSF’s Osher Center for Integrative Medicine and The New Science of Stress and Stress Resilience**: Elissa Epel, Ph.D. Stress Soup
  www.integralhealthresources.com

- **Understanding Procrastination**
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arj7oStGlkU

“Nurture your mind with great thoughts, For you will never go any higher than you think.”
Benjamin Disraeli
RISE YOGA FOR YOUTH
Recommendations:

- Traditional Sun Salutation: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73sjOu0g58M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73sjOu0g58M)

- Free Live Nidra (guided deep relaxation) Recordings: [https://flyingvenus.com/free-live-yoga-recordings](https://flyingvenus.com/free-live-yoga-recordings)

- MC Yogi "Be the Change" music video Themes: ahimsa, self empowerment [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_gQxVOmod0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_gQxVOmod0)

Meditation Resources & Articles:

- For meditation/mindfulness practice ideas, daily quotes, thoughts, wisdom & inspiration: [www.mindfueldaily.com](http://www.mindfueldaily.com)

Apps

[https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app](https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app)
Websites and National Organizations:

- Protect Your Brain From Stress:

- 7 Ways Meditation Can Actually Change The Brain

- **JUST FOR FUN by James Clear**  
  Read this on JamesClear.com
  The following list was compiled by James Clear, filled with insights and wisdom about life.

  - Jeff Bezos, "What Matters More Than Your Talents"
  - John Cleese, "Creativity in Management"
  - William Deresiewicz, "Solitude and Leadership"
  - Richard Feynman, "Seeking New Laws"
  - Neil Gaiman, "Make Good Art"
  - Atul Gawande, "Curiosity and What Equality Really Means"
  - Richard Hamming, "You and Your Research"
  - Steve Jobs, "2005 Stanford Commencement Address"
  - Admiral William H. McRaven, "Make Your Bed"
  - Arno Rafael Minkkinen, "Finding Your Own Vision"
  - Charlie Munger, "A Lesson on Elementary, Worldly Wisdom"
  - Charlie Munger, "The Psychology of Human Misjudgment"
  - Nathan Myhrvold, "Roadkill on the Information Highway"
  - Jawaharlal Nehru, "At the Stroke of the Midnight Hour"
  - Randy Pausch, "Achieving Your Childhood Dreams"
  - Sir Ken Robinson, "Do Schools Kill Creativity?"
  - J.K. Rowling, "The Fringe Benefits of Failure"
  - Claude Shannon, "Creative Thinking"
  - Bret Victor, "Inventing on Principle"
  - David Foster Wallace, "This is Water"    Art Williams, "Just Do It"