



Educating Students About Stress Management

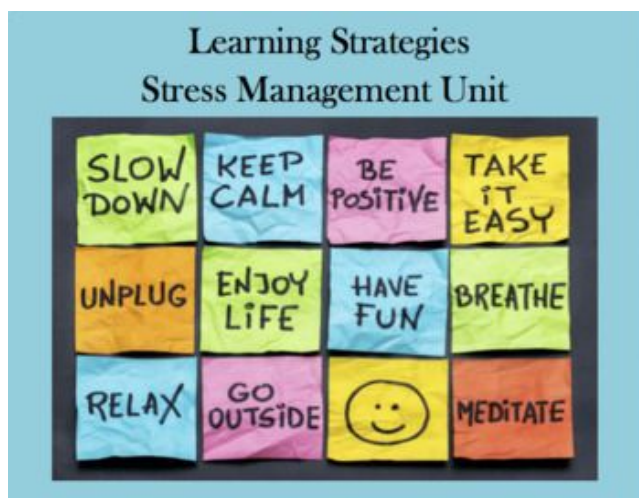
By: Tara Abdelnour on December 18, 2022



Especially during midterms, or final exam season, it can become extremely overwhelming and difficult to cope with the immense amount of pressure and stress to complete all of the required assignments and revise for all the exams that are worth 30% of your overall grade in the course. Especially when knowing that failing that course will affect your GPA; and consequently, could affect your financial aid. As a university student and an individual who has always struggled with constantly being stressed, I completely relate that studying can become overwhelming. With constant worries in my head about peer pressure, my grades, tuition fees, student loans, etc. My brain was constantly at war with itself; telling me that I had so much I had to do and think about during university that I never thought I was doing enough.

Many university students experience high stress levels, especially first-year students who are introduced to new challenges and obstacles as they transition from high school to university. As a third-year-university student, I will be sharing with you all some of the most effective stress management tools/strategies you can use to de-stress.

It is very important to take up, at least a couple of these strategies, to ensure that your stress is being managed and addressed; since, when it is not, it can lead to harmful health concerns such as anxiety, depression, increased blood pressure, etc.



To the left are examples of a few learning strategies that could be implemented either before stressing out about an assignment, an exam, grades, etc.

One important way is to relax. Whether that means doing some yoga, mindful meditation, or simply taking a few deep breaths, it is important to implement at least one of these techniques to relax your mind and/or body. This can also relieve anxiety, depression, and sleep problems, as your mind will feel more at peace and calm and there will be less

tension in your muscles afterward. One of my personal favorite stress management strategies to relax is playing “Relaxing Music for Stress Relief” or “Calm Music for Meditation” on Youtube whilst taking deep breaths and soaking in a warm bath. Right afterwards, I feel rejuvenated and able to tackle my problems (more specifically, my stress) in a healthy and rational way.

Let’s elaborate on breathing and it’s importance in stress management. Breathing deeply when you are stressed, such as before entering an exam room, sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. An example of a breathing exercise is the equal breaths exercise, which entails breathing in for a count of four, holding it for a count of four, then breathing out for a count of four. I know a lot of university and college students who use this exercise regularly as it has been able to slow down their heart rate and decrease their

stress levels. Developing this as a habit to be done in stressful moments during your day has not only short term benefits, but long-term benefits as well, specifically for your brain, digestion, and immune system.

Another extremely important way to manage your stress during university is to make use of your support network. This includes your friends and family who could lend you advice, and/or be a mentor during your stressful/difficult days. By talking your worries or anxieties out with someone you trust, you will be given a safe space to rant or talk about something that is causing you stress. This is beneficial since doing so prevents one from isolating themselves from their loved ones during stressful times, which leads to one bottling up all of their emotions. This is harmful since it has detrimental short term and long term effects on the individual. It is likely that your cousin, for example, who also attended university, experienced the same, or similar, stressful situation during their educational path. Reach out to them about your worries, and it is possible that they could provide advice that will relieve or decrease your stress. You never know unless you try.

Lastly, be sure to get enough sleep. I am aware that during exams season, it can be extremely difficult to get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. During those times of the year, you may feel that if you got more hours of sleep, you would be sacrificing X hours of study time. Many university students also constantly pull all-nighters (not sleep all night) until they finish studying for an upcoming exam. This is extremely harmful to the individual, since having a regular sleep routine calms and restores the body, sharpens judgement and decision-making, and improves concentration. It is more difficult to concentrate without having had adequate sleep. Speaking from experience, it is extremely challenging to focus on a two-hour lecture only running on 3 hours of sleep. Find out what the stressor is that is keeping you awake, and implement the stress management strategies listed above (as well as many more on Google), to ensure that you are getting enough sleep and, therefore, working towards decreasing your stress levels.

Note that, although I do incorporate some of these strategies (including relaxing, going for a walk to clear my mind, and doing breathing exercises), I still do get overwhelmed. This is important to recognize that the listed strategies are not a cure to be rid of stress, anxiety, or feelings of being overwhelmed throughout university. Rather, these strategies are ways to avoid constantly feeling overwhelmed, to ensure the stress is managed, in order to take better care of yourself and your sanity throughout your years in university.

Although grades are important throughout the university. Your mental well-being (including your mental health) is more important than your grades. Academic achievement is important, but when it comes to a point where you are sacrificing your mental health for grades, changes must be made to ensure your sense of well-being is not being eroded in the short term and long term.

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