Stress Less

UVU WELLNESS PROGRAMS

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

Stress Less

What You Can Expect from this Resource

This guide cannot eliminate stress in your life, but it can help you understand stress and teach you techniques that will help you adapt and manage your stress more effectively.

What Will Be Covered

- Types of Stress
- The Stress Response
- Stress Assessment: Perceived Stress Scale
- Managing Your Stress
- Common Stressors in College
- Resources

Types of Stress

Acute Stress: short-term, intense stress that generally goes away quickly. This type of stress helps us survive dangerous situations. You may experience acute stress throughout your daily life, such as arguing with a partner, getting a speeding ticket, or presenting in front of a group of people. There are also more traumatic events that cause acute stress, such as getting in a car accident, having someone close to you pass away, or being involved in an attack.

Chronic Stress: long-term stress that can last for weeks, months, or even years. This stress occurs when a stressor is constantly present, such as being in an abusive relationship, living in poverty, dealing with a chronic illness, or having problems at work. Sometimes this stress can become so much a part of your life that you do not notice it anymore. Chronic stress can lead to health problems if you do not learn how to manage it.

Distress: a negative form of stress. This response occurs when you are overwhelmed with demands, losses, or perceived threats. Distress can lead to health problems in the future if it is not managed properly. Some examples of distress include breaking up with a partner, the death of someone you love, or not meeting a deadline.

Eustress: a positive form of stress. This response occurs when you are experiencing challenging but attainable and enjoyable tasks. Eustress can lead to a sense of fulfillment and facilitate growth, development, and high performance levels. Some examples of eustress include competing in a sport, giving a speech, or performing at a concert.

The Stress Response

The stress response is the emergency reaction system of your body. When your body is in the stress response, it produces adrenaline and cortisol to help you handle the situation.

Sometimes the stress response can turn on when you don't need it. Your body believes it is in an emergency when it really is not. One example of the stress response being active when it doesn't need to be is when you are simply thinking about past or future events. Being in the stress response when it is not an emergency can take a toll on your physical health, psychological health, and behavior. Stress that is unmanaged long-term can lead to many health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Circle each stress response that you have experienced outside of an emergency situation.

Physical

Muscle Aches
Increased Heart Rate
Weight Gain
Constipation
Low Energy
Tight Chest
Dizziness
Stomach Cramps
Insomnia
Headache
Nausea
Dry Mouth or Throat
Weight Loss
Weakness
Diarrhea
Trembling
Chills
Sweating
Leg Cramps
Hot Flashes
Pounding Heart
Chest Pain
Numb or Tingling Hands/Feet
Increased Blood Pressure
Feeling Faint
Neck Pain
Increased Urination

Psychological

Restlessness
Agitation
Worthlessness
Depression
Guilt
Anger
Nightmares
Sensitivity
Numbness
Mood Swings
Decreased Concentration
Preoccupation
Insecurity
Anxiety

Behavioral

Avoidance
Neglect
Increased Smoking/Vaping
Poor Appearance
Increased Spending
Decreased Eating
Increased Eating
Nail Biting
Increased Talking
Sexual Problems
Fidgeting
Decreased Exercise
Aggressive Speaking
Increased Sleeping
Decrease in Relaxing Activities

Stress Assessment: Perceived Stress Scale

There are many different stress assessments available online. The purpose of stress assessments is not to diagnose but to present the participant with information about their own stress levels.

This program uses the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). This assessment tests what you perceive about your own experiences. Two people could experience the same thing, but depending on their perception of the event, one person could end up in the low perceived stress category, and one could end up in the high perceived stress category. This assessment will help you understand your own perception of stressful experiences.

Answer the following questions using the scale below. Answers should reflect your thoughts, feelings, and actions from the past month.

0 - Never 1 - Almost Never 2 - Sometimes 3 - Fairly Often 4 - Very Often

_____ 1. In the past month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
_____ 2. In the past month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
_____ 3. In the past month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?
_____ 4. In the past month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
_____ 5. In the past month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
_____ 6. In the past month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
_____ 7. In the past month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
_____ 8. In the past month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
_____ 9. In the past month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
_____ 10. In the past month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Scoring Your Perceived Stress Scale

- Reverse your scores for questions 4, 5, 7, and 8.
  - 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, 4 = 0
- Add up the numbers to get your score.

Total Score:

- If your score is **0 - 13**, you have **low perceived stress**.
- If your score is **14 - 26**, you have **moderate perceived stress**.
- If your score is **27 - 40**, you have **high perceived stress**.

Managing Your Stress

Learning how to manage your stress can improve your quality of life. It can also lead to better health outcomes in the future. Different techniques may be more beneficial to you than others, so try various techniques and use whichever ones work best for you!

Put a checkmark next to every technique that you are interested in trying.

_____ **Get Active:** moving your body increases endorphins (happiness hormones), can help you refocus, and can boost your mood. Make sure to choose physical activities that sound enjoyable to you. Try walking, working in the garden, heading to the pool, or cleaning your home.

_____ **Nourish Your Body:** Try to eat a variety of foods you enjoy, and that will give your body the energy it needs to function. Aim to eat 3 out of the 5 food groups during each meal. Don't forget to include snacks for an extra boost of energy!

_____ **Avoid Unhealthy Habits:** Sometimes people will turn to substances such as alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, or drugs to cope with stress. Avoid turning to substances that will hurt your health.

_____ **Meditate:** Meditation can bring a sense of calm and peace to you. It allows you to live in the moment and practice accepting yourself. You can meditate on your own or follow a guided meditation. You can also practice deep breathing, which is a form of meditation that is easy to do in public and in the moment.

_____ **Connect With Others:** Stress can make it easy for you to isolate yourself. Isolation can lead to greater feelings of stress and hopelessness. Connecting with others can provide a distraction from your stressors or give you a support person who can help you conquer your stress.

_____ **Get Enough Sleep:** Sleep is essential to your overall health. Sleep allows your body to rest and recharge in preparation for the next day. Not getting enough sleep or quality sleep can lead to poor mood, low energy level, and inability to function.

_____ **Journal:** writing down your thoughts and feelings can get it out of your head and onto paper. Don't worry about spelling or grammar, just allow yourself to release your stress onto the page.

_____ **Be Creative:** take time to do the things you enjoy. Your favorite hobbies can help distract you from your stressors. If you don't have a favorite hobby, try new things until you find something you love!

_____ **Seek Counseling:** Therapy is a valuable tool that provides extra support during difficult times. Therapists can help you identify stressors and learn new coping skills.

Common Stressors in College

Every college student is going to face stress. This stress can come from classes, homework, and tests, or it can come from life changes such as moving out, navigating relationships, or trying to juggle work and school.

Below is a list of common college stressors with campus resources that can help you cope with your stress.

Stressor	Resources
Classes	• Academic Tutoring: Language, Math, Writing (LA 201) • Professors • Academic Advisors
Finances	• Money Success Center (KB 108) • Financial Aid & Scholarships (BA 105)
Mental Health	• Student Health Services (SC 221)
Nutrition	• Dietitian (SL 211) • UVU Food Pantry (SC 105) • Wellness Coaching: Intuitive Eating, Meal Planning (SL 211)
Job	• Career Development Center (LC 409) • UVU Internships (LC 409)
Relationships	• Student Health Services (SC 221) • Victims Advocate (GT 331) • Healthy Relationships Wellness Coaching (SL 211)
Body Image	• Dietitian (SL 211) • Student Health Services (SC 221) • You Value You Women's Body Project (SL 211)
Planning for the Future	• Career Development Center (LC 409) • Academic Advisors

Goal

Setting a goal to help you manage your stress may allow you to explore a new activity that helps relieve stress or give you the extra strength you need to ask for help. Remember that goals should be SMART!

S Specific: determine the what and why of your goal.

M Measurable: how will you measure success?

A Attainable: make sure that your goal will challenge you, but it's still achievable.

R Relevant: ensure that your goal is in line with what you are trying to accomplish.

T Time-Bound: give yourself a clear deadline.

My Goal:

_____

_____

_____

"We can easily manage if we will only take, each day, the burden appointed to it. But the load will be too heavy for us if we carry yesterday's burden over again today, and then add the burden of the morrow before we are required to bear it."

John Newton

Program Sources:

- American Psychological Association
- Center for Integrated Healthcare
- Mayo Clinic
- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Institute of Health