



Resources for Online Learners

Stress Management

As working adults, we are constantly bombarded with demands on our attention, our time, our energy, and our resources. Some of these demands are in the form of ongoing background stimuli that barely register in our conscious minds, while others require decisions that affect our very health and well-being.

If you are a working adult returning to school after a long absence, you may already be painfully aware of the impact of adding a new role in your life--the role of student--to your roles as family member, employee, provider, etc. What you may not know is that there are some steps that you can take now to ensure that the demands of the student's role do not overwhelm you--physically or mentally.



Taking a Closer Look at Stress

Stress is not the result of circumstances, but rather the way we perceive circumstances. We can experience stress when:

- we feel overloaded or that things are out of control
- we experience life-changing events--either positive or negative.
- we are asked to change our attitudes and beliefs.
- we are uncertain about our roles or our future.
- we adopt certain behaviors that are encouraged in our culture, such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, time urgency, etc.
- we are fighting our "life rhythm"

Some circumstances are so stressful they create an immediate and noticeable physical response, as when you walk into a roomful of strangers to give a speech. The body, unable to distinguish between real and imagined danger, reacts with a primitive "flight-or-fight" response. If the body experiences enough of these stress reactions, chronic problems such as headaches, backaches, and stomachaches may result.

Techniques for Managing Stress

There are basically three choices for dealing with stress:

- Remove the stressor from your environment
- Remove yourself from the stressful conditions
- Learn techniques to counter the effects of stress

Some techniques that have proven to be effective in dealing with stress are outlined below:

1. *Practice Attitude Adjustment.* You must stretch your-self to see things differently when your current perspectives and attitudes limit your ability to cope.

2. *Set realistic expectations.* Setting personal targets too high is an invitation for ongoing stress.
3. *Exercise regularly.* Yes, running, walking, aerobics, and other kinds of vigorous exercise can revitalize you mentally and physically.
4. *Find Time for Leisure Pursuits.* Even sedentary hobbies such as reading, gardening or fishing can be helpful in coping with stress. Enjoyment is the key.
5. *Learn relaxation techniques.* They can make you feel less vulnerable to stress and more in control of your life. Deep, slow abdominal breathing as de-scribed for test preparation is highly effective.
6. *Draw on your support system.* Without regular face-to-face contact with classmates, the distance learner is even more dependent on the support of family and friends. However, with the communications options available today, this support system can be extended to include other distance learners.
7. *Don't overlook your instructor as a resource.* Your instructor should be the first person you contact if you have any questions on course requirements, need help, or want feedback on your progress.

The more flexible and varied your repertoire of coping skills, the more likely it is that you will be a successful stress manager.

Additional Resources

Butler, K. (1998). *Stress busters. Tips to feel healthy, alive, and energized* New York: John Wiley.

Carlson, R. (1997). *Don't sweat the small stuff-and it's all small stuff.* Hyperion.

Girdano, D. A.. & Everly, G. S. (2000). *Controlling stress and tension : A holistic approach, (6th ed.)*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Peisner, P. (2000). *Finding time: Breathing space for women who do too much (2nd ed)*. Sourcebooks Trade

Sieveking, A. & Eshref, H. (1999). *Easy exercises to relieve stress.* Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corp.

Spera, S. & Lanto, S. (1997). *Beat stress with strength: A survival guide for work and life.* Indianapolis, IN: Jist Works

Tubesing, D. (1981). *Kicking your stress habits: A do-it-yourself guide for coping with stress.* Duluth, MN: Whole Person Associates.

Williams, C. & Soccolich, R. (Eds.). (1998). *100 steps necessary for survival in a stressful environment.* Long Island City, NY: Seaburn Books

[Stress Management Tips and Resources \(http://www.stresstips.com/index.htm\)](http://www.stresstips.com/index.htm)

[Ten Commandments for Managing Stress \(http://www.unc.edu/depts/ucc/MStress.html\)](http://www.unc.edu/depts/ucc/MStress.html)

[The Web's Stress Management and Emotional Wellness Page \(http://imt.net/~randolfi/StressPage.html\)](http://imt.net/~randolfi/StressPage.html)