

### What is stress?

Stress is the physiological and psychological response of the body to some sort of threat to our safety, self-esteem, or well-being. Stressors can be physical (e.g., illness), social (e.g., a relationship breakup or other loss), circumstantial (e.g., a poor exam grade or moving), or psychological (e.g., low self-esteem or worry). Often, changes such as a new semester or new job can bring on stress.

We are all under stress every day. A certain amount of stress helps us all to function better, keep ourselves safe from threatening things, and to get things done during the day. Too much stress, however, can lead to feeling physically ill, difficulty concentrating,

### What are the symptoms of stress?

Everyone responds to stress in different ways. What might be stressful for one person may be another person's hobby. In a similar way, everyone reacts differently to stress. Some common stress reactions include:

- \*\* Muscle tension, soreness in the back, shoulders.
- \*\* Stomach troubles or digestive distress
- \*\* Difficulty falling asleep, waking early
- \*\* Increased heart rate or difficulty breathing.
- \*\* Fatigue or exhaustion
- \*\* Lack of interest, boredom
- \*\* Engaging in destructive behaviors (e.g., drinking too much, overeating)
- \*\* Inability to concentrate
- \*\* Avoidance or fear of people, places, or certain tasks

These symptoms may also be caused by conditions other than stress. In addition, stress can lead to more serious problems, including depression, anxiety, hypertension and other illnesses. If symptoms persist or if stress becomes too much for you to manage on your own, it is important to see a qualified health-care provider.

### Questions to ask yourself about your stress:

- What are the primary sources of stress in my life?
- What are the signs and symptoms in my body that let me know I'm stressed?
- What have I done that worked in the past to manage the stress?
- What can I do to integrate more relaxation into my daily routine?

### *Did you know...*

Counseling and Psychological Services offers individual assessment and counseling for stress reduction and relaxation. In a supportive environment, clients learn new stress reduction techniques and create an individualized plan to manage stress. Call 459-2628 for more information and to make an appointment

## From the experts

Stanford professor and expert on stress, Dr. Robert Sapolsky, has identified four important components of reducing stress in his research. Those include:

- 1.) Predictive information such as a sign that the stress is going to be increasing (e.g., knowing a test date). This gives us more control over our reaction.
- 2.) An outlet for dealing with stress (e.g., exercise, relaxation)
- 3.) A positive outlook or the belief that life is going to get better, rather than get worse.
- 4.) Having friends. Social support from others is an important part of keeping down our stress levels.

Taken from an interview 07/17/02

## CPS Contact

### Information

CPS provides many services including individual, group, couples, family, counseling, and stress reduction.

### Psychological Crisis or Suicidal Concerns

(M-Fri 8am – 5pm):

CPS: 459-2628

Psychiatry 459-2214

Student Health 459-2211

### 24-Hour Crisis or Suicidal Concerns:

Suicide Prevention of Santa Cruz 458-5300

Or 1-877-663-5433

UC Emergency 911

### Psychiatric Emergencies After 5pm and Weekends

County Mental Health 462-7644

**For more information visit our website:**

[www2.ucsc.edu/counsel](http://www2.ucsc.edu/counsel)

## Effective ways to manage stress:

- Think about possible causes of your stress and be active in reducing stress. Small shifts in your thinking, behaviors, or breathing can make a very big difference.
- Avoid stress-producing situations. While not always possible, many stressful situations can be avoided. Try to look for places where you can avoid inviting stress.
- Engaging in some regular exercise has been shown to alleviate the impacts of stress. Choose an assortment of tension-building and tension-releasing exercises, even small doses help.
- Examine if the way that you are thinking about your life (e.g., perfectionist thinking) is adding to or decreasing your stress. Are there other ways to think about the situation that are less stress-inducing?
- Engage in activities that you enjoy and that give you an outlet for thinking about other things besides your stress.
- Find your own optimal stress-relievers. Is it changing your thoughts? A physical activity? A social occasion? Look for the healthy ways that help you to feel less stressed and do them!
- Increase your social connections...find other people who can relate to your experience. Do stress-busting activities together!
- Take good care of your body ... eat well, get enough sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs, which can increase stress.
- Use self-relaxation techniques like deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and visualizing relaxing places (see below).
- Chronic stress can have long-term effects on health and well-being, so if your symptoms are prolonged or severe, it is important to get outside support.

## Some effective relaxation techniques to get you started:

- Try deep breathing exercises. Lay or sit in a comfortable position with your muscles relaxed and take a few deep breaths. Work towards breathing in to a slow count to five. 1...2...3...4...5... Exhale slowly. Rely on this technique when you start to feel stressed
- When your body feels tense, take three minutes to sit or lay quietly and focus on calming all of the muscles in your body. Begin with the muscles in your feet and slowly work your way up the body, relaxing all of the major muscle groups until your whole body feels at ease.
- After doing some breathing and muscle relaxation, or just taking time to rest, take a moment to calm your thoughts and visualize a peaceful place in your mind, either a place you have been or would like to go. Allow your body to relax more and your mind to become more calm. Recognize that you can go to that peaceful place in your mind and feel