

Learning Café Quick Study Tips

STRESS

We all experience stress at one time or another. In fact, stress is a normal & necessary response for a vital life. Without some stress, we would not be motivated to finish tasks, to tackle new challenges, to grow into stronger, more well-rounded people. However, too much stress can affect us negatively, sometimes to the point where it becomes debilitating. In those cases, in particular, how we handle stress becomes critical.

It is not the source of stress, but our reaction to it, that causes stress. So, what are some ways we can deal with stress more effectively?



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Become attuned to your body & emotions

Everyone reacts to stress in different ways. Recognizing the warning signs of stress in your life (ex., headaches, frequent crying, a short temper) will prompt you to find ways of coping with the sources of stress before the stress becomes unmanageable.

Pay attention to your physical needs

- Exercise regularly – Physical exercise alleviates tension through the release of endorphins (naturally occurring chemicals in the body). After 20 to 30 minutes of hard aerobic exercise, endorphins are released that provide an energy & mood boost for several hours.
- Eat healthy – When stressed, we often adopt unhealthy eating habits, such as drinking more coffee, mindless eating, skipping meals, or eating foods high in fat, sugar, & salt. Unfortunately, these habits can lead to increased stress levels & accompanying health problems. More than any other time, stressful times require that you pay close attention to nutrition.
- Get enough rest – Sleep-deprived individuals have difficulty coping with stresses in their daily lives because their bodies have not had adequate time to recover. Try to establish regular sleep routines (ex., regular rising & bedtime hours) to ensure your body has time to repair itself. Also, avoid other influences, such as alcohol, caffeine, or medications that might interfere with your ability to sleep well.

Learn & use relaxation methods

Relaxation strategies provide the mind & body with opportunities to rejuvenate. They serve as a form of release & make you better prepared to tackle other stressful situations or feelings.

- Find 10 minutes in your day to sit in complete silence.
- Learn deep breathing or muscle relaxation exercises.
- Incorporate time for meditation and/or prayer.
- Keep a diary or journal where you can explore personal stressors & responses to them.

Praise yourself

Rather than giving in to negative self-talk, acknowledge yourself with positive feedback. Explore something about yourself or your life that makes you feel good.

Develop a support system

Support systems are critical in helping us deal with stressful times. Such a network allows you to express your feelings, fears, & problems, helping you clear your mind, sort out confusion, & make decisions. Look to family, friends, coworkers, classmates, clergy, or counselors to provide the support you need.

Create balance in your life

- Make time for both work & play. Too much of either can lead to imbalance in your life & the subsequent stress that accompanies imbalance. Set limits on work & study as well as demands from people & activities in your personal life.
- Adopt activities that enrich your life & the lives of others.
 - Volunteer activities provide a sense of gratification while also providing support to other individuals.
 - Hobbies release stress & add fun to your life.

Be assertive

Assertive communication helps solve problems rather than build resentment. It increases self-confidence & helps you maintain control in your life. Learn to acknowledge your feelings, express your preferences, & stand up for yourself. Recognize the need to say “No” if you do not want or cannot afford to commit to someone else’s request.

Develop a sense of humor

Laughter, like exercise, produces endorphins that strengthen the immune system & produce a sense of well-being. It also increases oxygen flow to the brain & promotes positive physiological changes. So, watch a comedy, have coffee with a funny friend, or tell a joke. Laughter will help lift some of the weight of stress you carry on your shoulders.

Exercise & stretch your mind

Like your body, your mind also requires exercise to refresh & stimulate it. Distract your mind from its troubles by doing puzzles, playing challenging games, learning something new, or debating with friends. A little mental exercise will keep you sharp & better equipped to cope with those daily challenges.

Plan, rather than worry

Disorganization contributes to stress & may increase avoidance behaviors that actually lead to further stress. With stress also comes worry. Set aside time to plan, schedule activities, explore solutions, & solve problems. These activities will help you to be proactive in dealing with stresses in your life before they get out of control.

Get professional help, if needed

When these strategies don’t work, seek help! Ongoing feelings of depression & hopelessness or thoughts of death & suicide should be discussed with a professional.

*For more information on any of the suggestions given here, please visit the Learning Café, located in the library (CE1340) / 403-382-6952 / learningcafe@lethbridgecollege.ca
Or sign up for a Student Success Workshop!*