December 2008

Relax Don't Do It

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2009/iss2/9
Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock... I set my alarm, right? Tomorrow I need to remember to send in the electricity bill and e-mail my advisor! I wonder if the bookstore will buy back this book after it got soaked in the rain. Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock... what time is it now? I need to sleep! If I'm really not going to sleep I should turn the lights back on and try studying again. But I'm so tired!

By Samantha Carlson

Sound familiar? With finals right around the corner, it can be difficult to find the best balance between sleep and studying, unless that decision has been made for you. Not getting enough sleep poses many health risks, as any doctor would tell you. According to the Better Sleep Council, 65 percent of sleep loss among Americans is a result of stress.

Stress is not a bad thing to have as it can sometimes be helpful. Stress encourages us to study for finals, make to-do lists, remember to pay bills or go grocery shopping. Stress must be managed, however, or it could lead to sickness or long-term health damage, including depression, addictive behaviors or chronic diseases.

People suffer from four main types of stress, according to Stressfocus.com. Eustress, considered positive stress, motivates people to do things (i.e. your anatomy final)s. Distress, the most harmful form, causes anger and anxiety. Under-stress and over-stress comprise the two moderate categories. Under-stress causes people to "give up" and become bored or hopeless when they feel overwhelmed with activities and jobs. Over-stress occurs after working excessively to meet a deadline, causing people to focus only on one deadline at a time (forget even thinking about multitasking).

Everyone feels stress from time to time within each of these categories, but the trick lies in managing stress. Some ignore it or react destructively, while others attack stressful situations with as much energy as possible. Try to avoid these extremes by maintaining a balanced lifestyle.

"In the grand scheme of things, if I'm doing a project and get a lower grade, I think, 'how is that going to affect my life?' It's really not a big deal. I think about other things too," said Kimberly Zamora, sophomore in graphic design.

Which college Iowa State bestows the most stress on its students? Some say design, others consider engineering, even agriculture is mentioned as one of the more stressful majors. But which factors should be used to determine the most stressful? Is it the difficulty of the work or the amount asked of students?

"Design students pull more all-nighters, but they seem to bring it on themselves," said Anna Claussen, senior in construction engineering.

Sleeping is a major way to reduce stress. Hanging out with friends, watching The Colbert Report reruns or pulling all-nighters to finish last-minute projects, however, makes it difficult to maintain a regular sleep pattern.

"For projects, that's how it is," said Stephanie Hoogerwerf, sophomore in graphic design. "You work the night beforehand. It's crunch time."

When you finally find a chance to rest your eyes, Mayo Clinic suggests sleeping in comfortable clothing, and keeping the room dark with a cool temperature. Daily activities also affect your ability to get a good night's rest. Eat meals at the same time each day—especially dinner—and avoid eating more than a light snack two to three hours before going to sleep. Limit caffeine intake after noon, including chocolate. Do things that raise your body temperature, like exercising or bathing, four to six hours before going to sleep. Allow your body temperature to drop. When your head hits the pillow, take deep long breaths, hide the clock and read if you become anxious about falling asleep.

As finals quickly approach, try to balance your to-do list with your wellbeing. Maintain routine eating and workout schedules and get a good night's sleep.
'Tis the season to be jolly? Well, maybe for the week after project deadlines, finals, holiday shopping... But prior to that blissful holiday week, many individuals suffer from seemingly inevitable stress—especially during the holiday season—but believe it or not, stress can be foreseen and oftentimes prevented. And if you can't prevent that dreaded, anxious feeling, stress can be relieved in a number of ways you may not have known were possible.

By Alissa Atkinson

Symptoms of Stress (helpguide.org)

Cognitive Symptoms (just in time for finals!)
>> Memory problems
>> Indecisiveness
>> Inability to concentrate
>> Trouble thinking clearly
>> Poor judgment
>> Seeing only the negative
>> Emotional Symptoms
>> Moodiness
>> Agitation
>> Restlessness

Physical Symptoms
>> Headaches or backaches
>> Muscle tension and stiffness
>> Insomnia
>> Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
>> Weight gain or loss
>> Frequent colds
>> Face breakouts

Behavioral Symptoms
>> Eating more or less
>> Sleeping too much or too little
>> Isolating yourself from others
>> Procrastination
>> Nervous habits
>> Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax
>> Teeth grinding
>> Picking fights with others
>> Overreacting to unexpected problems

Causes of Stress

The activities that cause stress depend on the individual. Something that may cause stress to one may be enjoyable to someone else.

For Jenna Nikkel, sophomore in pre-journalism, external aspects of stress come from trying to maintain a balanced schedule while participating in a number of activities, including PRSSA, the Iowa State Daily and Salt Company.

Stress can also be caused internally. Internal causes of stress include, but are not limited to:
>> Pessimistic attitude
>> Self-criticism
>> Uncertainty or worries
>> Unrealistic expectations
>> Low self-esteem
>> Perfectionism
>> Unexpressed anger
>> Lack of assertiveness
>> Chronic stress: a state of ongoing physiological arousal occurs when the body experiences so many stressors that the nervous system doesn’t have time to activate the relaxation response.

Demanding jobs, homework and sadness occur too frequently in our high-energy, fast-paced lifestyle, so (not surprisingly) our body is oftentimes in a state of perceived threat and chronic stress. Our fight-or-flight response, designed to help fight a few life-threatening situations spread over long periods of time, cannot handle regular stress, so our bodies become ill, either physically, emotionally or both.

It has been estimated that more than 90 percent of doctor visits result from conditions in which stress plays a role.

Impact of Stress

When faced with chronic stress, people notice physical effects. The first symptoms are relatively mild, like chronic headaches and increased susceptibility to colds. With more exposure to chronic stress, however, more serious health problems may develop. These stress-influenced conditions include, but are not limited to:
>> Depression
>> Diabetes
>> Hair loss
>> Heart disease
>> Hyperthyroidism
>> Obesity
>> Obsessive-Compulsive disorder or anxiety disorder
>> Tooth and gum disease
>> Ulcers

Food and drinks can be a go-to for many when they are feeling overwhelmed with stress. “If I know I am going to have a long day I try to drink a coffee or Diet Coke,” Nikkel said. More recently, however, she has been drinking water, which she believes has felt better than when she filled up on soda. She said ice cream has always been her comfort food. She added that when
she notices she is starting to feel ill, she takes Echinacea, a natural immune booster supplement.

There may be times when stress can seem unavoidable. For Nikkel, that time comes twice a year at the end of every semester. “The weeks right before breaks or finals definitely stress me the most because all the big projects and papers seem to be due then,” said Nikkel. “On top of the projects and papers, I am usually trying to finish different things up for clubs, too.”

During this time, it is common for Nikkel to experience tension headaches that last all hours of the day and neck pain. In order to relieve her stress, Nikkel enjoys massages and listens to calm music just before going to bed. “Sometimes I journal or read the Bible; that never fails,” she said.

**Stress Management**

**Relax Your Mind**

*Writing.* There is evidence that writing about stressful events and circumstances may help relieve stress and improve diseases linked to stress. Write for ten to 15 minutes a day about stressful events and how you felt during them.

**Expressing your feelings.** Discussing how you feel with friends, family members, or a counselor is an important way of coping with and relieving stress. Laughing and crying are also natural ways to release tension and frustration. They are both part of a normal emotional healing process.

**Mindfulness activities.** Mindfulness activities help relax your mind and are often combined with body-centered relaxation exercises.

**Self-hypnosis** can open your mind to suggestions that can relieve stress or change the way you respond to stress.

**Meditation** during which you focus your attention on the things that are happening in the present moment. One way to do this is by paying attention to your breathing.

**Music therapy** can relax your body, improve your mood, and change the pace of your day. Listening to slow, calm ballads will help you relax.

**Humor therapy** helps to boost the body’s immune system and reduce stress. Listen to a comedian at the M-Shop or on YouTube. Rent a comedy or read a funny book.

**Relax Your Body**

*Physical activity.* Exercise has been proven to reduce stress. Aerobic exercise—the kind that increases your heart rate, such as walking, running or swimming—is especially useful for counteracting the harmful effects of stress. Additionally, stretching is a good way to relieve muscle tension.

**Do something you enjoy.** A meaningful activity helps relieve tension. This can be a hobby (such as cooking), a creative activity like writing or artwork, or doing volunteer work for a cause that benefits others.

**Body-centered relaxation.** Body-centered relaxation skills are especially useful for people who experience physical symptoms of stress. These skills include:

**Yoga and Pilates** are forms of exercise and meditation. The Iowa State Recreational Services offer power yoga, fitness yoga, wellness yoga, Pilates and yo-Pi (a combination of yoga and Pilates) classes Mon. through Fri, in Beyer 301

**Aromatherapy** that uses the aroma-producing oils from plants to promote relaxation.

**Breathing exercises,** such as deep breathing.

[webmd.com/balance/stress-management](webmd.com/balance/stress-management)