

## What is stress?

Stress is your mental, emotional and physical reaction to any change, be it good or bad. We are sensitive to change – from a simple change in the temperature to major life changes. Reactions or adjustments occur within our body physically, emotionally and mentally to cope with each change and re-establish balance. Stress accumulates and if the body and mind are not well maintained, overstress (an overload of stress) begins to have a negative effect and then warning signs of symptoms of wear and tear will show. Stress should not be feared. The body's normal stress reaction to a "stress" is to COPE, which simply means that some corrective action or management is taken to relieve the balance. Stress affects everybody in a different way.

## Coping with Stress

### Signs/Effects of stress

- Emotionally – crying, angry, irritability, frustration, anxious and panic, etc.
- Physically – upset stomach, diarrhea, indigestion, headache and backache, etc.
- Behaviourally – avoiding people, overeating, reduced appetite, excessive sleep and sleep disturbance, etc.
- Mentally – forgetfulness, negative thinking, worrying, indecisiveness, cloudy thinking and preoccupation with problems, etc.

Stress is something that is part of normal life, it may be associated with juggling study, work and family responsibilities and it can be positive and negative. Some people can identify and handle the stress in their lives, while others need to introduce new strategies to reduce it. Some strategies to help:

- Establish a balanced lifestyle that includes times for study, work, family, leisure activities and physical exercise
- Build some regular exercise into your life, this gives you more energy and helps you to unwind, try and do moderate exercise at least 3 times per week (walk, jog, swim, ride or weight training, etc.)
- Eat healthy foods, have regular meals and drink enough water
- Get enough sleep by exercising and feeling tired, establish a regular sleep schedule, wind down at bedtime, use alcohol or caffeine in moderation
- Take "time-outs". Clear your head, go for a walk, garden, play with a pet, watch nature or talk to a supportive friend
- Use problem solving strategies, to clarify your problems, brainstorm possible solutions, explore the pros and cons of each option and then choose one to put into action and monitor your progress with it
- Engage in relaxation techniques such as imagery where you take time out and imagine yourself in a relaxing place, make it peaceful, comfortable and safe, and focus on your senses, image what this imagery place looks, smells, feels and sounds like and concentrate on these things to help you to relax
- Learn to do yoga, meditation or listen to relaxation tapes and learn calming techniques such as controlled breathing, where you breathe in through the nose counting to 4 seconds making full use of capacity of your lungs, hold your breath for 2 and then breath out for 4 seconds
- Use progressive muscle relaxation exercise where you tense the muscle groups separately in your body for 5 seconds and then relax them
- Consider whether negative thinking is contributing to your stress levels which can cause you to worry more than necessary, for example, "I am a failure because I can't understand the essay question" whereas, using positive thinking acknowledges difficulties but challenges negative

thinking, for example say that “I understand this part of the essay question and I need to clarify with the lecturer, the parts that I don’t understand”

- Seek help early, ask your lecturer for help on the content of your course, discuss improving your study and writing skills with the staff members in the Learning Centre and talk to a counsellor about what is stressing you and any negative thinking patterns
- Consider writing, journaling or drawing as a way of expressing thoughts and feelings. Be as specific as you want to, whilst prioritising your own feelings

## Where to go help?

If you wish to understand more about how to manage your stress, then contact a counsellor at Student Services.

Free, confidential counselling available for currently enrolled students at  
USQ Student Services

Toowoomba Campus, G Block Ph: (07) 4631 2372

Springfield Campus Level 3 Main Building Ph: (07) 3470 4400

Fraser Coast Campus Student Hub C Block Ph: (07) 4194 3125

## Online resources

- Headspace <http://www.headspace.org.au/>
- Reach Out <http://au.reachout.com/>
- Mind Tools <http://www.mindtools.com/>
- Breathing exercises <http://cci.health.wa.gov.au/docs/ACF3c65.PDF>
- Relaxation and Mindfulness exercise <http://www.allaboutdepression.com/relax/>
- Relaxation techniques <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/docs/info-PMR.pdf>
- Breathing exercises <http://cci.health.wa.gov.au/docs/ACF3c65.PDF>
- Relaxation and Mindfulness exercise <http://www.allaboutdepression.com/relax/>
- Mal Huxter’s Mindfulness resources, including downloadable, free files on relaxation techniques [http://www.malhuxter.com/index.php?option=com\\_phocadownload&view=sections&Itemid=64](http://www.malhuxter.com/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=sections&Itemid=64)
- Lifeline Ph:13 11 14 offers 24/7 telephone counseling services for people in crisis <http://www.lifeline.org.au/Find-Help/Mental-Health-Resource-Centre/Mental-Health-Resource-Centre/default.aspx>

[Source: Centre for Clinical Interventions <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>]