Managing Stress

What Do You Know about Managing Stress?

- Having stress is negative, and so stress should be eliminated from your life. True or False?
- Time management is the reason most college students cite for their academic success or failure. True or False?
- Laughing is important in managing stress. True or False?
- Different colors, sounds, and smells can affect your stress level. True or False?
- Breathing is the key to stress management. True or False?
- You can make up for not sleeping enough during the week by sleeping more or on the weekends, and it is the same as getting an average of seven to nine hours of sleep per night over a week’s time. True or False?
- Exposing yourself to stressful situations can sometimes help you reduce your stress. True or False?

Check your answers at the end of the chapter.

What Is Stress?

How do you know when you are stressed? You might experience headaches, stomachaches, or back and neck aches, or you might feel irritable, tired, anxious, and depressed. Some people eat more, while others find eating difficult when they are stressed. Stress refers to physiological and psychological responses to a significant or unexpected change or disruption in one's life. It can be brought on by real or imagined factors or events.

Stress was first described in the 1930s by Hans Selye. During his second year of medical school, Selye observed that, although his patients suffered from a variety of illnesses, they all showed common symptoms, such as fatigue, appetite disturbance, sleep problems, mood swings, gastrointestinal problems, and diminished concentration and recall. He began developing his now-famous theory of the influence of stress on people's ability to cope with and adapt to the pressures of injury and disease. He discovered that patients with a variety of ailments manifested many similar symptoms, which he
ultimately attributed to their bodies’ efforts to respond to the stresses of being ill. He called this collection of symptoms—this stress disease—stress syndrome, or the general adaptation syndrome (GAS). He also described this as “the syndrome of being ill.” We will discuss Selye’s discovery further later in the chapter.

Selye defines stress as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand whether it is caused by or results in pleasant or unpleasant conditions.” Stress can be both positive or negative. It is our response to stress—that makes a difference in terms of how it affects us. Stress resulting from unpleasant events or conditions is called distress (from the Greek dys, meaning bad, as in displeasure). Stress resulting from pleasant events or conditions is called eustress (from the Greek eu, meaning good, as in euphoria). Both distress and eustress elicit the same physiological responses in the body, as noted in Selye’s General Adaptation Syndrome model.

While stress may not always be negative, our responses to it can be problematic or unhealthy. Both positive and negative stressful situations place extra demands on the body—your body reacts to an unexpected change or a highly emotional experience, regardless of whether this change is good or bad. If the duration of stress is relatively short, the overall effect is minimal and your body will rest, renew itself, and return to normal. But, as you will learn in this chapter, long-lasting stress, experiencing multiple stressors simultaneously, and not managing your stress effectively can take a toll on your body.

Stress is actually normal and healthy at a certain level. With functional, healthy levels of stress, overall physiological equilibrium is maintained at a balanced level. However, you really don’t want to eliminate all stress because stress is adaptive, functional, and can be beneficial. You need to understand how you uniquely deal with stress and what works and doesn’t work well for you in coping with day-to-day pressures and problems (see the box “Different Cultures, Different Ways of Coping”).

How We Respond to Stress

When we are stressed, we react in specific ways. The stress response is the result of learned and conditioned habits adopted early in life as a way of coping with problems, conflict, and disruptive events. But many of our responses to stress are innate, basic human survival mechanisms left over from our primordial roots. In prehistoric times, the best response to perceived danger, such as seeing a saber-toothed tiger about to attack, might be to either fight the animal or to run away. Stress in modern times remains the same except that we are responding to twenty-first century threats and dangers rather than to saber-toothed tigers. Again, it is not the events that determine how stressed we feel but our response to these stressors. We next discuss the way that this innate stress response affects our modern lives.

**Fight or Flight Response**

Our response to stress involves many physiological changes that are collectively called the fight or flight response. In situations in which you must react immediately to danger, it is advisable to either fight off the danger or flee. For example, you are walking back from class at night, thinking about all the studying you need to do and you begin to cross the street. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a car’s headlights are coming right at you. Since your best response is probably not to fight the car, you run as fast as you can to the other side of the road. In that split second when you see the car careening quickly toward you, your muscles tense, your heart beats faster, your adrenaline pumps faster and is released at increased levels into your bloodstream, your breathing becomes more shallow and rapid, and your pupils dilate to see the car better.

This is the fight or flight response. Receiving alert signals from the brain, the sympathetic nerves signal most of the organs of the body, and the adrenal glands are activated. Within the brain itself, neural pathways, involved in increased attention and focus, are activated. In this way, performance and learning can be heightened. Again, all these changes are adaptive and helpful to your survival in getting out of harm’s way. In the preceding example, when you get to the other side of the road and realize that you are okay, your body begins to relax and return to its

**Key Terms**

- **stress** The physiological and psychological state of disruption caused by the presence of an unanticipated, disruptive, or stimulating event.
- **general adaptation syndrome (GAS)** Sequenced physiological responses to the presence of a stressor, involving the alarm, resistance, and exhaustion stages of the stress response.
- **distress** Stress that diminishes the quality of life; commonly associated with disease, illness, and maladaptation.
- **eustress** Stress that enhances the quality of life.
- **stress response** The physiological and psychological responses to positive or negative events that are disruptive, unexpected, or stimulating.
- **fight or flight response** The physiological response to a stressor that prepares the body for confrontation or avoidance.
normal state. You take a large, deep breath, expressing a big sigh of relief. Your muscles may feel even weaker than usual, your breathing may become deeper and heavier than is typical, and you may feel shaky as your body goes from extreme arousal to relaxing very quickly. Figure 3-1a depicts the changes from the normal state to an arousal state to a very relaxed state then back to normal.

Accompanying this fight or flight reaction is a slower response. During stressful events, the pituitary gland secretes a peptide called adrenocorticotropic hormone, or ACTH, into the blood. ACTH travels through the blood to the adrenal gland, where it signals the production of a hormone called cortisol.² Cortisol aids the body in recovering from stressful experiences by freeing up energy stores. The logic behind the slower stress response is that the quick fight or flight response uses up a lot of the body’s available energy. The slower response helps to replenish that energy. The body usually has some small amount of cortisol circulating in the blood at all times. When the stress response lasts too long or is initiated too frequently, the cortisol level is increased. After enough of these small increases, the body soon resets its control mechanism to maintain a higher constant amount of cortisol in the body.

**Chronic Stress**

Now let’s consider a different situation. You have a test in a week that you are very concerned about. It seems to be preoccupying your every waking thought, and you have trouble sleeping as well. You are worried that you won’t perform well on the test, and you really need to do better than you did on your last test. Your parents have been putting a great deal of pressure on you to do better in school in general. Because our bodies respond similarly to perceived or anticipated threat, you can have the

---

² For a detailed explanation of how cortisol functions in the body, refer to the sources provided at the end of the chapter.
same response to things that have and have not yet occurred. In other words, your heart races, breathing becomes labored, muscles are tense, the body sweats, and blood flow is constricted to the extremities and digestive organs and increases to the major muscles and brain. Your body is becoming ready to fight or flee the danger. However, you cannot take any action and make a fight or flight response, because nothing has happened yet. You haven't taken the test yet, and even once you have done so, you won't know your grade. So your body remains at this high level of arousal, as depicted in Figure 3-1b.

Remaining in a continued state of physiological arousal for an extended period of time is called chronic stress. This high level of arousal is similar to putting your foot on the accelerator of your car while it is in park and not letting up on the gas pedal. Since the fight or flight response is meant to be a very quick, short-acting response, your body begins to wear down if kept at this physiological state of arousal for too long; eventually, you will begin to feel exhausted. This is also the reason that people cope better with anxiety by taking some action, doing something about whatever they are worried about, rather than stewing about their problems. Thus the fight or flight response can be triggered inappropriately in response to phobias, irrational beliefs, an overactive imagination, or hallucinations or delusions.

The Three Stages of Stress

Once under the influence of a stressor, people’s bodies respond in remarkably similar, predictable ways. For example, when asked to give a speech for a class, your heart rate may increase, your throat may become dry, your palms may sweat, and you may feel lightheaded, dizzy, and nauseous. If an individual lost her or his job or discovered that her or his partner wanted to terminate their relationship, she or he might experience similar sensations. It is clear that different stressors are able to evoke common physical reactions.

Selye described the typical physical response to a stressor in his general adaptation syndrome model discussed earlier in the chapter. Selye stated that the human body moves through three stages when confronted by stressors, as follows.

**Alarm Stage**

Once exposed to any event that is perceived as threatening or dangerous, the body immediately prepares for difficulty, entering what Selye called the alarm stage. These involuntary changes, shown in Figure 3-2, are controlled by the hormonal and the nervous systems, and they trigger the fight or flight response. For example, you realize that the final exam you thought was today was actually scheduled for yesterday. You may begin to experience fear, panic, anxiety, anger, depression, and restlessness.

**Figure 3-1 Resolving Stress** How quickly and effectively you act to resolve stress has a significant effect on how long your body remains at a high level of physiological arousal.


**Key Terms**

- **chronic stress** Remaining at a high level of physiological arousal for an extended period of time; it can also occur when an individual is not able to immediately react to a real or a perceived threat.
- **alarm stage** The first stage of the stress response, involving physiological, involuntary changes that are controlled by the hormonal and the nervous systems; the fight or flight response is activated in this stage.
Sympathetic fibers of the autonomic division of the peripheral nervous system

- Decreased digestive activity
- Increased metabolic rate
- Increased sweating
- Increased salivation
- Increased muscular tension
- Increased cardiac function
- Altered immune response
- Decreased clotting time
- Increased glucose utilization
- Increased fat mobilization
- Increased muscle breakdown

Epinephrine and glucocorticoids release body’s stored energy in the stress response

Pituitary gland produces ACTH

Adrenal glands produce glucocorticoids

Adrenal glands produce epinephrine (adrenaline)

Sympathetic fibers of the autonomic division of the peripheral nervous system

Message reaches the autonomic division of the peripheral (outside the spinal cord) nervous system

Message travels down the spinal cord (central nervous system)

Control center (hypothalamus) initiates the stress response

Stressor registers in brain’s intellectual area (cerebral cortex)

Pituitary gland assists in the stress response

Pituitary gland produces ACTH

Peripheral nerve fibers back up epinephrine

Adrenal glands produce epinephrine (adrenaline)

Figure 3-2 The Stress Response  Physiological reactions to a stressor are controlled by the hormonal and nervous systems.
Resistance Stage

The second stage of a response to a stressor is the resistance stage, during which the body attempts to reestablish its equilibrium or internal balance. The body is geared for survival, and because staying in the alarm stage for a prolonged amount of time is not conducive for the body's optimal functioning, it will resist the threat or attempt to resolve the problem and reduce the intensity of the response to a more manageable level. Specific organ systems, such as the cardiovascular and digestive systems, become the focus of the body's response. During this phase, you might take steps to calm yourself down and relieve the stress on your body: you might deny the situation, withdraw and isolate yourself from others, and shut down your emotions. Thus, in the previous example, you may not tell anyone about missing the exam, may tell yourself that you don't care about that class anyway, and go back to bed.

Exhaustion Stage

Your ability to move from the alarm stage to a less damaging resistance stage determines the effect that the stressor has on your physical and psychological health. As you gain more control and balance is reestablished, you can begin to recover from the stress.

The length of time, the energy, and the effort required to accomplish recovery determines how exhausted your body becomes as a result of the stressor. Of course, the longer the body is under stress and out of balance, the more negative the effect will be on your body. Long-term exposure to a stressor or coping with multiple stressors at the same time often results in overloading your system. Specific organs and body systems that were called on during the resistance stage may not be able to resist a stressor indefinitely. When all the psychological and physical resources we rely on to deal with stress are used up, an exhaustion stage results, and the stress-producing hormones such as adrenaline increase again. This is when chronic and serious illnesses can begin to develop, and the individual may even develop clinical depression.

The Effects of Stress

If not managed well, stress can affect us in a variety of negative ways. For instance, stress can give us medical problems, interpersonal and relationship conflicts, and academic and work difficulties. However, a moderate level of stress can be beneficial.

The Physical Toll of Stress

Constant arousal and increased levels of adrenaline in your system will eventually wear down your body's immunological system. As this occurs, you will be less able to cope with stress, and so it takes less and less to cause a stress reaction. When you are chronically stressed, it takes very little to frustrate you, and you can feel easily irritated and stressed at the littlest thing. Your body is both psychologically as well as physically less able to cope with stress. This can compromise your immune system, and you may become ill more easily. It may also take longer for you to recover from illness.

The following medical problems have been associated with stress (to examine stress indicators for your personal stress, complete the rating scale at the end of this chapter):

- Cardiovascular problems (heart attacks, strokes, hypertension)
- Gastrointestinal problems (ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, diarrhea, constipation, diverticulitis)

Key Terms

resistance stage The second stage of a response to a stressor, during which the body attempts to reestablish its equilibrium or internal balance.

exhaustion stage The point at which the physical and psychological resources used to deal with stress have been depleted.
The newly emerging field of psychoneuroimmunology addresses the apparent interplay of the mind, the nervous system (the hypothalamus and the autonomic nervous system), and the immune system (see Chapter 13).

On the basis of clinical observation and laboratory studies, it is recognized that feelings associated with stress (depression and anxiety) and the disruption of social support systems relate to the weakening of the immune response and the development of some illnesses. For example, a study showed that happy, relaxed people are more resistant to illness than are those who tend to be unhappy and tense. In addition, work-related or personal stress experienced for at least one month increases a person’s chances of catching a cold. In other words, the longer you live in a stressful state, the more likely you are to catch a cold. People in unhappy marriages, particularly wives, also have higher incidences of colds. Extroverts are less likely to catch a cold, as are those with diverse social roles such as spouse, parent, worker, friend, community member, student. This situation makes sense, since we know that incorporating positive social interactions into our lives helps to alleviate stress, which in turn minimizes the risk of catching a cold.

In another study, immunizations were less effective in producing an immune response in students stressed by upcoming examinations than in those not scheduled to take exams. Stress triggers the release of inflammatory particles, cytokines and histamines, that fight off infection but can also cause cold symptoms. Researchers suspect that a sense of well-being decreases the release of cytokines and eases symptoms. This phenomenon may also explain why people can get through a state of acute stress and then become ill after the crisis is over, since much cortisol in the system can also act to suppress the immune system. Remember that the stress response is meant to be a rapid, temporary response. Individuals who are chronically stressed are constantly pumping out a high level of corticosteroids. Over time, this can result in a breakdown of muscle, a decreased number of immune cells, and a decreased inflammatory response. This can render the body less able to defend against bacteria and viruses—a stressed person is more likely to become ill. Hypertension and fluid retention are also associated with constant high levels of corticosteroids. On the other hand, if the level of corticosteroids in your system is too low, you can have an overactive immune system—this can harm healthy cells, resulting in autoimmune diseases such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. Therefore, it is important to maintain a healthy level of corticosteroids (in other words, a moderate level of stress) to keep the body in balance. See the box “Psychoneuroimmunology” for more on the links between stress and health.

**Psychoneuroimmunology: Can Stress Affect Our Immune System?**

The newly emerging field of psychoneuroimmunology addresses the apparent interplay of the mind, the nervous system (the hypothalamus and the autonomic nervous system), and the immune system (see Chapter 13).

On the basis of clinical observation and laboratory studies, it is recognized that feelings associated with stress (depression and anxiety) and the disruption of social support systems relate to the weakening of the immune response and the development of some illnesses. For example, a study showed that happy, relaxed people are more resistant to illness than are those who tend to be unhappy and tense. In addition, work-related or personal stress experienced for at least one month increases a person’s chances of catching a cold. In other words, the longer you live in a stressful state, the more likely you are to catch a cold. People in unhappy marriages, particularly wives, also have higher incidences of colds. Extroverts are less likely to catch a cold, as are those with diverse social roles such as spouse, parent, worker, friend, community member, student. This situation makes sense, since we know that incorporating positive social interactions into our lives helps to alleviate stress, which in turn minimizes the risk of catching a cold.

In another study, immunizations were less effective in producing an immune response in students stressed by upcoming examinations than in those not scheduled to take exams. Stress triggers the release of inflammatory particles, cytokines and histamines, that fight off infection but can also cause cold symptoms. Researchers suspect that a sense of well-being decreases the release of cytokines and eases symptoms. This phenomenon may also explain why people can get through a state of acute stress and then become ill after the crisis is over, since much cortisol in the system can also act to suppress the immune system. Remember that the stress response is meant to be a rapid, temporary response. Individuals who are chronically stressed are constantly pumping out a high level of corticosteroids. Over time, this can result in a breakdown of muscle, a decreased number of immune cells, and a decreased inflammatory response. This can render the body less able to defend against bacteria and viruses—a stressed person is more likely to become ill. Hypertension and fluid retention are also associated with constant high levels of corticosteroids. On the other hand, if the level of corticosteroids in your system is too low, you can have an overactive immune system—this can harm healthy cells, resulting in autoimmune diseases such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. Therefore, it is important to maintain a healthy level of corticosteroids (in other words, a moderate level of stress) to keep the body in balance. See the box “Psychoneuroimmunology” for more on the links between stress and health.

**The Immune System and Stress**

Corticosteroids are produced in the adrenal cortex as part of the stress response. Cortisol increases the body’s fuel supply of carbohydrates, glucose, and fat, which are needed to respond to stress. It is important not to keep these levels elevated for very long, though, as too much cortisol in the system can also act to suppress the immune system. Remember that the stress response is meant to be a rapid, temporary response. Individuals who are chronically stressed are constantly pumping out a high level of corticosteroids. Over time, this can result in a breakdown of muscle, a decreased number of immune cells, and a decreased inflammatory response. This can render the body less able to defend against bacteria and viruses—a stressed person is more likely to become ill. Hypertension and fluid retention are also associated with constant high levels of corticosteroids. On the other hand, if the level of corticosteroids in your system is too low, you can have an overactive immune system—this can harm healthy cells, resulting in autoimmune diseases such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. Therefore, it is important to maintain a healthy level of corticosteroids (in other words, a moderate level of stress) to keep the body in balance. See the box “Psychoneuroimmunology” for more on the links between stress and health.

**Cardiovascular Disease and Stress**

Your level of stress also contributes to your risk for developing cardiovascular disease. Chronic stress exposes your body to unhealthy, persistently elevated levels of stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Studies also link stress to changes in the way blood clots, which

- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Lupus
- Headaches and migraines
- Muscle spasms and cramps
- Sleep disorders
- Anxiety
- Jaw problems (temporomandibular joint [TMJ] syndrome)
- Allergies
- Cancer
- Back pain
- Asthma
- Kidney disease
- Sexual dysfunction
- Infertility
- Alcoholism and drug abuse
increases the risk of heart attack. Job stress, personality factors, and social isolation have all been suggested as factors contributing to cardiovascular disease. For example, one study found that people who worked more than 60 hours a week were twice as likely to have a heart attack as those working 40 hours a week. High levels of stress can make other risk factors (such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure) worse, which in turn increases the chances of developing cardiovascular disease.

**Type A and Type B Personalities** Cardiologists Meyer Friedman and Roy Rosenman identified two basic types of personalities when they interviewed individuals in order to identify people who may be susceptible to stress-related heart disease. In the interview, they asked individuals the following questions:

1. Does your job carry heavy responsibility?
2. Is there any time when you feel particularly rushed or under pressure?
3. When you are under pressure, does it bother you?
4. Would you describe yourself as a hard-driving ambitious type of person in accomplishing the things you want, or would you describe yourself as a relatively relaxed and easy-going person?

From the responses to these questions, Friedman and Rosenman were able to distinguish two types of personalities with respect to stress: type A and type B personalities. **Type A** individuals often feel pressured, are ambitious, impatient, competitive, walk and talk rapidly, and can be easily annoyed by delays. **Type B** individuals tend to be calm, relaxed, easy-going, and patient. They also found that many cases of heart disease couldn't be attributed to other cardiac risk factors such as smoking or dietary habits but could be linked to stress. Type A personalities tend to share qualities of workaholism and perfectionism, such as having high expectations and feeling out of control, irritable and overwhelmed, stressed and pressured most of the time. There is a constant sense of needing to go faster and hurry through activities to get onto the next task. Thus type A people tend not to enjoy what they are doing because they are thinking about the next activity rather than enjoying the present. This can of course cause tension in their relationships as well. Type A people tend to drive themselves to exhaustion and stop only when they collapse or become ill.

While Friedman and Rosenman didn't describe type A personalities as an illness but more as a personality type, they did find correlations with stress. Type A people sometimes need to slow down, lower their expectations of themselves, delegate responsibilities to others, and prioritize their tasks. Type A individuals often complain that they have trouble relaxing and don't know how to relax. They also don't allow themselves to have fun until all of the work is done, which rarely occurs. Scheduling social activities and time to relax is one important component in alleviating the stress that accompanies type A personalities. Exercising, meditation, massage, spiritual activities, and yoga are other ways to relax.

**The Stress-Hardy Individual** While some people are chronically stressed, which leads to exhaustion, other people seem to have a high stress tolerance. These “stress-hardy” individuals have a lower frequency of illness and absenteeism. They view stressors as challenges and chances for new opportunities and seem to thrive with increased stress. They feel more in control of their lives and perceive themselves as having options and the power to make choices and influence situations. So it is not just the level of stress that an individual experiences that determines how he or she will respond but also the individual’s ability to manage varying degrees of stress. Stress-hardy individuals who have a good social support system, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy diet have fewer stress-related illnesses than do those who have less healthy lifestyles.

**Benefits of Stress**

As we have said, while too much stress can have a negative effect and cause some serious health problems, a moderate level of stress is positive and beneficial. Stress can be motivating and energizing. Without some stress, many of us may not get much accomplished in our day or even get out of bed! Look at the diagram in Figure 3-3. What do you notice? Too little and too much stress are not helpful. When you are not stressed at all, you can be apathetic and lethargic. When you are too stressed, you are paralyzed with fear, like deer in the headlights. This is referred to as the **Yerkes-Dodson Law**, which uses a bell-shaped curve to demonstrate that there is an optimal level of stress for peak performance. This fact holds true for any type of performance, from academic or work...
activities to music or athletics. Recognizing the appropriate level of stress for your ideal performance level is important in reaching your potential.

The Sources of Stress

There are other causes of stress besides experiencing positive or negative events in life. What events or situations trigger stress for you? For some it is financial worries, for others it might be relationship conflict, and for still others it is work-related stress. Even positive events, such as getting married, starting a new job, or moving to a new place, can be stressors. Going on vacation can be stressful as you get things done ahead of time to prepare for being away, pack your belongings, spend money on the trip, and completely change your routine. Any type of change in your life has the potential to trigger a stressful response.

Because stress involves a physiological response, it has a direct link to your physical and psychological health. The work of Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe has found direct connections between changes in people’s lives and physical illness. They developed a widely used inventory, called the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, to assess the degree of stress people experience in connection with particular life events. While one of these events alone might be tolerable, a combination of too many life changes within a short period of time may lead to illness. To effectively manage your stress, you need to understand what specific sources trigger stress for you. Students experience some specific types of stress that other people do not necessarily encounter. In this next section, we will discuss stressors unique to students and how to manage them.

To assess your level of stress and potential vulnerability to illness, complete the Personal Assessment inventory at the end of this chapter.

Student Stressors

Going to college has been likened to “crossing into a new culture” where students face unique challenges and stressors. Similar to going to live in another country, students must learn new customs and traditions, new ways of doing things, a new language, and must leave comfortable and familiar surroundings. This can cause a high level of stress for students, many of whom have left their support system behind to live in a place where they know few people. In the sections that follow, we cover some of the specific stressors college students face and offer ways to manage these situations.

Interpersonal Stressors

Homesickness Homesickness is one of the most common problems facing college students—which is understandable given that they are separated from friends and family and learning to live in an entirely new environment. When you are undergoing a great deal of change in your life, it is helpful to have the comfort and security of knowing that your home base remains stable and consistent. Moving from home to college can disrupt this sense of safety. While the college years can be an exciting and challenging time in your life, you may be missing your friends and family at home with whom you normally share these events. You may have also lost your sense of belonging while you struggle with finding a way to fit in with and navigate your new surroundings.

Often homesickness doesn’t hit until a few weeks or maybe a month after you have moved, since the first few weeks are filled with meeting new people, social activities, and unpacking. After the dust settles, some people begin to feel lonely and alone. See the box “Overcoming Homesickness” for advice on how to deal with homesickness.
Relationship Problems  Along with homesickness, another very common stressor for students is relationship problems. Often students are separated by long distances from their best friends and romantic partners. While it can be difficult to maintain long-distance relationships, it is not impossible. Studies show that the key to effective long-distance relationships is communication. The quality of a long-distance relationship is improved if you both are committed to each other, you can talk openly about your concerns, feelings, and fears, and you can agree on the rules of the relationship, such as dating other people. In addition, there needs to be a strong level of trust between the partners, since trust is often tested in long-distance relationships. Both of you will change, and you must share these changes so that you can grow together, not apart. Agree on how often you will see each other, call or e-mail, and focus on spending high-quality time together.

Balancing Work, Home, and School  It is estimated that about two-thirds of students work while going to college, and more students are working full-time to pay for the costs of tuition (see Figure 3-4). In addition, it is estimated that between 5 and 10 percent of college students also have children. This, of course, adds stress to a student’s life in balancing time for school, children, work, and household responsibilities. The increase in the number of students who have children is partly a result of a nationwide trend of more women in their mid-20s or older starting or returning to college. In fact, a national study by the University of Michigan showed that the number of full-time female students over 25 years old grew by 500 percent over recent years.12

Changing for the Better

Overcoming Homesickness

I just started college, and my family and friends are five hours away from me. I tend to be on the shy side and don’t know anyone at my college. I miss my friends and family and don’t feel like I belong here. I am thinking about withdrawing from school and going home. What should I do?

The following are some strategies to combat these feelings:

- **Get involved!** Become active in extracurricular social activities such as special interest clubs, student government, religious clubs, fraternities, and sororities. Clubs associated with your major are a great way to meet people, further your academic and career interests, and keep you from feeling homesick.
- **Call, e-mail, or text message** your family and friends regularly and let them know you would like to hear from them.
- **Be open to meeting new people.** Introduce yourself to people in your classes, and exchange e-mail addresses and phone numbers. This is also an excellent way to get a study partner or study group together. Keep your door open when you are in your room, and spend time in public, common areas—not just hiding away in your room when you have spare time. Strike up a conversation while doing your laundry in the common laundry room area.
- **Don’t eat alone.** Ask someone to join you to eat, or ask people at a table if you can eat with them.
- **Don’t go home on the weekends.** Even though it may be tempting to visit your family and friends, the weekends are the best time to meet people and participate in the activities going on around campus.
- **Be patient with yourself.** Accept that loneliness and longing for home are normal, and it will take some time for you to adjust to all the changes you are experiencing. Don’t decide to throw in the towel after the first few days! It may take a month or more before you begin to feel more comfortable in your new home. Give yourself some time to face this new challenge.
While some campuses offer child care, many do not, which leaves students having to coordinate schedules and juggle responsibilities, causing even more stress. Also, the cost of child care can be exorbitant for some and can certainly add to financial worries. Managing time well and having a strong support system are essential for students with children, particularly single parents. Often there is little to no time available for relaxation, socializing, or exercising, and so employing stress relief strategies can be challenging.

**Academic Stressors**

**Stress and Learning**  How does stress affect learning? Research suggests that people who are highly anxious tend to perform better than others do at simple learning tasks but less well than others do at difficult tasks, particularly those involving reasoning activities and time-limited tests. One interesting study showed that college students with average scholastic ability earned significantly better grades when they had low levels of anxiety as compared to highly anxious average students. When you are more stressed or anxious, you have a diminished ability to concentrate, to recall information, and to master problem-solving activities. You may find yourself reading the same page in your textbook over and over again, not knowing what you read.

**Test Anxiety**  You have studied for the test you are about to take and are well prepared. You look at the first test question and suddenly your mind goes blank. The harder you try to think, the more nervous and distressed you feel. You just can’t think clearly and feel as though you have some type of mental block—what is happening? One-fifth of students experience these feelings, referred to as test anxiety. Exams are one of the greatest sources of stress for college students. The physical sensations associated with test anxiety are similar to those of general anxiety, such as fidgeting; having the feeling of butterflies in your stomach; rapid heart rate; difficulty breathing; nausea; tension in your neck, back, jaw, and shoulders; headaches; sweaty palms; and feeling shaky. People suffering from test anxiety make more mistakes on their tests, don't read the test accurately, and tend to make simple mistakes, such as spelling errors or adding something incorrectly. Many don’t pace themselves well and have a hard time finishing exams. Test anxiety is a form of performance anxiety—people anticipate that they will perform poorly on the test. To help determine if test anxiety is a problem for you—and what to do about it—refer to the box “Do You Suffer from Test Anxiety?”

**Speech Anxiety**  As we have mentioned, speech anxiety, or fear of public speaking, is one of the most common anxiety disorders. Since students are frequently required to give oral presentations, expected to engage in class discussion, and graded on class-participation points, this can present a problem for some.

In addition to the basic stress-management techniques outlined in this chapter, the following strategies can be used to cope with speech anxiety:

- **Volunteer to go first.** Anxiety is dealt with best by taking action. Pressure and expectations tend to mount with each person who takes a turn so you can lessen your stress level by being the first to present. Another advantage is that your performance is judged on its own merit without being compared to anyone else’s.

- **Practice in front of a mirror and for your friends.** Solicit feedback: Do you need to slow down or speak louder? Practice will also help you to remember your talk so that you don’t read it word for word, which can seem less interesting to your audience.

- **Engage in positive visualization.** Take deep, comfortable breaths and imagine yourself giving your speech with confidence and receiving positive feedback and compliments about your performance.

- **Vary your presentation style and format.** Use visuals such as slides, and engage your audience.
Math Anxiety

Do You Suffer from Test Anxiety?

1. Are you aware of being really nervous on a test, maybe so nervous that you don’t do your best, even though you know you’ve studied well and are prepared?
2. Does your stomach ever get tight or upset before or during a test? Hands cold and sweaty? Headaches? Do you have trouble sleeping the night before a test?
3. Do you ever find your mind racing or seeming dull or cloudy so that you can’t think clearly while taking a test?
4. During a test, do you ever forget material you studied and learned, only to remember it again after the test is over?
5. Do you overanalyze questions, see too many possibilities, choose the complex answer, and overlook the simple, correct one?
6. Do you make many careless errors?
7. Have you had some bad experiences with tests and made poor grades when you didn’t expect them?
8. Do you spend a lot of time and energy preparing for tests, yet fail to make grades that represent what you know?
9. Are tests and finals a particularly miserable time for you?

If you answered yes to more than half these questions, you might want to consider getting some help in managing the anxiety associated with test taking. College counseling centers frequently offer stress-management programs and can teach you techniques to manage your anxiety. Similar to managing other types of stress and anxiety, test anxiety can be coped with by using the following suggestions:

- Prepare well in advance. Don’t cram at the last minute for the test. Rehearsal and repetition are the best ways of remembering information.
- Improve your odds by getting a good night’s sleep before the test and eating a nutritious meal to give your brain needed energy.
- Watch your test talk. Don’t talk about the test beforehand with friends, since this tends to increase anxiety.
- Go into the test with a confident attitude, reminding yourself that you are well prepared and have taken many tests and performed satisfactorily in the past.
- Activity reduces anxiety. If you stumble on a question, don’t linger over it; go on to the next question and return to that one later.
- Ask for clarification if you don’t understand a question or something on the test.
- Don’t pay attention to the people around you. Focus on the test and don’t allow yourself to get distracted.
- Take deep breaths, allow your breathing to help you to relax, and bring more oxygen to the brain so you can think more clearly.
- Pace yourself and be aware of your time. Know when you need to be halfway through the test according to the time allotted for the exam.


in discussion so that they are an active not a passive part of your presentation. This takes some of the focus and pressure away from you.

Math Anxiety

Another common stressor for college students is math anxiety. Math anxiety is an intense emotional feeling of anxiety that some people have about their ability to understand mathematics. People who suffer from math anxiety feel that they are incapable of performing well in activities and classes that involve math. The incidence of math anxiety among college students has risen significantly over the last decade. Many students have chosen their college major on the basis of how little math is required for the degree. Math anxiety has become so prevalent on college campuses that many schools have designed classes and special counseling programs to help math-anxious students.

Typically, people with math anxiety have the potential to perform well in math; the anxiety is more of a psychological, rather than an intellectual, problem. However, since math anxiety interferes with a person’s ability to learn math, it can create an intellectual problem. Often math anxiety is the result of a student’s negative or embarrassing experience with math or a math teacher in previous years. Or perhaps the student was repeatedly told that he or she would not be able to perform well in math by a parent or a teacher. Such an experience can leave a student believing him- or herself deficient in math ability. This belief can actually result in poor performance, which serves as confirming evidence to the student. This phenomenon is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy; it is described more fully later in this chapter.14

Students who fear math often avoid asking questions to save embarrassment, sit in the back of the classroom, fail to seek help from the instructor, and usually put off studying math until the last moment. All these negative behaviors are intended to reduce the student’s anxiety but actually result in more intense anxiety. However, there are a number of strategies to overcome math anxiety:

1. Be sure to have developed a solid arithmetic foundation. Since complex concepts build cumulatively on more simplistic ones, a remedial course or short course in arithmetic is often a significant first step in reducing the anxiety response to math.
2. *Take an easier, slower math course* as opposed to a faster-paced, more challenging one. It is better to stack the odds in your favor than to risk reinforcing your negative experiences with math.

3. *Be aware of thoughts, feelings, and actions* as they are related to math. Develop a positive perspective toward math.

4. *There is safety in numbers!* Math anxiety is learned and reinforced over a long period of time and may take time to eliminate. You can reduce your anxiety with the help of a tutor, studying with a friend, and talking with your instructor.

5. *Sit near the front of the class* where you will experience fewer distractions and feel more a part of what is being discussed.

6. If you have questions or can’t keep up with the instructor, *ask for clarification and repetition* of whatever you missed.¹⁵

7. *Review the material.* As with most things, skill in math comes from practice. Make sure you review the material covered in the class, and identify questions you need to ask the instructor as soon as possible after the class. Research shows that you will remember 50 percent of what you heard in class if you review it immediately after class, but only 20 percent is retained 24 hours later if you didn’t review the material right away.¹⁶

### Internal Stressors

We can also generate stress within ourselves by putting too much pressure on ourselves, procrastinating, expecting too much of ourselves, and being self-critical. These *intrapsychic stressors* refer to our internal worries, criticisms, and negative self-talk, which were discussed in Chapter 2. Students say that procrastination, perfectionism, and poor goal setting are common sources of stress in their lives.

**Procrastination**

*Procrastination* means postponing something that is necessary to do to reach a goal.¹⁷ Putting things off is a common problem that plagues students and can cause stress. A survey of college students found that approximately 23 percent of students said they procrastinated about half the time, and 27 percent of students said they procrastinated most of the time.¹⁷ Procrastination has been viewed as a time-management problem, but it is really more than that, and so time-management strategies tend to be ineffective in resolving this problem. Procrastination is also different from indecision, because people can make a decision but still have trouble implementing it.

Typically there is a psychological aspect to procrastination because we tend to delay doing those things that we don’t want to do. Emotions such as anxiety, guilt, and dread often accompany thinking about the task. By putting the dreaded activity off, you can temporarily alleviate your anxiety and discomfort, which is a reinforcing aspect of procrastination. In the short term, procrastination seems to be a good solution and helps you to feel better. However, in the long run, procrastination usually leads to bigger problems and more work. For example putting off paying your bills may feel good at the moment, but when your electricity is turned off and you have to pay late fees, and your roommates are upset with you because they thought you had paid the bill, your pleasurable feelings soon turn sour.

Men and women procrastinate equally often, but more people in the mid- to late 20s and 60-year-olds procrastinate more than people in any other age group do.¹⁸ Individuals who procrastinate are frequently referred to as “lazy” or “stupid,” but actually there are no differences in levels of intelligence between procrastinators and non-procrastinators. However, students who procrastinate tend to perform less well and retain less than students who do not. You might want to take the survey at the end of this chapter to assess your risk for procrastination.

Many people who procrastinate report feeling overwhelmed and highly anxious. They have difficulty tuning out external stimulation and concentrating on the task at hand. They also worry about how their performance will be judged by others and have perfectionistic standards for themselves. We discuss perfectionism and setting unrealistic goals in the next section.

**Perfectionism**

*Perfectionism* leads to undue stress because perfection is an unattainable goal. By setting the standard at perfect, you will set yourself up to fail. Perfectionists tend to be their own worst critic; they are harder on themselves than anyone else is on them, and they are also critical of others. These individuals are described as neat and organized, seeming to “have it all together” and to be able to do more than most people and do it exceptionally well. Often people envy perfectionistic people because they seem very confident and competent; however, individuals who are perfectionistic never feel good enough and often feel out of control in their lives.²⁹ People who are perfectionists focus on what they haven’t accomplished or haven’t done right rather than on what they have completed or have done well. Making mistakes feels especially humiliating to persons.

---

**Key Terms**

- **intrapsychic stressors** Our internal worries, self-criticisms, and negative self-talk.
- **procrastination** Putting off completing tasks until some later time, sometimes resulting in increased stress.
- **perfectionism** A tendency to expect perfection in everything one does, with little tolerance for mistakes.
who are perfectionistic, and they tend to feel a strong sense of shame and low self-esteem when someone catches them in error. They have difficulty with criticism or any negative feedback because much of their self-esteem is based on being accurate, competent, and being the best. While striving to do your best is an admirable quality, expecting to be perfect in everything you do and never making a mistake places a great deal of stress and pressure on yourself.

People with perfectionistic behavior tend to be rigid in their thinking, saying “I must be perfect or else I am a failure” and tend to put 100 percent of their effort into something or don’t want to attempt it at all, which can lead to procrastination. In expecting perfection, there seems, to these individuals, to be a right and wrong way to do things. Thus, perfectionism can create a great deal of anxiety and distress.

Problems with Goal Setting and Time Management
With the rising cost of education, many students feel pressured to earn their degrees as quickly as possible, and this adds another layer of stress for them. Learning for the sake of learning can sometimes seem like a luxury, because earning top grades to get into graduate programs and land well-paying jobs tend to take priority. Research shows that many students drop out of college because they don’t know why they are in school, haven’t found a direction or major, and feel pressured to either declare a major or quit. In addition, an overwhelming number of students identify time management as the reason for their academic success or failure. Setting priorities and goals, balancing academic life with your social life, and finding time for sleeping, eating, exercising, and working along with studying are essential aspects of managing your stress effectively; strategies will be discussed later in this chapter.

Job Stressors
Americans are spending more time at work than ever. In fact, the United States has overtaken Japan as the industrialized country with the longest working hours. Americans work 350 more hours per year than European workers.2 What is the cost of these increased work hours? Less leisure time; less time for family, exercise, and sleep; less time for anything else but work! Seventy-five percent of workers stated that they experience job stress or burnout at work. Conflict with coworkers was the number one source of job stress, followed by unrealistic work loads, tight deadlines, last-minute projects, and difficult bosses. What are the signs of job burnout?

- Coming in late for work and leaving early
- Frequently calling in sick to work
- Feeling unmotivated and apathetic at work

- Withdrawing from coworkers
- Watching the clock during work hours
- Doing other things at the job instead of work, such as surfing the Net and chatting online

What are some strategies for overcoming job stress?
First, you need to identify what is causing you the most stress and focus on resolving that issue. If it is conflict with your boss or a coworker, talk it out (see the tips on conflict negotiation and communication strategies in Chapter 2). Set a goal of finding one thing you are looking forward to or like about your job. Are there ways you can make your job more enjoyable? Take a walk—get out of the office and take a break—when you notice you are feeling frustrated or unmotivated. Organize and prioritize your workload, and start with the most urgent tasks first. Ask for assistance if you need help with something and set reasonable goals for your workday. Getting enough rest, relaxation time, and good nutrition also go a long way in decreasing job stress.

Technological Stressors
We are having to learn how to deal with a whole new type of stress—technological stress. Destructive computer viruses; hundreds of junk mail ads sent through e-mail, instant messages, cell phones, and voicemail; and increasing worry about identity theft have brought new meaning to stress management. Over 450 new viruses are discovered each month and 82,000 hacking attacks are made each year.20 Seventy-six colleges reported security breaches in the past year. Hacking costs companies over $17 billion a year and creates paranoia, extreme stress, and frustration in victims of these attacks. Computer attacks have become increasingly wider in scope, automated, and harder to trace.20

If you are swamped by the catalogs, junk mail, and credit card applications you receive through the U.S. mail, your stress level will probably only intensify with the deluge of junk mail received via e-mail, voicemail, and instant messaging. And Internet telephony spam, called “spit,” is predicted to become a bigger problem in the future as more people make phone calls over the Internet rather than use the regular phone lines.21 Marketers can program their computers to send 1,000 voice messages a minute over Internet telephony. “Spim” is spam sent out as an instant message, and it has increased to 2 billion messages in 2004, four times more than were sent in 2003.22

Even personal Web logs, or blogs, are not immune from these invasive advertisements. Spam messages masquerade as comments from readers, with some bloggers receiving 20 spam messages on their Web journals each day.

Phishing is the practice of sending e-mails and using fake websites to lure unsuspecting customers into
Building Media Literacy Skills

Protecting Yourself from Spim, Spam, Phish, and Viruses

How much “junk” do you receive via e-mail and instant messages every day? E-mail offers marketers a new way to reach many potential customers—and scammers a new way to reach potential victims. Although new technologies offer many advantages, they also create new types of stressful challenges in our lives, and you may need to develop new skills to meet those challenges. Be aware of the potential risks in the e-mail you receive, and learn to protect yourself from the hassles and stress that come with our increasingly technological society:

- Don’t reply to e-mail or pop-up messages that ask for personal or financial information, and don’t click on or cut and paste links in a message. Scammers can send an e-mail that appears to be from a legitimate business and ask you to click on a link or call a number to verify or update your account information. Do not follow these instructions. Legitimate companies don’t ask for this information via e-mail.
- If you need to reach an organization you do business with, call the number on your financial statements or on the back of your credit card—not the number shown in a potentially fraudulent e-mail. Or type in the Web address yourself; phishers can make links look like they go to one place but actually send you to a different site.
- Cure-all products, weight-loss claims, and work-at-home schemes are among the most prevalent spam scams. If you are considering an offer you receive via e-mail, use the same caution you would in evaluating any type of ad for a product or service. Read the small print, and get all promises in writing. Resist any urge to “act now,” despite an attractive offer and terms. And don’t do business with any company that doesn’t provide its name, street address, and telephone number.
- Don’t start or forward chain letters that involve money or valuable items and promise big returns; these are illegal, and if you start a chain e-mail or letter or send one on, you are breaking the law.
- Don’t e-mail personal or financial information. E-mail is not a secure method of transmitting personal information. Don’t give your Social Security number unless you absolutely have to, and don’t give out your credit card or bank account information online unless you are certain you are using a legitimate and secure site.
- Review credit card and bank account statements as soon as you receive them to check for unauthorized charges.
- Install antivirus and antispyware software, and make sure you update it regularly.
- Install updated software and filters to block spam and spim. Almost all e-mail software includes some type of antispam program.
- Be cautious in opening e-mail attachments, particularly from senders you don’t recognize. However, be wary even of attachments sent by accounts you recognize, because viruses can send e-mails from infected computers owned by people known to you. Use the same precaution when downloading files from the Internet.
- Use hard-to-guess passwords, and change them frequently. (Don’t use names of pets or family members, significant dates, or similar data.)
- Back up key documents frequently using removable media.
- Consider installing a firewall security program to further protect your computer. If needed, consult with your university’s computing services staff about security issues.
- When you receive spam that is phishing for information, forward it to spam@uce.gov and to the company, bank, or organization impersonated in the phishing e-mail.


Sharing personal and financial data such as credit card account numbers, checking account numbers, and PayPal account numbers. Phishers create websites that look almost identical to the real ones, such as those of financial institutions like Citibank, and then ask their customers to verify their account information, which allows phishers easy access to people’s financial data. An estimated 57 million people received phish e-mails in 2004 alone.23 E-mails received from phishers are convincing because phishers copy the “from” line from the real company to make them look authentic. Banks, eBay, and even some government agencies, including the IRS and the FBI, have been spoofed by phishers.

Spending an inordinate amount of time deleting these messages or losing hours of work on one’s computer because of a virus or a worm can create a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness. When word spreads that a new virus is circulating, people become increasingly anxious. They can become angry with friends, coworkers, and family members for inadvertently spreading a virus to their computers.

For tips on reducing the technological stressors in your life, refer to the box “Protecting Yourself from Spim, Spam, Phish, and Viruses.”

Environmental Stressors

Light, sounds, smells, air quality, and temperature can all affect your stress level. Some people feel more stressed if their environment is disorganized or messy, and feel a
need to clean it up before they can concentrate or relax. As you read in Chapter 2, the amount of light and type of lighting you are exposed to can affect your levels of stress and depression. Artificial light, as well as certain colors, can increase one's stress level. People tend to associate the color red with anger and hostility and blue with depression. Stress has also been linked to being exposed to prolonged, daily noise such as in a factory, at a construction site, or in a crowded room. Air that is too cold or too warm, or that contains mold or pollutants, can be a source of stress. Higher temperatures have been associated with an increase in violence and aggression and decreased concentration and productivity. Situations in which one does not have control over one's environment—such as being stuck in a traffic jam, in line, or in an elevator—can also be stressful. Your stress level might also increase if you don't have control over the noise, temperature level, or appearance of your environment.

**Figure 3-5 Stress and Gender** 43 percent of men and 51 percent of women feel concerned about their level of stress.


**Figure 3-6 How Americans Cope with Stress** People have different ways of coping with stress, such as watching TV, reading, listening to music, or playing video games. How do you cope with stress?


However, the way that people resolve their problems and alleviate stress may be positive or negative.

A number of negative ways of dealing with stress are quite common and often quite harmful. As indicated in Figure 3-6, some people turn to alcohol and drugs to avoid their problems and numb their feelings, and cigarettes are also cited as a way of relieving stress. Many people use food to comfort themselves. Putting off distasteful tasks and avoiding stressful situations is another negative way of coping with stress. Some people use sleep as a way of escaping their problems, and certainly depression has been associated with not having the ability to effectively manage stress. In the next section, we discuss ways of effectively managing stress.

What are some positive, effective methods to cope with stress? Different strategies and methods for stress management involve the physical, social, environmental, and psychological aspects of stress. We will review techniques and strategies within each of these dimensions, and you will need to practice and experiment to find the stress-management techniques that are right for you.

**Physical Aspects of Stress Management**

The physical aspects of stress management involve meeting your basic needs of sleep, exercise, and nutrition as was discussed in Chapter 2 under Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.
**Sleep**

As with eating, too much sleep or too little is also an ineffective way of managing stress. Most adults require 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night.27 Sometimes people get very little sleep during the week and try to “catch up” over the weekend, sleeping 14 hours at a time or taking naps during the day. Sleep is not like a bank account in which you can make deposits and withdrawals, and so getting an average of 7 to 8 hours a night over a week’s time is not the same thing as sleeping this amount each night. Sleep problems are becoming more prevalent; 75 percent of Americans reported problems with sleep in 2005, compared to 62 percent in 1999. A majority of Americans also stated that they don’t sleep well when they do sleep.29

People also need uninterrupted sleep. Normal circadian rhythms, the biological processes related to the 24-hour light/dark cycle, are necessary for normal sleep and optimal daytime functioning. Our sleep patterns relate to these biological cycles, which also affect our patterns of hunger and eating, body temperature, and hormone release. These cycles must be in harmony for us to have a sense of well-being during our waking hours.29 Sleep deprivation has been found to cause losses in higher cognitive processing tasks, decline in the performance of simple tasks, memory loss, and, with prolonged sleep deprivation, temporary psychosis, such as hallucinations and delirium.4 Research also shows that sleeping too much can result in increased depression and decreased energy levels.

Not getting enough sleep has been related to increases in weight, depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disorders, and accidents. Problems with mood, memory, and concentration have also been linked to lack of sleep.

So how do you cope with sleep problems? Americans are turning to prescription medications in alarming numbers. The use of sleeping pills has doubled among 20- to 40-year-olds since 2000.28 People are using more caffeine and energy drinks to wake up in the morning to compensate for morning grogginess due to hangover effects from sleep aids. Memory lapses, sleepwalking, and dependency have been associated with taking sleep medications. Sleeping pills can interfere with normal brain-wave activity during sleep and cause a rebound effect of increased insomnia when you discontinue taking them.

It is recommended that you develop healthy sleep habits so that you can get enough rest without sedatives and stimulants. Here are some tips for good sleep hygiene:

1. Establish a sleep routine. Go to bed every night at the same time and wake up at the same time every morning, regardless of how much sleep you actually got.
2. Engage in sleep rituals before bedtime (just like when you were a child), such as taking a bath before bed, reading a book, or listening to relaxing music.
3. Avoid caffeine use five hours before bedtime. Avoid eating two to three hours before bedtime. Decrease fluids before bedtime, and avoid smoking and drinking alcohol before going to sleep.
4. Don’t exercise before you go to sleep or engage in any stimulating or arousing activities before bedtime.
5. Associate your bed with sleeping. Don’t study, eat, or watch television in bed.
6. If you have been lying in bed for 20 minutes and haven’t gone to sleep, get up and do something relaxing for 30 to 60 minutes and then try again. Keep getting out of bed after 20 minutes of no sleep and don’t return to bed after your scheduled wake-up time.
7. Don’t take naps during the day—this will interfere with your sleep schedule.
8. If you worry while in bed, keep a worry journal and write in it a few hours before bedtime to get these things out of your head and alleviate stress.

See the box “Alternatives for Stress Management” for more information on herbal and alternative therapies for insomnia.

**Exercise**

Exercise is another physical aspect of stress management. Exercising aerobically at least three times a week for 20 to 30 minutes has been found to manage stress effectively for several reasons. First, exercising requires you to focus on your breathing and to breathe deeply, the key to stress management. By tensing and releasing the muscles through exercise, you are allowing your body to relax and unwind. Secondly, exercise can alleviate stress through the release of endorphins, naturally occurring chemicals in the brain. Endorphins help to counter stress, subdue pain, and increase pleasure, which is the reason people talk about the runner’s high. Hitting a racquetball against the wall or playing basketball can be a great way to release the frustrations of the day and let go of tension and stress. Aerobic exercise includes walking briskly, running, bicycling, skating, and dancing. The benefits of exercise are further discussed in Chapter 4.

**Nutrition**

In Chapter 5 you will learn about the nutrients that provide the necessary fuel the body needs to function. When people are stressed, they often skip...
meals or eat on the run. Since the fight or flight response requires more energy during stressful times than is normally needed, you must eat a balanced, nutritious diet. Without proper nutrition, the body will begin to break down its own tissues in an effort to obtain the energy required to survive. The immune system can then become compromised, making the body more susceptible to disease. It is not a coincidence that many people who are under a great deal of stress for prolonged periods of time become ill and that regaining their health takes longer than it does for those who are managing their stress well.

As we previously mentioned, people often use food to cope with stress and can overeat, typically eating high-sugar and high-fat foods such as chips, candy, and cookies. One study showed that women who were exposed to a high level of noise, similar to that made by a jackhammer, ate 65 to 70 grams of fat when offered snacks as compared to women who were in a less stressful, quieter environment, who chose snacks with half as much fat. Eating too much or too little is not an effective way to manage stress and can eventually lead to serious health problems, such as obesity, eating disorders, diabetes, and hypertension.

Social Aspects of Stress Management

To manage stress effectively, you must also make time for fun and play. Like exercise, laughter increases the release of endorphins and requires you to breathe deeply, and so having humor in your life is an essential part of stress management. Research has shown that stress can be related to having inadequate social interactions. Hugging and human contact have also been demonstrated as having a significant effect in reducing the harmful physical effects of stress. Participating in social activities such as social organizations, sports, or just talking with friends can give you the break you need to rest your mind and focus on something other than work (see the box “The Fast-Growing Slow Movement”).

Actually, you don’t even have to have human contact to reduce stress—just owning a pet can make a difference. Studies have shown that just petting an animal
Our culture has developed an increasing need for speed. We are a fast-paced society, encouraged to eat, work, play, and move faster and faster. Our addiction to speed makes us a slave to time. What is the first thing you do in the morning when you wake up? Look at the clock, of course. Time tells us what to do when, and how long we have to engage in that activity. We have a need for speed that feeds our thirst for excitement and pumps out more adrenaline.

However, this pressure to do more in less time also causes stress in our lives. We can never be fast enough; there is never enough time. As Carrie Fisher once said, “Instant gratification takes too long.” In order to beat the clock, we are consuming more caffeine and amphetamines and sleeping less. We are eating more fast food and gaining weight. We are working longer hours and taking less time to exercise, socialize, and enjoy leisure activities. The increase of road rage, relationship conflicts, and general lack of civility in our society has also been linked to our obsession with saving time. Time management and finding ways to do things more efficiently were originally intended to give us more leisure time and reduce the level of stress in our lives, but the opposite has occurred and we now pay a high price for speed.

However, there is a new, growing trend in the media called the “Slow movement.” Books such as In Praise of Slowness discuss the merits of finding a balance in our lives and becoming more calm, careful, patient, and reflective and developing real, meaningful connections with people. In fact, the author contends that slower can be better, as we can develop healthier relationships, work, and family life. We can have higher quality in our food, exercise, and other aspects of our lives if we take the time to do things well. Sometimes doing something more slowly can yield faster results, because doing things quickly can result in making mistakes and having to redo things. The comedian Lily Tomlin once said, “For fast-acting relief from stress, try slowing down.”

We are beginning to see this trend in many facets of life. Yoga and meditation have become increasingly popular, as has the Slow Food movement. In the United States and around the world, some cities are becoming “slow cities”—which means these communities have made a commitment to create an environment that helps people slow down. The slow philosophy translates into city ordinances such as banning motorized vehicles from some streets, banning fast-food chains and neon signs, and lowering speed limits. These communities have speed bumps that read “Ready, Set, Relax,” and they set aside days for “family focus night” with no school practices, no homework, and no meetings.

October 24 has been designated “Take Back Your Time Day” in the United States, because by October 24 each year, Americans have worked as much as Europeans do all year.

How can you begin to break away from the cult of speediness? Here are some tips:
1. Don’t overschedule yourself.
2. Don’t multitask. Focus on one thing only.
3. Take time to play.
5. Meditate or do yoga.
6. Make a meal from scratch.
7. Eat without watching television, reading, or doing anything else.
8. Walk and talk slower than you normally do.
9. Don’t wear a watch.
10. Let someone else go before you in line.
11. Don’t drink caffeinated beverages.
12. Sleep eight hours a night.

Test yourself to see how difficult it is for you to do these things. Do you have trouble relaxing and doing nothing? Are you suffering from time sickness? It is important to note that the Slow movement doesn’t necessarily mean that we do everything at a snail’s pace. Instead, it means finding a balance in our lives. There may be times when it is appropriate to act quickly, to be time oriented, or to multitask. The Slow movement suggests only that we take back control of our time and go at our own pace, instead of rushing around because that is what we are supposed to do.


produces calming effects such as lowered blood pressure and decreased heart rate. Cardiac patients who own pets tend to live much longer than those who have no pets.33

Environmental Aspects of Stress Management
To effectively manage your stress, you need to take into consideration environmental stressors such as noise level, amount of light, and aesthetic quality of the space you inhabit. Natural light tends to elevate your mood.24 Having plants or photos of friends and family around your living and workspace can also alleviate stress.

Smell can also play a significant role in managing stress. As the saying goes, “Stop and smell the roses.” Studies have shown that aromatherapy, using different aromas or odors therapeutically, can lower stress levels. When you breathe in the oils, they send a direct message to your brain via your olfactory nerves, where they can then affect the endocrine and the hormonal systems via the hypothalamus. Odors have an amazing effect on our emotional states because they hook into the emotional or primitive parts of our brains. Aromatherapy has been used to relieve pain, enhance relaxation and stress relief, unknot tense muscles, soften dry skin, and enhance immunity. So it is wise to pay attention to your aromatic
surroundings, because they may affect you much more than you may realize.

While social interaction has been shown to have positive results on lessening the effects of stress, this beneficial effect depends on the type of friends with whom you surround yourself. Spending time with negative, pessimistic people can increase your stress level rather than decrease it. It is obviously more advantageous to surround yourself with positive, optimistic friends. Feeling crowded in a room and not having enough personal space can also lead to an increase in stress. Interestingly, it is not being in crowds itself but how familiar you are with the people, the activity that is taking place, and how much control you feel over your personal space that makes the difference. In other words, being in a crowded room filled with your friends during a party feels subjectively different than feeling trapped in a crowded restaurant filled with strangers.

Other important aspects of managing stress in your environment include having meaningful work and challenging and interesting classes. Having work that is stimulating but not beyond your abilities helps to keep your stress response at a moderate, optimal level for performance.

Psychological Aspects of Stress Management

Last, you can effectively cope with stress by using a variety of cognitive and psychological strategies. There are several different techniques, but as you will see, many are focused on deep breathing, which is the key to managing stress.

Relaxation and Deep Breathing The relaxation response, developed by Herbert Benson, M.D., is an effective way to ensure that you do not remain in the stress response too long. It is effective because it entails the opposite of the stress response. Rather than taking shallow breaths, you are required to breathe deeply, inhaling to a count of four and exhaling to a count of four while sitting in a comfortable position. As you breathe deeply, your muscles unwind and relax, again the opposite of the stress response. It is generally advised not to cross your legs or arms so that your muscles can relax easily. Blood flows to the extremities, and your heart rate slows. In fact, experienced users of this technique can temporarily lower their breathing rate from a typical rate of 14 to 18 breaths per minute to as few as 4 breaths per minute. Body temperature decreases, and blood pressure is lowered as well. The entire nervous system is slowed, in direct opposition to its role in the stress response. You are instructed to focus on your breathing and inner experience and become less aware of your external environment.

To help to tune out the outside world, you are instructed to close your eyes and let go of the worries and concerns of the day.

To try this technique, take a moment to focus on your breathing and breathe in for a count of four and out for four. After doing so a few times, tighten your body, clench your hands, teeth, and jaw, close your eyes tightly, and pull your shoulders up while you are still breathing deeply. Are you able to do so? It is virtually impossible to tense your body and breathe deeply because they are mutually exclusive activities. Thus, the relaxation response is the foundation of most of the stress-management techniques described in this chapter. Deep breathing is the fundamental aspect of stress management, and it can also be used to alleviate anger; see the box “The Antidote for Anger . . . Relaxation.”

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) In 1929 Edmund Jacobson, M.D., published a book describing a simple procedure of deliberately tensing and releasing major muscle groups in sequence from head to toe to achieve total relaxation of the body. His technique, called Progressive Muscle Relaxation, still enjoys popularity. By learning to recognize the difference between contracted and relaxed muscles, Jacobson believed that people would be able to have more of a sense of control over their bodies and the stress response. Progressive muscle relaxation enables you to intentionally put certain muscles into a controlled state of relaxation and reduce your overall stress level.

PMR is based on the use of positioning your body in a comfortable position, sitting or lying down, and concentrating on certain muscle groups. As you inhale, breathing in for a count of four, you contract your muscles starting with your forehead and count to four as you exhale and relax your muscles. Continue to clench and relax the muscles, using your breathing to help you to tighten and release, working your way down your body all the way to your feet and toes. Concentrate on the sensations of relaxation and how different they are from the feelings of tension and stress. Fifteen minutes, twice a day, is the recommended schedule. In one to two weeks, you will have mastered the basics and will be aware of which muscles need more attention in order to relax. You will also be more sensitive to the buildup of tension in your body so that you will be able to decrease your stress level before it becomes overwhelming.

Guided Imagery and Visualization In the early 1900s, Emil Coué, a French pharmacist, first suggested using human suggestibility to overcome the stress syndrome, to enhance recovery from illness, and to facilitate the accomplishment of positive goals. By forming an image of a peaceful, serene place or seeing yourself being successful in accomplishing a task, you can use guided imagery or
When we are angry, our muscles tense, we breathe shallowly, and our adrenaline level increases, similarly to how we feel when we are stressed. Tension tends to build with the stress of increasing frustration, worry, discomfort, or unmet needs. The greater the stress, the more tension you feel. Expressing your anger can help to get rid of this tension, but only temporarily. You may have noticed that right after you get angry, maybe even blow up, you feel more relaxed and calm. Your muscles relax, the tension leaves your body, and you breathe more easily—but only briefly. Anger can create more anger because of the reinforcing effect that blowing up has in temporarily helping you feel better. Blowing up makes it easier to react the same way the next time, and the outbursts are usually stronger and harder to control each time.

As with the stress response, the key to managing anger is to change how we respond to events and express our anger. So, instead of blowing up, should you just keep your anger inside? No; this can eventually result in an explosion similar to that caused by pressure that builds in a pressure cooker or a shaken soda can. This is the “last straw” kind of anger response. To an observer, you may seem to be overreacting to a particular situation when you are really responding to a multitude of situations and frustrating events. You may take your anger out on an innocent bystander, or the dog.

Here are some tips on effective, respectful anger management:

1. Relax, take a deep breath, count to 10.
2. Take a time-out if needed. Don’t continue to engage in a discussion if it is getting too heated.
3. Avoid name calling. Use “I” language, as was discussed in the previous chapter.
4. Stay connected to the individual with whom you are speaking. Don’t withdraw physically or psychologically unless you need a time out, and then say this directly.
5. Ask yourself what underlies your anger. Hurt, guilt, feelings of rejection and shame, and fear of abandonment may be feelings that you need to express but that come out as anger. Especially for men, anger tends to be a more comfortable emotion to express.
6. Is there a hidden agenda to your anger? Are you using your anger to control, change, or punish someone? If so, use assertive language instead, and share your thoughts and feelings directly.
7. Speak in a quieter, calmer voice than you typically do. People tend to yell, speaking more loudly than normal in order to get the other person’s attention. You may feel that you don’t have power or people’s attention unless you yell. While anger can be attention grabbing, this kind of attention is probably not what you want. People may tend to yell back, tune you out, or agree with you without meaning it, just to stop the yelling.
8. Choose your battles wisely. Don’t argue every point. Ask yourself “Is this something that is really important to me and will be as meaningful tomorrow as it is right now?”
9. Express your anger in a timely fashion. Don’t wait a week or a month to bring up issues when you have accumulated a bunch of things that have been bothering you over time. However, it may be more productive to wait until morning to express your anger if you are tired and irritable in the evenings. Another option is to wait and arrange a specific time to talk to avoid rushing through a conversation as you get ready to leave for work or class.
10. It might feel easier or safer to redirect the anger you feel toward your boss at your best friend or partner, but that doesn’t solve your conflict with your boss and might create conflict with your friend or partner.

After you have respectfully expressed your anger, make sure you allow time and opportunity for the other person to express his or her feelings. Tell the person you appreciate how he or she listened to you and responded to you. Share other feelings besides the primary ones of hurt and anger, so that the person knows you can be angry with him or her and still care about him or her. Remember that your way of expressing anger and resolving conflict can either be destructive or be a way of connecting with people and improving relationships.


Visualization is similar to guided imagery with the scene being more specifically focused on something you are about to do or want to accomplish, or on some performance or activity that may be causing you distress. Guided imagery and visualization techniques help you to change through positive mental images. For example, you might imagine yourself auditioning for a part in a play, seeing yourself go through your lines effortlessly and flawlessly, and feeling confident and proud of yourself. You are probably already skilled at visualization; unfortunately, we frequently engage in negative visualization and are unaware of doing so. For example, we imagine ourselves making fools of ourselves or making mistakes.
Discovering Your Spirituality

Yoga: The Union of Mind and Body

Yoga is often associated with Indian philosophy, such as Buddhism, but it has recently gained in popularity as a form of stress management. Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning “union” of the individual soul with the universal soul. The practice of yoga directs and channels energy in a specific manner in the body. Individuals who practice yoga say they experience greater clarity in thinking and improved balance in their lives.

The reported benefits of regular yoga relaxation are numerous. They include:

- Better overall physical and mental health
- Increased energy and a feeling of restfulness
- “Spiritual unfoldment,” which refers to an improved mind-body integration and an increased sense of harmony and peacefulness
- Enhanced concentration and focus
- A greater ability to cope with anxiety and daily stressors

Yoga has been shown to reduce heart rate and blood pressure, increase lung capacity, improve muscle relaxation, assist with weight management, and increase overall physical endurance. Yoga may affect levels of brain or blood chemicals, including monoamines, melatonin, dopamine, stress hormones (cortisol), and GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid). Changes in mental functions, such as improved attention, cognition, processing of sensory information, and visual perception, have been described in some research studies in humans.

There are many different types of yoga, involving varying levels of meditation, posing, and activity. If you are interested in taking a yoga class, ask what type of yoga they teach:

- **Hatha yoga** is the most commonly known type of yoga. It focuses on simple poses that flow from one to the other at a very comfortable pace, while also focusing on breathing and meditation.
- **Kundalini yoga** is designed to activate the kundalini energy in the spine through poses, breath control, chanting, and meditation. It incorporates mantras (chanting), meditations, visualizations, and guided relaxation.
- **Kripalu yoga** starts with meditation and centering, breathing, warm-up movements, yoga postures, and relaxation.
- **Ashtanga** or power yoga, is the preferred yoga for athletes. Ashtanga yoga is light on meditation but heavy on developing strength and stamina. The poses are more difficult than those performed in other styles, and one moves quickly from one pose to another in an effort to build strength and flexibility.
- **Bikram yoga** is performed in a room that is at a temperature of 38 degrees C (100.4 degrees F) or higher to replicate the temperature of yoga’s birthplace in India. The exercises are physically demanding and intense, with 26 postures that are performed in a certain order to warm up and stretch muscle, ligaments, and tendons.
- **Sivananda yoga** has a series of 12 poses, with the Sun Salutation, breathing exercises, relaxation, and mantra chanting as the basis.
- **Viniyoga yoga** is a slower, more individualized form of yoga that focuses on developing strength, balance, and healing.

To learn more about yoga, find a yoga class at your college or in the community.


Athletes are trained in using positive visualization to improve their performance and visualize their goals. Positive visualization has also been used in managing pain, especially in chronic pain management. This technique has also been effective in weight management, smoking cessation, insomnia, and for almost any type of behavior change. Some images commonly used to decrease stress are to visualize tightly twisted rope as uncoiling; hard, cold wax melting and softening; creaky hinges being oiled and becoming silent and gliding smoothly; or the feeling of sandpaper turning into silk. Again, guided imagery and visualization exercises have optimal benefit when practiced at least once a day, every day for 15 to 20 minutes.

Meditation Meditation allows the mind to transcend thought effortlessly when the person concentrates on a focal point. In transcendental meditation, a widely recognized approach to meditation, people repeat a mantra, or a personal word, while using deep-breathing and relaxation techniques. In other meditation approaches, alternative focal points are used to establish the depth of concentration needed to free the mind from conscious thought. Physical objects, music, and relaxing environmental sounds or breathing can be used as focal points. Meditation is also used in yoga; see the box “Yoga” for more information. Students who meditated twice a day for 15 minutes reported lowered blood pressure, better class attendance rates, and felt less stressed during their classes.

Hypnosis Hypnosis is an artificially induced state, resembling, but physiologically distinct from, sleep. It involves a heightened state of suggestibility that creates flexible and intensified attention and receptiveness, and an increased responsiveness to an idea or to a set of
Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Meditation can reduce blood pressure and lower stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.

Use of a daily planner is a strategy that can help you manage your time more effectively as well as reduce your stress level.
tasks, try the ABC method of task management. The A effective time management. When you prioritize your ageable pieces and then prioritizing them is the key to ment”). Breaking the large tasks into smaller, more man- first step (see the box “Tips for Better Time Manage-
out the entire schedule.

your time schedule, modify your plans but don’t throw
as for each day. If something unexpected interferes with
week. Don’t fall into the C trap, which is when you do the
week. If something unexpected interferes with

- Make a list of the things you need to accomplish, and then go
- Break large tasks into smaller, more manageable pieces so that
- Set deadlines that are realistic, and give yourself a cushion of
- Check off items on your to-do list and consult it regularly.
- Do tasks that fit your time schedule and energy level.

Make a list of the things you need to accomplish, and then go back and prioritize the list using the A B C method to signify their urgency. Focus on getting the A tasks done first. Start on the Bs and Cs only if you have extra time.

Set Goals and Prioritize Set goals for the week as well as for each day. If something unexpected interferes with your time schedule, modify your plans but don’t throw out the entire schedule.

Making a to-do list can be helpful, but it is only the first step (see the box “Tips for Better Time Management”). Breaking the large tasks into smaller, more manageable pieces and then prioritizing them is the key to effective time management. When you prioritize your tasks, try the ABC method of task management. The A tasks are those items that are most urgent and must be done today. Then the B tasks are those things that are important but, if need be, could wait 24 hours. The C tasks are activities that can easily wait a few days to a week. Don’t fall into the C trap, which is when you do the least important tasks because they are quick and can be checked off your list with ease. This can lead to putting off the more important A activities, leaving them until you feel stressed and overwhelmed.

Stress Inoculation Working in a manner similar to a flu shot, stress inoculation involves exposing an individual to specific stressful situations, a little at a time, under controlled, safe conditions. Stress inoculation teaches individuals to relax using deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation while they are being exposed to stressful situations.

The first step is to construct your personal list of stressful situations and arrange the list from the least to the most stressful items, and learn how to evoke each of these situations in your mind while at the same time focusing on your breathing and relaxing your muscles. The second step is to create an arsenal of stress-coping thoughts, such as “I’m going to be all right,” “I’ve succeeded with this before,” and “Getting started is the hardest part, then it will get easier for me.” The third step is to practice this in vivo, meaning in real-life situations, while using the relaxation and cognitive techniques to minimize the stress response. In addition to stress management, stress inoculation has also been helpful in anger management.

Cognitive Self-Talk What we tell ourselves, our self-talk, has a tremendous effect on how well we manage our stress. Stress can be generated from faulty conclusions, misinterpretations, and expecting the worst. Some people claim that if they expect the worst, they won’t feel disappointed or hurt, but in reality, they still feel the pain from their disappointment. We need to be careful about what we expect because we may inadvertently make it happen, a phenomenon referred to as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Key Terms

self-fulfilling prophecy The tendency to make something more likely to happen as a result of one’s own expectations and attitudes.

www.mhhe.com/payne10e

Self-fulfilling prophecies can work for you or against you. If you expect that work will be boring and uninteresting, you will tend to portray a negative, unmotivated attitude and will probably have a miserable time. However, if you expect to enjoy yourself at work, you are more likely to go looking for challenge and to have fun.

If we look more closely at how we make faulty conclusions and misinterpretations, we recognize a number of cognitive distortions that lead to a more stress-filled life, such as:

1. **Filtering.** Selectively paying attention to the negative and disregarding the positive.
2. **Polarized thinking.** Putting things into absolute, all-or-nothing categories with no middle ground. For example, you have to be right or else you are wrong.
3. **Overgeneralization.** From one isolated event, you make a general, universal rule. For example, if you have failed once, you will always fail.
4. **Mind reading.** Without people saying so, you believe you know what people are feeling and the reasons they behave the way they do. For example, if your friend seems tired, you think she doesn’t really want to go out to the movies tonight as you had planned and so you cancel the plans thinking that is what she really wants.
5. **Catastrophizing.** Expecting disaster or the worst-case scenario.
6. **Personalization.** Thinking that things people do or say is in reaction to you and comparing yourself with others. For example, you walk past a group of people laughing and assume that they are laughing at you.
7. **Fallacy of fairness.** Feeling resentful when situations don’t seem fair or just. Believing that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.
8. **Shoulds.** Telling yourself what you are supposed to do, what is expected of you, or what you feel obligated to do rather than what you want to do. This is often something we don’t want to do but think we should do and feel somewhat pressured or forced to do.

To change these cognitive distortions, you need to generate some rebuttals to your negative self-statements. This entails finding middle ground between all-or-nothing thinking by asking yourself what evidence proves that a statement is true and identifying some exceptions to this statement. Look for balance by asking yourself what is the opposite of this negative self-statement. Rather than telling yourself what you “should” do ask yourself what you “want” to do. Be specific instead of overgeneralizing, and avoid labeling yourself and others. Instead of telling yourself “I’m lazy,” you might say, “I wish I would have studied a few more hours for that test.” Stick to the facts without blaming yourself or others. Question yourself as to how you know something is true and if you might be making an assumption or “mind reading.” Be mindful of your self-fulfilling prophecies. It may be wiser to acknowledge that you don’t know or consider many different possible outcomes rather than to expect the worst.

Changing negative self-talk requires time, practice, and patience. We develop these patterns of thinking over years, and they become almost automatic. It takes concentrated effort to be aware of and change negative thinking. Remember that your rebuttals need to be strong, nonjudgmental, and specific. Practice developing more flexible and balanced thinking about people, behavior, and situations.

**Conquering Procrastination** Sometime techniques for combating procrastination involve time management, stress management, assertiveness training, and increasing self-esteem and self-acceptance. Specifically with regard to time management, procrastinators tend to both over- and underestimate how much time a task will take. When they underestimate the time, they feel justified in procrastinating because they erroneously believe they have plenty of time to complete the task. When they overestimate the time needed, they feel intimidated by the magnitude of the job, feel anxious, and so have trouble getting started. So it is important to give yourself more time than you think you might need for a project and start earlier than needed in case of unforeseen delays. Breaking the task down into manageable pieces can also help it seem less daunting.

People also report procrastinating when they feel forced or pressured to do something they don’t want to do. Rather than communicating assertively, they rebel by agreeing to do something but constantly put it off, which can be a passive-aggressive way of behaving. They fear the consequences of saying no or not fulfilling their obligations but are also angry about what they perceive as unfair expectations and demands on them. This is when some assertiveness training may be helpful. Finally, increasing self-esteem can solve problems with procrastination because feeling better about yourself relieves you of worrying about what others think of you and having constantly to prove yourself to them. Some people procrastinate because they think they need to do everything perfectly or not at all. With increased self-esteem, you are more accepting of mistakes and don’t expect yourself to perform perfectly.

**Combating Perfectionism** Perfectionism is often associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder as well as with eating disorders. Having perfectionistic tendencies can also create stress and conflict in relationships because people who interact with perfectionists feel as
Changing for the Better

Combating Perfectionism

My girlfriend is a perfectionist and she is driving me crazy. Nothing I do seems good enough for her as much as I try to please her. Her unrealistic expectations are causing a great deal of stress in our relationship and our friends are beginning to stay away from us because they don’t like to hear us argue. What can I do?

Sometimes people who are perfectionists tend to blame others for their own sense of failure or rejection. Here are some ways to respond better to your girlfriend:

1. Communicate how you feel when she is critical of you or shows her disapproval. Suggest more positive ways that she can give you feedback or share her disappointments.
2. Give specific examples of how she may be expecting too much, and find a compromise between all or nothing.
3. Don’t retaliate. It is tempting to point out her flaws when she is doing the same to you. Instead, reassure her that you think highly of her and point out her successes and accomplishments, since she is probably focusing on her failures.
4. Communicate your confidence in her abilities and ask her to have the same trust in you.
5. Model acceptance of imperfection in yourself and others. Show her that everybody is flawed, no one is perfect, and this makes us human.
6. Don’t focus on her mistakes or tease her when she makes an error. Instead give positive reinforcement when she doesn’t do something well.
7. Help her to relax and have fun even if all the work is not yet done.
8. Talk about how she is feeling rather than the content of her message, such as saying “You sound very stressed and overwhelmed.”
9. Don’t fall into the perfectionist trap yourself. It is easy to think, “If I just try harder, she will be happy with me.” Perfectionism is an impossible goal to reach, and so you are setting yourself up for failure and rejection.
10. Help her to see the forest rather than the trees. It is easy for perfectionists to get lost in the details and lose sight of the overall goal. It may help to alleviate her stress if you can help her to refocus on what is really important and what the overall goal is, such as having fun at the party you are throwing and not having the house perfectly clean.

Though nothing they do is good enough or will please that person.

To help alleviate the stress of perfectionism, base your self-esteem on who you are rather than on what you do. This involves accepting yourself and others unconditionally, including imperfections (see the box “Combating Perfectionism”). Lowering your expectations of yourself and others and aiming for 80 percent rather than 100 percent is another strategy in battling perfectionism. Note what you are doing well and have accomplished rather than what is still left to do. Push yourself to take risks and allow yourself to make mistakes. It can be useful to make mistakes on purpose in order to get accustomed to this experience and realize that people still like and accept you and nothing bad will happen. Relaxation and stress-management techniques such as the ones described at the end of this chapter can also help alleviate the stress that comes with perfectionism. You might want to take the survey at the end of this chapter to assess your level of perfectionism.

As you can see, there are many different aspects to consider in managing stress, as well as its physical, social, environmental, and psychological components. As you think about how you can more effectively manage your stress level, you will need to practice and experiment to find the stress-management techniques most beneficial for you.

TALKING POINTS Think back to stressful times in your life. What were some positive ways you coped, and what were some negative things you did to cope?

A Realistic Perspective on Stress and Life

The development of a realistic approach to today’s fast-paced demanding lifestyle may best be achieved by fostering many of the following perspectives: 41

Anticipate problems and see yourself as a problem solver. Although each specific problem is unique, it is most likely similar to past ones. Use these past experiences to quickly recognize ways of resolving new problems.

Search for solutions. Act on a partial solution, even when a complete solution seems distant. By resolving some aspects of a problem, you can gain time for more focused consideration of the remaining difficulties. In addition, some progress is a confidence builder that can help you remain committed to finding a complete solution.

Take control of your own future. Set out to accomplish your goals. Do not view yourself as a victim.
Also, recall from Chapter 2 that being proactive and optimistic is an excellent way to take charge of your life and recognize capabilities that you were previously unaware of.

*Be aware of self-fulfilling prophecies.* Do not extend or generalize difficulties from one area into another. Further, negativity about yourself, in the form of self-doubt and self-blame, is certain to erode your feelings of success.

*Visualize success.* Focus on those things that are necessary and possible to ensure success. The very act of “imaging,” seeing oneself performing skillfully, has proven beneficial in a variety of performance-oriented activities.

*Accept the unchangeable.* Focus on taking control of what you can and letting go of the rest. The direction your life takes is only in part the result of your own doing. Cope as effectively as possible with those events over which you have no direct control; beyond a certain point, however, you must let go of those things over which you have little control.

*Live each day well.* Combine activity, contemplation, and a positive attitude approaching the many things that must be done each day. Celebrate special occasions. Undertake new experiences. Learn from your mistakes. Recognize your accomplishments. Most importantly, however, remember that the fabric of our lives is far more heavily influenced by day-to-day events than it is by the occasional milestones of life.

### Taking Charge of Your Health

- Complete the Student Stress Checklist at the end of this chapter.
- Determine if you suffer from perfectionism by completing the Perfectionism assessment at the end of this chapter.
- Join a yoga, meditation, or exercise class on campus or in the community.
- Assess your sleep hygiene and incorporate into your sleep habits some of the tips recommended in this chapter.
- Prioritize your daily goals in a list that you can accomplish, allowing time for recreational activities.
- Counteract a tendency to procrastinate by setting up imaginary (early) deadlines for assignments and rewarding yourself when you meet those dates.
- Replace a negative coping technique that you currently use, such as smoking, with an effective alternative, such as deep breathing, relaxation exercises, yoga, or exercise.
- List the positive aspects of your life, and make them the focus of your everyday thoughts.

### SUMMARY

- Stress refers to physiological changes and responses your body makes in response to a situation, a real or a perceived threat.
- The fight or flight response is a physiological response to perceived, anticipated, or real threat; it causes the heart to race, breathing becomes labored, muscles are tense, the body sweats, and blood flow is decreased to the extremities and digestive organs and increased to the major muscles and brain.
- Chronic stress refers to remaining at a high level of physiological arousal too long and not being able to take immediate, effective action to alleviate the perceived or real threat.

---

**Act on your capacity for growth.** Undertake new experiences and then extract from them new information about your own interests and capacities. The multiple dimensions of health identified in Chapter 1 will, over the course of your lifetime, provide a wide array of resources that will allow growth to occur throughout your entire life.

**Allow for renewal.** Make time for yourself, and take advantage of opportunities to pursue new and fulfilling relationships. Foster growth in each of the multiple dimensions of health—physical, psychological, social, intellectual, spiritual, and occupational. Initial renewal in one dimension may serve as a springboard for renewal in others.

**Accept mistakes.** Both you and others will make mistakes. Recognize that these can cause anger, and learn to avoid feelings of hostility. Mistakes, carefully evaluated, can serve as the basis for even greater knowledge and more likely success in those activities not yet undertaken.

**Keep life simple.** Keep the demands of life as orderly and manageable as you can. Just as adding too many appliances to an electrical circuit will quickly overload it and cause a power outage, excess demands and commitments added to our daily schedule can quickly burn out our psyches. Learning to prioritize and postpone activities is key to building a productive and enjoyable life.

**List the positive aspects of your life, and make them the focus of your everyday thoughts.**
• While too much stress can have a negative effect and cause some serious health problems, a moderate level of stress is positive and beneficial.

• Constant arousal and increased levels of adrenaline in your system will eventually wear down your body’s immunological system. You will be less able to cope with stress, and so it takes less and less stress to cause a stress reaction.

• General Adaptation Syndrome is a sequenced physiological response to the presence of a stressor, involving the alarm, resistance, and exhaustion stages of the stress response.

• An overwhelming number of students identify time management as the reason for their academic success or failure. Setting priorities and goals and balancing academic life are essential aspects of managing your stress effectively.

• To effectively manage your stress, you need to take into consideration environmental stressors such as the noise level, amount of light, and aesthetic quality of the space you inhabit. It is also important to get adequate amounts of sleep, exercise, and nutrition.

• The relaxation response is effective because it entails the opposite of the stress response. Rather than taking shallow breaths, breathe deeply, inhaling to a count of four and exhaling to a count of four while sitting in a comfortable position.

• Effective psychological tools for stress management include progressive muscle relaxation, visualization, guided imagery, meditation, hypnosis, biofeedback, stress inoculation, cognitive self-talk, conquering procrastination, combating perfectionism, and setting realistic goals.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What is stress?
2. How does stress relate to your physical and psychological health?
3. What is the fight or flight response?
4. What are some long-term physiological effects of chronic stress?
5. Describe the Yerkes-Dodson Law.
7. List at least five types of stressors students can experience.
8. List some environmental stressors, and explain how high levels of stress have been linked to environmental factors.
9. Describe the relaxation response and how it is effective for stress management.
10. Name seven cognitive and psychological stress-management techniques, and explain how they work.

**ANSWERS TO THE “WHAT DO YOU KNOW?” QUIZ**


**As We Go to Press**

**Stress Elimination: Just Take a Pill to Forget Your Stress?**

Taking a pill to erase your memory sounds like something out of the movie *X-Men*. In the case of propranolol, life imitates art. Propranolol (Inderol) is a beta blocker historically used in the treatment of hypertension. Its controversial proposed new use is to erase traumatic memories and stress. When people are stressed, adrenaline is released. Adrenaline can enhance performance when produced at a moderate level. Increased adrenaline can also enhance memory. However, propranolol acts to block adrenaline, and in doing so it weakens memory or stops memories from becoming stronger. It has been suggested that propranolol be used for victims of trauma, such as rape victims, soldiers, and accident victims, to weaken the intensity of their psychological trauma and help them go on with their lives. There is currently an experimental study underway using propranolol to weaken or alter memories.

Although alleviating the anxiety, depression, and stress associated with a trauma may seem to be effective treatment for people with posttraumatic stress disorder, the Council on Bioethics has questioned the ethics of changing people’s memories. They contend that our memories are part of who we are, and that changing people’s memories of the past is paramount to rewriting people’s lives and can fundamentally alter our identities. Proponents for propranolol defend the use of this drug by comparing it to giving morphine to someone in severe pain. They contend that since we prescribe medications to take away physical pain, why not also prescribe them for psychological pain?

The bioethicists want to know where the line will be drawn—in other words, what experiences will be considered traumatic enough to warrant administering propranolol to erase the person’s memories of them? If you had a relationship breakup, were fired from your job, or just had a bad day, would you want to take a pill to forget it?

ENDNOTES

26. Sleep treatments rise to the occasion USA Today, February 27, 2006.
30. Hugging warms the heart and also may protect it. USA Today, March 10, 2003.
Personal Assessment

Student Stress Checklist

Put a check next to those stressors that apply to you.

Academic
- Difficulty managing time
- Deadlines
- Poor grades
- Competition
- Exams
- Pressure to do well (parents’, own, and/or others’ expectations)
- Study skills deficit
- Earned academic awards
- Completion of a big project
- Keeping scholarships
- Other

Interpersonal Relationships
- Too much or too little social activity
- Dating
- Conflict with others
- Few or no supportive relationships
- Long-distance relationship issues
- Sexual difficulties
- Beginning a new romantic relationship
- Negotiating relationships with professors
- Joining an organization
- Other

Personal
- Poor physical or psychological health
- Family difficulties
- Lack of social support
- Death of a loved one
- Financial problems
- Having a gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered identity
- Homesickness
- Change in eating or sleeping pattern
- Conflict in values
- Recent life changes (moved to a new location, new job, marriage, etc.)
- Becoming more independent
- Not belonging/fitting in
- Having a pet
- Holiday/semester breaks
- Disatisfaction with appearance
- Peer pressure
- Difficulty controlling alcohol and/or drug use
- Other

Career
- Lack of career direction
- Unhappy with major
- Declaring a major
- Internship placement (e.g., student teaching)
- Graduation
- Other

Employment
- Difficulty with boss
- Unstable work hours
- Change in working conditions
- Job offer
- Promotion (more responsibility)
- Possible military deployment of self/friends/family
- Other

Environment
- Discrimination
- Unsatisfactory living environment
- Transportation difficulties
- Commuting
- Parking
- Other

Total Stressors Checked
**Personal Assessment—continued**

**TO CARRY THIS FURTHER . . .**

How well do you think you are managing your stress?
(Make a mark on the continuum where you think you fit.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keep in mind that two people with the same number of stressors may experience their stress differently. A person with a small number of stressors may feel overwhelmed by them, while a person with many stressors may feel they are manageable. As you consider the number of stressors in your life, it is important to recognize how well you manage them. Regardless of the number of stressors, if you are not managing your stress well, we encourage you to seek help in developing positive coping skills.
Personal Assessment

Am I a perfectionist?

Below are some ideas that are held by perfectionists. Which of these do you see in yourself? To help you decide, rate how strongly you agree with each of the statements below on a scale from 0 to 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not agree</td>
<td>I agree</td>
<td>I agree completely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I have an eye for details that others can miss.
2. I can get lost in details and forget the real purpose of the task.
3. I can get overwhelmed by too many details.
4. It stresses me when people do not want to do things the right way.
5. There is a right way and a wrong way to do most things.
6. I do not like my routine to be interrupted.
7. I expect a great deal from myself.
8. I expect no less of others than I expect of myself.
9. People should always do their best.
10. I am neat in my appearance.
11. Good grooming is important to me.
12. I do not like being seen before I have showered and dressed.
13. I do not like making mistakes.
14. Receiving criticism is horrible.
15. It is embarrassing to make mistakes in front of others.
16. Sharing my new ideas with others makes me anxious.
17. I worry that my ideas are not good enough.
18. I do not have a great deal of confidence in myself.
19. I’m uncomfortable when my environment is untidy or disorganized.
20. When things are disorganized it is hard for me to concentrate.
21. What others think about my home is important to me.
22. I have trouble making difficult decisions.
23. I worry that I may make the wrong decision.
24. Making a bad decision can be disastrous.
25. I often do not trust others to do the job right.
26. I check the work of others to make certain it was done correctly.
27. If I can control the process it will turn out fine.
28. I am a perfectionist.
29. I care more about doing a quality job than others do.
30. It’s important to make a good impression.

TOTAL SCORE

Scoring

Add all 30 items together to get your total score. If your score was less than 30, then you are probably not a perfectionist, although you may have a few of the traits. Scores from 31 to 60 suggest mild perfectionism. When you are stressed your score may be higher. Scores of 61 to 90 suggest moderate perfectionism. This probably means that perfectionism is causing you trouble in some specific areas, but is not out of control. Scores higher than 91 suggest a level of perfectionism that could cause you serious problems.

TO CARRY THIS FURTHER . . .

If you or a friend of family member scored in the moderate to high range for perfectionism, consider taking some of the steps described in this chapter for combating perfectionism. Allow yourself to take risks and make mistakes. General relaxation strategies can also be helpful in overcoming an unhealthy degree of perfectionism.

Source: Adapted with the permission of The Free Press, a Division of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, from Never Good Enough: Freeing Yourself from the Chains of Perfection by Monica Ramirez Basco, Ph.D. Copyright © 1999 by Monica Ramirez Basco. All rights reserved.