

The most important things you need to know about stress management

Managing stress well takes some thought and some practice, but is something that everyone can do. The UI Wellness Center offers several stress management programs. Our courses go into a lot more detail and take more time than we have today. The following is an overview of the most important things you need to know to get a handle on managing your stress:

It's not stress unless you respond as if it is. Stress = a stressor (the thing that bugs you – an event or circumstance) + a stress response (emotional and physiological). Things that stress out one person don't necessarily bother others. For instance a roommate leaving clothes all over the floor might really upset someone, whereas someone else will just shrug it off. If you don't respond it's not stress.

Becoming aware of your stressors and how you respond to them will help you learn how to manage stressors before they "get to you". Using a stress diary, stress management checklists or journaling are good ways to build your stress awareness. And building awareness is the beginning of creating a stress management strategy that works for you.

Work with what you've got. Everyone already has a stress management system. For most of us, some of our stress management tools work well and others don't work well. Analyzing how you currently manage stress and thinking about how you can improve upon what you are already doing can help you manage stress better.

Find several tools that suit you. There are many different kinds of stress management techniques. Different techniques work better with different stressors, circumstances, personality types etc. It's important to develop a few techniques that work for your unique set of stressors, personality and stress response style.

Determine what you have control over. A good way to manage stress is to look at your stressors and figure out which ones you have control over. Sometimes you can reduce your stress by eliminating or changing the stressor (event or circumstance that bugs you) itself. Other times, you have no control over the stressor; you will need to either change the way you think about it, learn to relax or "let go of it".

To learn more about types of stress management tools turn the page over

Types of stress management tools

The following is a list of different kinds of stress management techniques. Some work better with stressors that can be controlled, and some are best for dealing with those stressors that you don't have control over:

Behavioral: These are great techniques when you have control over the stressor. These techniques include problem solving and time management skills, and arranging your life so that the stressor ceases to exist. For instance, if being late to morning class is typically a stressor for you, setting your alarm for 30 minutes earlier is a behavioral technique for reducing that stress.

Physical: Taking care of your body is an important way to reduce the negative effects of stress when you do not have control over the stressor. Eating well, getting enough sleep and being physically active builds your body's resilience and improves self-confidence. Physical activity also helps you burn off stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline.

Perception: Another excellent set of techniques for stressors that cannot be changed or controlled. They help you look at circumstances in a way that are not upsetting. Perception techniques include the use of healthy and respectful humor, and the use of empowering affirmations. Another very powerful perception changing technique is called reframing thoughts. This is a way of changing the self-talk in your head to be more positive and helpful, rather than judgmental or pessimistic.

Interpersonal: Many of the most common stressors involve our interaction with other people, including professors, students, friends and family. Learning to communicate well and handle conflict effectively are excellent ways to handle controllable stressors. Building a strong social support network is another great way to reduce stress.

Relaxation: Perhaps the most well-known stress management technique, eliciting the body's relaxation response is an effective way to de-stress when you encounter stressors that you cannot change or control. A few different relaxation techniques include: abdominal breathing, imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation. Yoga and Tai Chi combine physical activity and meditation to reduce stress.

For more ideas on how to manage stress or to schedule a stress management program for your residence or student group, contact the UI Wellness Center:

- ui-wellness@illinois.edu
- <http://www.campusrec.illinois.edu/wellnesscenter/>
- 265-9355

Also be sure to visit our online Wellness Under Pressure toolkit:

<http://www.campusrec.illinois.edu/wellnesscenter/underPressure/>