

## Stress Management

Stress is a very common concern of college students. Although stress can serve a purpose, such as motivating us to study for an important test or making sure we don't forget an upcoming deadline, it can also be very problematic. The short-term and long-term impacts of stress can impact how we think and how we feel, both emotionally and physically.

### What is stress?

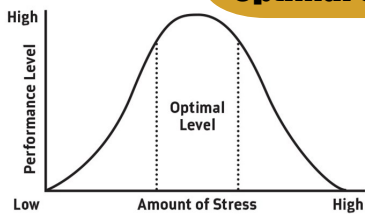
Stress is a form of tension that can be felt both physically and emotionally. Our bodies experience stress often in response to real or imagined events that are important to us or threatening in some way. Although stress is often viewed as something we wish we could completely get rid of in our lives, it does serve an important purpose.

Our bodies and minds have designed powerful stress responses to help us in threatening situations. For example, a stress response to seeing a car stopped suddenly in front of you while driving may provide your body and mind with the sudden energy and alertness to brake just in time. Stress can also help us to stay motivated or focused on our goals. Worried about being fired from your job for showing up late? A stress response may provide you with the motivation to skip hitting the snooze on your alarm.

However, as most of us know, stress can also have a very negative impact on our lives. Intense short-term stress or chronic long-term stress can leave us feeling wired, irritable, anxious, depressed, forgetful, or exhausted. We can experience headaches, increased blood pressure, upset digestion issues, and much more. Long-term stress can impact the immune system and cause a number of ongoing physical issues.

Therefore, the goal is to manage stress in order to aim for optimal levels that promote our mental and physical wellness, and help us in our goal achievement.

### Optimal Stress Levels



Some stress may help us to focus and stay motivated, but too much stress will negatively impact our

performance. Consider a competitive runner about to start a race. How might a little stress help them to perform? How might too much stress have a negative impact?

### How do I manage stress?

Managing stress requires both the skills to respond to sources of stress in the moment and strategies to keep yourself at a low or "optimal" stress level.

Often, when feeling stressed, we may have a difficult time generating ideas of how to address the issue. The "Four A's of Stress Management" can be helpful in brainstorming possible approaches. This strategy includes considering ways in which you can change the situation or change your reaction to the situation.

Change the Situation	Change your Reaction
<b>Avoid</b> the stressor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Say "no" to things you do not need to take on</li> <li>Avoid stressful people, places, or topics</li> <li>Remove unnecessary sources of stressful stimulation (for example, political news)</li> <li>Distinguish between the "shoulds" &amp; the "musts" in your life</li> </ul>	<b>Adapt</b> to the stressor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on the positive</li> <li>Review what you accomplished each day</li> <li>Look at the big picture (How much will this matter in 5 years? 10 years?)</li> <li>Adjust your standards (Are you holding yourself to perfectionistic standards?)</li> </ul>
<b>Alter</b> the stressor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Express yourself</li> <li>Communicate your feelings, needs, and limits</li> <li>Be assertive</li> <li>Manage time and plan ahead</li> <li>Develop daily to-do lists</li> </ul>	<b>Accept</b> the stressor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't try to control the uncontrollable (this includes trying to control other people's behaviors)</li> <li>Share your feelings (talk to a friend, a counselor, journal)</li> <li>Look for an upside</li> </ul>

Imagine you just spent four hours working on homework and when you check your to-do list, you still have a ton to get done. What approach might you use? Perhaps you might try to **adapt** your reaction in order to reduce stress by focusing on what you *did* accomplish. Or maybe you choose to **alter** the stressor by developing a study schedule and booking a tutoring session. Both are healthy and productive ways to respond to this stressor.

## Coping Skills for Stress

Developing coping skills, or strategies to help us to cope in a challenging situation, can be incredibly useful in our process of managing stress. Coping skills can be used proactively to help to keep our stress levels low or they can be used reactively when a stressful situation hits.



Here's a few ideas.

- **Deep breathing.** Practice taking slow deep breaths by breathing in to the count of eight and breathing out to the count of eight. Place a hand on your abdomen to feel the rise and fall with each breath. Deep breathing slows the physical stress response by relaxing the body which in turn, can help us to relax our minds. This can be an easy strategy to use anywhere and almost any time.
- **Talk to someone.** Talking about your stressors can help you to better understand your reaction and more efficiently brainstorm strategies for addressing the issue. Expressing your feelings may also help you feel supported and less alone. Consider talking with an empathic friend, family member, or counselor.
- **Move your body.** Physical exercise can help to regulate our bodies in times of stress and can often boost our moods. Consider ways in which to get active such as going for a quick walk between classes.
- **Engage in meaningful activities.** Develop a list of activities that promote relaxation or positive emotions. For example, activities could include things such as journaling, engaging in a creative project, having coffee with a friend, gardening, reading, petting your dog/cat, taking a bath, meditation, biking, or listening to music. Schedule time to engage in activities as an ongoing method to proactively promote your mental wellness. If your schedule is packed, get creative and develop a list of activities that can fit into almost any day such as listening to relaxing music on your commute or stretching and giving yourself a quick neck massage when on break between classes.
- **Take an intentional break.** Sometimes it can be helpful to take a break from a direct stressor. Studying for an

## Additional Resources

There are many resources available on stress management and related topics. Check out the following resources available from the Jed Foundation ([jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center](https://jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center)).

- [Understanding Stress](#)
- [Tips for Managing Stress](#)
- [Tips for Managing Academic Stress](#)
- [How to Deal with Financial Stress](#)

exam? Consider taking an intentional break every so often in order to reduce your stress levels and clear your mind. Rather than hopping on social media or scrolling for news on your phone, make this break intentionally focused on reducing stress. Consider deep breathing, listening to music, going for a short walk, doing a few jumping jacks, or engaging in some light stretching.

It's important to note that there are many negative ways in which some attempt to cope with stress. Negative coping attempts, such as using drugs or alcohol, procrastinating, or excessive distractions (for example, an unhealthy amount of time spent playing video games or on social media) may hide feelings of stress in the very short-term but will create bigger problems. Negative coping attempts will add to the source of stress and often balloon into long-term problems. If you engage in negative behaviors as an attempt to cope stress, you are strongly encouraged to talk with a counselor for support and to work on developing a new approach.

## Counseling Services

Counseling services are available to support Anoka Technical College students. A counselor can talk with you about any concerns or difficulties you are facing, provide support, and help in developing strategies and skills to promote wellness and goal achievement. Counseling services are confidential and free. You are encouraged to reach out for support.

To learn more about counseling services, visit: <https://www.anokatech.edu/student-services/counseling-services/>

To schedule an appointment with a counselor, visit the weblink above or call 763-576-7860.