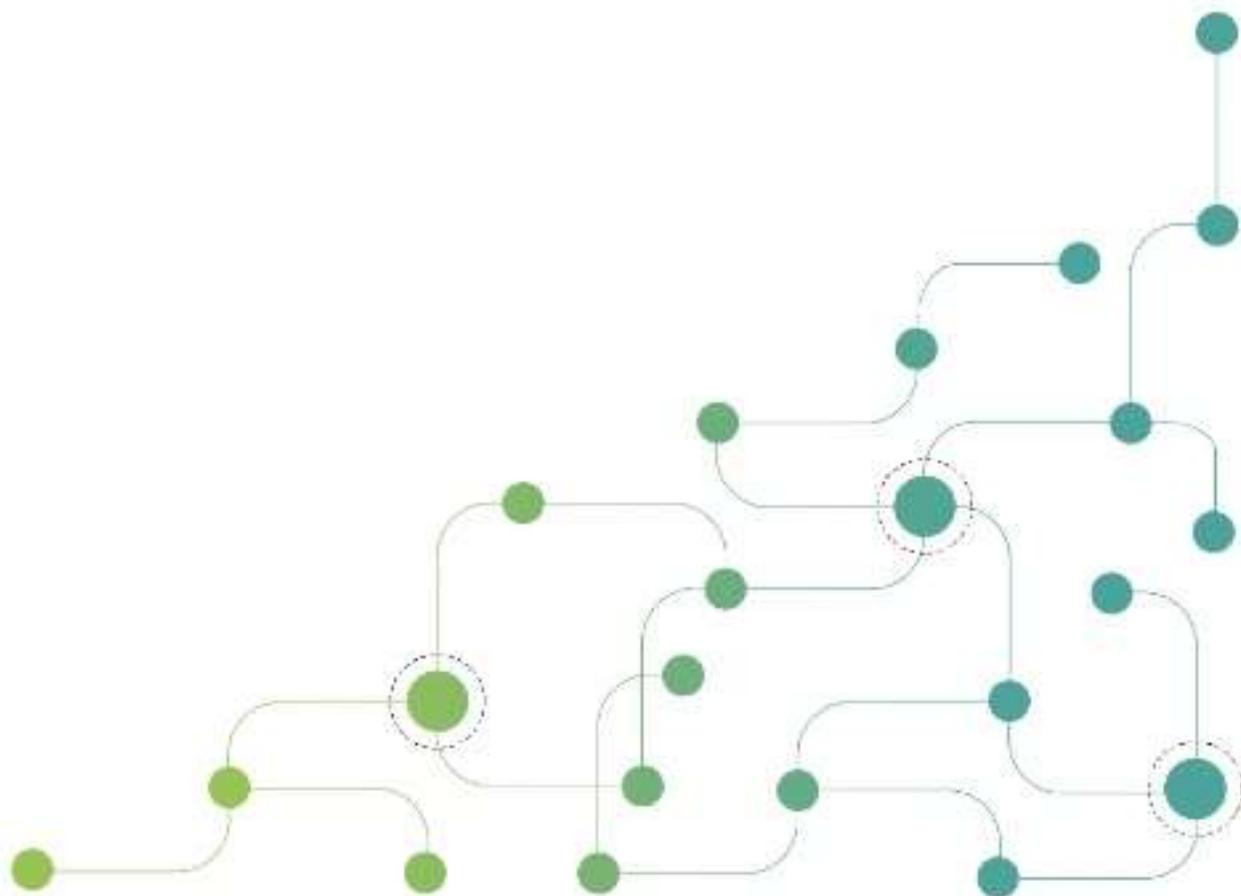




Stress Management and Positive Mental Health

Infopack for Students



About the author

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The Cordelia Foundation was established in 1996 with main aim of improving the mental-health state and quality of life of (severely) traumatized asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, including refugees, and their families through complex psycho-social rehabilitation. Cordelia is an accredited member of the Copenhagen-based network, the IRCT (International Rehabilitation and Research Council for Torture Victims). In 2004 UNHCR rewarded their work with the “Asylum prize”. In 2008 the committee of the Viennese SozialMarie Prize for Social Innovation chose the Foundation as one of the awarded organizations. In 2009 the National Immigration Agency in Hungary acknowledged their services in the field of mental health treatment of refugees with a certificate.

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Introduction

Hello and welcome! We highly appreciate and value your participation in this educational program and would like to equip you with some resources and information – theoretical and practical – on how to deal with some of the potential challenges a student might face in a highly demanding educational environment.

Your physical and mental health is just as important as good performance and achievement – as a matter of fact, even more so. We know that students often feel a lot of pressure to achieve and sometimes push their limits overboard. Additionally, being a refugee and starting afresh in a new environment adds on to the challenges – we are aware of this.

We will talk about things that you or someone in your environment may be experiencing but is hard to talk about or maybe even recognize or acknowledge- such as stress, burnout, and other mental problems. We will also explore ways to cope and valuable tools and resources for this purpose. Welcome on board and we hope you find this infopack useful.

Part 1. Stress and burnout

Defining stress

Stress is the body's reaction to any change or challenge. Though stress is often perceived as bad, it can actually be good in some respects. The right kind of stress can sharpen the mind and reflexes. It might be able to help the body perform better, or help you escape a dangerous situation.

Stress produces a physiological reaction in your body. Hormones are released, which results in physical manifestations of stress. These can include slowed digestion, shaking, tunnel vision, accelerated breathing and heart rate, dilation of pupils and flushed skin. This process is often referred to as the **“fight or flight”** response. That is just what it sounds like: Our bodies are prepared to either run away from the stressor or to stick around and fight against it.

However, the stress response is not only physical, it affects the mind and behavior as well. Here are some examples of the further stress response:

- ***The Psychological (Mind) Stress Response:***
 - feelings of tension
 - irritability
 - restlessness
 - sadness
 - worries
 - inability to relax
 - depression
 - reduced desire for activities
 - pessimistic attitude
 - lack of patience

- **Behavioral stress response:**

- Avoidance of tasks
- difficulty in completing work assignments
- fidgeting; tremors
- clenching fists
- crying
- changes in drinking, eating, or smoking behaviors
- change in sleep pattern
- social isolation/avoidance of people and social situations
- trouble getting along with others

- **Cognitive stress response:**

- Anxious/repetitive/disturbing thoughts
- fearful anticipation
- poor concentration
- difficulty with memory
- reduced or impaired judgement

Task: consider whether any of them seem familiar to you, and how each of these response types may influence learning and performance!

These are some of the most common stress-related reactions we may observe in ourselves or any of our fellow students:

- inability to focus in class
- fatigue/irritability
- getting sick often
- stomach aches
- giving up on assignments in frustration
- crying/yelling in anger
- shutting down
- nervous behavior fidgeting/jitters
- acting out/short temper

- aggressive behavior/fighting

Practical implication: Knowing how the stress response system works helps us to understand our own stress reactions and those of others. For example, when we are feeling frightened or threatened, even if we are not sure why, it is important to remember that the emotional brain that has taken over. As a result, we may overestimate or misinterpret the situation and perceive heightened danger. Also, attempts to think clearly and to connect to others in that moment may be ineffective.

So, what can you do?

Here is an easy **ABCD method** to tackle those moments of stress:

Acknowledge – take notice that you have gone into “stress mode”, being aware of this can already help to provide a normalizing explanation and it also provides an opportunity to react accordingly. So naming it is an important first step.

Breath – take a few slow and conscious breaths. There are a variety of breathing techniques that are very useful, and we will expand these in more detail in a later section (see section on Mindfulness)

Count – counting till 3 while you breath in and then till 3 again when you breath out

Distract - do something different to help your body and mind to get out of the stress-mode: look out the window, stand up, take a short walk, switch the task, have a glass of water – basically anything that helps you distract and switch to another mode

More on types of stress response: Fight, Flight, or Freeze Responses

Each type of response is appropriate in certain situations. The healthiest scenario is that a person displays flexibility in their responses: If you can overcome the danger, you stay and fight it. If you can't, and there's a way out, you run. In cases of extreme and overwhelming stress, the person may not feel capable of running or fighting, and as a result - as can be seen in the animal world - freezes up, becomes numb and motionless. Under such circumstances, freezing up or - as in the human world - dissociating from the here and now- may be the only and the best thing to do. This “hypoaroused” state (when

we are shut down, numb, and feel paralysed) permits the individual not to feel the enormity of what's happening, and as a result of the secreted chemicals, the pain of injury to the body or psyche is experienced with far less intensity.

The healthiest scenario is displaying flexibility in the responses. However, many people respond one way when a different response would serve them better. This happens either because they don't have the flexibility to adapt to different situations and get stuck in one type of response.

Types of Stress

According to the American Psychological Association, there are three types of stress: acute, episodic acute and chronic.

- **Acute stress** is the most common form and is the result of recent or anticipated stressors, it happens to all of us, and is a normal part of life.
- **Episodic acute stress** is acute stress that occurs frequently. This is the kind of stress that continuously pops up, sometimes in a pattern.
- **Chronic or long-term stress** can harm your health, coping with the impact of chronic stress can be challenging. Because the source of long-term stress is more constant than acute stress, the body never receives a clear signal to return to normal functioning. With chronic stress, those same lifesaving reactions in the body can disturb the immune, digestive, cardiovascular, sleep, and reproductive systems. Some people may experience mainly digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, sadness, anger, or irritability. Chronic stress requires reaching out for help. (For more on where and how to reach for help see: the section on stress management.)

A prolonged high level of stress should not be taken lightly. It can affect every area of your life— productivity in the classroom, increased health risks, and relationships, to name just a few. You can learn to manage stress.

The first step is understanding yourself better—how you react in different situations, what causes you stress, and how you behave when you feel stressed.

Task: Consider the following aspects of your relationship to stress:

- What are your triggers? That means what are
 - o the situations (e.g. high workload, time pressure, experiencing obstacles, lack of exercise or me-time, crowded areas),
 - o behaviors (e.g. someone being pushy or rude, expressing criticism or expectations),
 - o states (e.g. hunger, exhaustion, lack of sleep, need for physical activity),
 - o stimuli (e.g. loud noise, heat) that easily evoke a heightened sense of discomfort and threat in your case?
- What are your most common stress responses? Are they rather physical or emotional or behavioral? Where do you generally experience tension/discomfort in your body when you are stressed? What are the main emotions that stress triggers (e.g. anger, sadness, fear, agitation)? And how do you tend to engage with others in case of stress (e.g. becoming needy, impatient, snappy or withdrawing)?

Stress management

At this point we would like to introduce some methods and approaches that can help you manage stress not just in the moment, but also to create routines and practices that can help you in the long run to manage stress that comes up in your life.

Stress management comprises a:

“set of techniques and programs intended to help people deal more effectively with stress in their lives by analyzing the specific stressors and taking positive actions to minimize their effects” (Gale Encyclopaedia of Medicine, 2008).

Keep in mind: we're not aiming towards being stress-free all of the time. That's unrealistic as stress is an unavoidable human response to change and challenges. And as mentioned in a previous section - it's not all bad either.

However, we can all benefit from identifying our stress and managing it better.

The following tips are adapted from The American Psychological Association to support individuals with a stress management plan.

1. Understand your stress

How do you stress? It can be different for everybody. By understanding what stress looks like for you, you can be better prepared, and reach for your stress management toolbox when needed. (See before: what does your stress response look like?)

2. Identify your stress sources

What causes you to be stressed? (See before: what triggers you? – e.g. time pressure, hunger, loud noise, certain people etc.)

3. Learn to recognize stress signals

We all process stress differently so it's important to be aware of your individual stress symptoms. What are your internal alarm bells? What are the early signals of stress in your case? (e.g. headache, belly discomfort, irritability) Recognizing and tending to early signals is crucial as it gives you a chance to respond before things possibly escalate and get out of hand. So keep this in mind and try to intervene as early as possible, this can save you from getting into a state when things are hard to repair.

4. Recognize your stress strategies

What is your go-to tactic for calming down? These can be behaviors learned over years and some may be very useful, while others may be less healthy and helpful. See more on coping strategies in the next section.

5. Implement healthy stress management strategies

It's good to be [mindful](#) of any current unhealthy coping behaviors so you can switch them out for a healthy option. For example, if overeating is your current go to, you could [try going for a walk instead](#) or reaching out to a friend. *The American Psychological Association suggests that switching out one behavior at a time is most effective in creating positive change.*

6. Make self-care a priority

As mentioned in the introduction - good grades, performance and achievement are important – especially in a highly demanding educational setting. But not by all means. If you are putting your health and well-being at risk in the meantime, then the price you are paying is too high. Also, be aware that good health is the basis for anything in life – without health we cannot enjoy anything else that we are striving to achieve. Self-care should thus become a priority. The simplest habits can [promote well-being](#), such as enough sleep, food, downtime, and exercise.

7. Ask for support when needed

Many of us struggle to reach out for help for a variety of reasons – shame, pride, fear of rejection or judgement, just to name a few. The uglier things get – the more unlikely we are to reach out. But keep in mind – everyone has their own vulnerabilities, and no one is invincible. Consider who in your social network can you trust the most with your problems – e.g. a friend, a teacher, a social worker/counsellor? And remember that reaching out also means setting a good example and that the other person can rely on your support when they are in need.

8. Connect to your strengths, use positive affirmations

Remember a time when you were facing a problem in the past and were able to deal with it efficiently. Connect to this experience and strengthen it internally. Use positive affirmations (e.g. I am good enough, I am competent, I can deal with hardships) and imagery (e.g. connect to a happy, safe place or memory of yours), both have been proven to increase positive emotion. When you think of a positive experience, your brain basically perceives it to be a reality.

9. Reframe the situation

Try to change the perspective you are seeing things from (e.g. from “obstacle” to “challenge”) and replace negative thoughts with positive statements (see previous point).

Further tips on stress management and stress prevention

Though there is no way to completely avoid stress, there are some ways to get a better handle on the things that cause it, how you respond to it, and what it does to you. There are a set of techniques that can actually help you prevent stress from developing or increasing to an unmanageable level. Some have already been introduced in the previous section on stress management, but the focus here is on prevention, that is creating a set of routines/habits before things escalate.

Know your limitations, learn how to say ‘no’

If we are engaging in something new and exciting – whether it is a relationship or a college program – we may tend to go overboard due to our enthusiasm and our drive to make the most of the experience. However, pulling the brakes is a very useful capacity, and can save you from a lot of further distress and trouble. Try practicing this by listening to internal cues and trying to understand when your body and mind start sending you signals that you are reaching your personal limits. The signals are usually there, but we may neglect them when we become enmeshed in a task, project or relationship. Also, we may believe that pushing our limits is a virtue or is expected or welcomed by our

environment (and indeed sometimes our cultural norms do entail this message). However, completely neglecting our own needs and being blind to signs of overwhelm generally do not lead to any good and should be re-considered. The capacity to say 'no' is strongly linked to this issue and may also pose a challenge for many. It can make us feel uncomfortable and we may fear the consequences of this act. However, if we learn to stick up for our boundaries, it can serve us well in the long run.

Task:

Consider a time when you neglected your personal limitations and what it resulted in. Now try to remember an experience where you took notice of your boundaries and advocated for them. Connect to how it made you feel and what you learned from it.

Consider or do some research on some ways to be 'assertive' and say 'no' in various situations (professional, personal etc.)

- **Learn to stand up for yourself**

This relates to sticking up for your boundaries and being assertive. Be aware of toxic (that is emotionally damaging) relationships or situations, do not allow yourself to be bullied, whether it's by fellow students, coworkers, a boss or anyone else.

- **Manage your time**

Plan out your time in a way that you find a balance between your duties and needs. Consider 'time-wasters' (e.g. excessive time spent on electronic devices) and how to cut down on them as much as possible. Make sure to plan downtime as well, when you can switch off and let loose.

- **Create and connect to a good support system**

Having someone to turn to can help in many ways. You can get emotional support, like empathy and compassion; furthermore, "venting" (that is letting out and sharing intensive emotions) can be a relief from stress on its own. You can also attain practical help through a change of perspective or getting advice or actual assistance in solving the

issue. Your support system can include family, friends, and professionals. A support system needs maintenance, and this is something to consider too. Make sure to keep up your relationships even in busy or tough times. Also, you cannot expect for people to automatically know if you are struggling, in many cases you must make others aware and ask for help.

- **Consider how to avoid or set limits to your triggers**

We have already addressed triggers in a previous section and the importance of knowing what stresses you out. Be aware of what makes you anxious, tense or worried and try to learn how to avoid those situations, people, and circumstances.

- **Learn relaxation techniques, practice mindfulness or meditation**

Being able to regulate your emotions and body reactions is a huge asset. If you learn to calm and soothe yourself, you will be much more equipped to cope with potential stress. Take the time to explore the techniques that make most sense to you. Mindfulness can help with attention, emotional regulation, compassion, and calming. For ideas on relaxation, mindfulness and meditation practices, scroll down to the 'Resources' section.

- **Exercise – move your body**

Getting active releases “happiness hormones” that can help you relax, stay calm, feel confident and cope with life’s stressors. Even a small amount of exercise each day can significantly boost your energy levels and self-confidence and decrease your stress level.

- **Be compassionate, kind and generous with yourself**

Allow yourself to recharge and have me-time. Find forgiveness for yourself, when you have made mistakes or have not lived up to your own expectations. Beating yourself up and feeling guilt and shame are very stressful experiences, while practicing self-compassion goes a huge way.

- **Be creative and playful**

Connecting to your “inner child” can be a great way to relieve yourself from stress and tension – you can paint, work with clay or try out a swing on your local playground.

Good to know: Different strategies can be useful depending on the situation and your ability to control the circumstances. Here is a brief explanation on the three categories of approaches and when they are most useful:

1. Action-oriented approaches: mean taking action to change a stressful situation
2. Emotion-oriented approaches: are used to change the way we perceive a stressful situation
3. Acceptance-oriented approaches: can be very useful in dealing with stressful situations you can't control

Stress Don'ts

As mentioned above, there are many ways to deal with stress, and the best approach often also depends on the situation and our resources and opportunities to control the issue. But there are a few methods that should definitely be avoided as they are harmful and are bound to lead to further problems and stress.

- **Substance abuse**

Though turning to drugs and alcohol might seem to relieve stress in the short term, it is a recipe for disaster. The negative problems that quickly result will turn your (and your loved ones') future into a nightmare.

- **Other types of addiction**

Any sort of addiction can quickly spiral into something you can't handle. Avoid anything that might seem to be an addictive trigger for you, like substances, gambling, or any online-related, compulsive behavior (internet addiction).

- **Aggression of any kind**

If you are being abused by anyone, in any way, get help right now before it gets worse. Emotional, verbal, physical, sexual abuse – as well as other types – are highly detrimental to your health.

If you have noticed that you are reacting with aggression to high stress – whether it is directed towards others or yourself, you should definitely take it seriously and seek help. You will find more on the issue of suicide, an extreme form of self-harm in the next chapter ('The connection between stress and other mental disorders').

- **Isolation**

When you are feeling isolated for whatever reason, stress builds up to the breaking point. If you are suffering alone, without a support group or support system to help you, it's time to reach out. Don't hesitate to turn to others in case of need, no one is invincible, and everyone has a vulnerable side to them. Reaching out to your social network sets a good example for others and can strengthen your relationships as well. If you feel your friends are not available or are not the best option, consider alternative options, such as resources offered by your community (college mentor or counsellor, your local community center, your religious congregation, a hotline, etc.).

Task:

Make a list of your social and community network and resources. Try to think of anyone that you can reach out to, and what their availability is (e.g. non-stop, only on working days, in person or online etc.). Keep this list in a safe place (it may be useful to have it on your phone) and try to update it when applicable. Remember to connect to these options in case of need.

Defining burnout

What happens when we continue "burning the candle at both ends" until we reach physical and emotional exhaustion? Just like the candle itself, we risk burning ourselves out.

Burnout is a common phenomenon that is related to stress and excessive work.

What's the difference between stress and burnout?

- Stress is inevitable. Burnout isn't.
- Stress is our response to change and challenge, burnout is the accumulation of excessive stressors over time, which results in unmanageable stress levels.
- Burnout entails a *decline in performance*. It's possible to experience stress without burning out. As discussed previously, some stress can actually improve cognitive performance. But if your stress is taking a toll on your academic life, social life, or overall wellbeing, you might be experiencing burnout.
- Stress can be short-termed and its levels fluctuate, burnout usually takes place over a longer period of time.

Burnout "history"

American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger first termed the word "burnout" in the 1970s, referring to the effect of extreme stress and high ideals placed on "helping" professionals, such as doctors and nurses.

Today it is used more broadly to refer to the consequences of "excessive stress" placed on any individual, no matter their occupation. When we get to the point of no longer **being able to cope**, we are "burned out," like the candle.

Another recent development is the recognition of student burnout, and today there is growing literature on its nature and ways to prevent and tackle it.

Factors and signs of burnout

The stress that contributes to burnout can come mainly from your job/study related tasks, but stress from your overall lifestyle can add to this stress. Personality traits and thought patterns, such as perfectionism and pessimism, can contribute as well.

Burnout Warning Signs

Mental

- Making careless mistakes that you ordinarily wouldn't make.
- Difficulty concentrating and feeling engaged
- Lashing out at others due to pressure and frustration.
- Lacking opinions or ideas to classroom discussions or group projects.
- Losing confidence, motivation, and otherwise feeling incapable to keep deadlines.
- Feeling negative about tasks

Physical

- Constantly feeling exhausted despite getting sleep or not sleeping well at all.
- Habitually stress eating, overthinking, or anything else you know is a bad habit for you.
- Not noticing pain and tension in your body from working or thinking about work constantly.
- Experiencing frequent headaches or dizzy spells.
- Finding yourself getting sick more often with head colds, stomach flu, etc.

Emotional

- Alienation from work/study-related activities: feeling numb / emotionally distant
- Feeling disengaged from friends and fellow students
- Being overly- sensitive, overreacting to seemingly minor issues with others like comments or criticism

- Feeling bored or uninterested in matters you used to enjoy

In summary if you feel exhausted, have lost interest in your studies, and are beginning to feel less capable at performing and less productive, you are most probably showing signs of burnout.

Dealing with burnout

Recognize

The first and most important step is recognition. Take the warning signs seriously and address the problem. This is where stress management can offer tools, and help people find a way out of the unpleasant experience of burnout.

Reverse and recover

Burnout is reversible if you acknowledge the state and tackle the source of the problem. All of the above mentioned stress management strategies (e.g. , prioritize, set limits/boundaries, reconsider time management and organization, recharge – find time for yourself, tend to your body, ask for support, set realistic goals, reframe your relationship to your tasks) are useful approaches to reversing burnout. Depending on the degree of the problem, you may need to implement more strategies and time – but it is worth the time and effort. Neglecting burnout – just as with long lasting stress - can lead to chronic health problems.

In the “recovery” phase, it may also be useful to think about the "why" of burnout, meaning that you try to identify why you've experienced burnout. In some situations, this will be obvious, but other times, it can take more time and introspection to uncover this.

Part 2.

The connection between stress and other mental disorders

Chronic stress and the inability to manage or downregulate stress can lead to mental problems. It is good to know how to differentiate between stress and various mental disorders, and to be able to recognize the early signs of these disorders.

Depression

People with depression have similar symptoms to stress, except the symptoms are not temporary—they can last for weeks at a time. Because of the sustained symptoms, the effect on the body, mood, and behavior is often more serious than with temporary stress. Depression can have severe effects on your eating habits, your relationships, your ability to work and study, and how you think and feel. Millions of adults including many college students, suffer from clinical depression. It's important to understand that clinical depression is a real, not an “imaginary” illness. It's not a passing mood or a sign of personal weakness. It demands treatment—and 80 percent of those treated begin to feel better in just a few weeks.

The following symptoms are signs of major depression:

- Sadness, anxiety, or “empty” feelings
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down”
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia, oversleeping, or waking much earlier than usual)
- Appetite and weight changes (either loss or gain)
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, and worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or remembering
- Irritability or excessive crying
- Chronic aches and pains not explained by another physical condition.

It's normal to have some signs of depression some of the time. But if someone has five or more symptoms for two weeks or longer, or suffers noticeable changes in normal functioning, that person should go to a mental health professional for evaluation. Depressed people often may not be thinking clearly and may therefore not seek help on their own. They frequently require encouragement from others—they “need help to get help.” Mental health professionals say depression among college students is a serious problem. If you think you might be depressed, you should talk with a qualified health-care or mental-health professional. Your health-care provider or a university counsellor can help steer you to treatment resources. Several effective treatments for depression are available, and—depending on the severity of the symptoms—can provide relief even in a few weeks.

Suicide

As noted above, severe depression often manifests itself in thoughts about death or suicide, or in suicide attempts. Many people are understandably uncomfortable talking about suicide, but doing so can save lives. One common myth about suicide is that it comes “out of the blue.” In most cases, this is false. On the contrary, usually, the person exhibits several warning signs. You should always take suicidal thoughts, impulses, or behavior seriously.

If you are thinking or talking about hurting or killing yourself, or know someone who is, seek help immediately. We recommend you turn to your student health center; a family physician; a professor, coach, or adviser; a member of your religious community, a local suicide or emergency hotline; or a hospital emergency room.

Some of the warning signs of suicide include:

- Talking about suicide
- Statements about hopelessness, helplessness, or worthlessness
- Preoccupation with death

- Becoming suddenly happier or calmer
- Losing interest in things one cares about
- Setting one's affairs in order for no apparent reason—such as giving away prized possessions or making final arrangements regarding finances and property.

Anxiety

The difference between stress and anxiety is that stress is a response to a threat in a situation. Anxiety is a reaction to the stress, and is often a more constant sensation that manifests in emotional and physical symptoms. Stressful life experiences may increase your risk for an anxiety disorder, too. Symptoms may begin immediately or years later and often require intervention from a professional in order to solve.

There are several types of anxiety disorders. They include:

- Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Social anxiety disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Phobias
- and Panic Disorder.

To read more on anxiety disorder and health visit: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/pain-anxiety-and-depression>

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

PTSD can develop after a person has been exposed to a terrifying event or has been through a series of experiences in which intense physical or emotional harm occurred or was threatened.

Stress becomes traumatic when it overwhelms the system that is usually effective at keeping us safe. When the system becomes overwhelmed, the emotional brain remains on-alert and continues to send the body instructions to fight, flee, or freeze, even after the threat has passed. Trauma may result from a single distressing experience or recurring or ongoing events. Students exposed to trauma may remain in survival mode much of the time, which compromises their ability to learn.

Time frame:

PTSD is diagnosed after a person experiences symptoms for at least one month following a traumatic event. However, symptoms may not appear until several months or even years later.

Symptoms:

- **Reexperiencing** — constantly thinking about the event, replaying it over in their minds, nightmares.
- **Avoidance** — consciously trying to avoid engagement, trying not to think about the event.
- **Negative Cognitions and Mood** — blaming others or self, diminished interest in pleasurable activities, inability to remember key aspects of the event.
- **Arousal** — being on edge, being on the lookout, constantly being worried.

Important note: PTSD does not indicate weakness – the opposite, they are in fact **normal reactions to an abnormal situation**. Every person has their own individual limit of what they can cope with, and most people who have been exposed to a traumatic event that is severe enough will develop symptoms.

If you believe you may be suffering from the aftermath of trauma, it is vital that you reach out for help. There are a range of psychological therapies for PTSD that are effective in treating symptoms and improving overall quality of life.

Further materials and resources:

- **Stress**
 - [16 Best Stress Management Books for 2020](#)
 - [Student Stress & Anxiety Guide | LearnPsychology.org](#)
- **Burnout**
 - [\(PDF\) Students School Burnout Inventory: Development, Validation, and Reliability of Scale](#)
 - [Avoiding Burnout - Stress Management Training From MindTools.com](#)(here you will find many more useful tools for stress management, burnout and other study related issues - many of them are free and available for download)
- **Mindfulness, meditation and relaxation** (click on the underlined titles for the link to the resources)

[Mindfulness Exercises](#)

Mindfulness has been defined as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally". Research has linked mindfulness with numerous benefits to mental well-being, including reduced symptoms in anxiety and depression and improved concentration. Like any skill, becoming mindful takes practice. Use this worksheet to learn some methods to increase mindfulness.

[Mindfulness Meditation](#)

During mindfulness meditation, you focus on your breathing as a tool to ground yourself in the present moment. It's normal that your mind will wander. You'll simply bring yourself back into the moment by refocusing on your breathing, again and again.

[Grounding Exercises](#)

After a trauma, it's normal to experience flashbacks, anxiety, and other uncomfortable symptoms. Grounding techniques help control these symptoms by turning attention away from thoughts, memories, or worries, and refocusing on the present moment.

[*Relaxation Techniques \(Guide\)*](#)

Relaxation skills are useful tools for alleviating symptoms of stress, anxiety, anger and trauma. Here you can access a number of helpful relaxation audio clips, worksheets, scripts, and general information on stress management.

[*Mindfulness Walk \(Interactive\)*](#)

Put on your headphones and head outside to practice mindfulness while walking. The Mindfulness Walk guided audio activity instructs you to focus on different parts of your experience, from each of your senses to the process of breathing, while allowing ample time to practice.

[*Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script \(Worksheet\)*](#)

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is a powerful technique with long-term benefits for stress and anxiety. When practiced regularly, the positive effects of PMR can become generalized. This means that the reduced levels of stress and anxiety will last well beyond the practice period.

[*Deep Breathing*](#)

Deep breathing is a popular relaxation technique that helps to control the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and anger. The skill is easy to learn and provides near immediate relief from uncomfortable symptoms. As the name suggests, deep breathing works by taking slow, deep breaths, to trigger the body's relaxation response.

- **Meditation apps:**

- Headspace:

<https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app?fbclid=IwAR02hifnzmOMzR3ifXyGaO1MBMRtMGa3T3cb3a7xjzP7RaGNsIM4n9cO5Oc>

- Calm:

https://www.calm.com/?fbclid=IwAR09lsu9LjRda5l8t1lrtaqabAGJzplI_qXyrjF_2veDIYIAKO7wKbBbODs

- Insighttimer:

https://insighttimer.com/?fbclid=IwAR3SEIbDFIW7vr5JRIYm3pRQ2nKQgA9TImSnkUF_J4D29zFlagiMgkKjVj0

Closing remarks

If you have read through this material, you have already done something considerable for your well-being. Keep up the good work and take a little more time to consider your main take-aways and practical intentions for your future. It can be useful to put this into writing too, and here is some space left exactly for this purpose.

My main take-aways:

My main intentions regarding self-care and stress management:

Final task: Develop an action plan to improve your stress management skills. Consider what you are already doing for your stress management/prevention ('strengths') and what you are still in need of ('weaknesses'). Try to incorporate at least three techniques described in this infopack in your new action plan.

My strengths are:	What I am still missing / 'weaknesses':
My new action plan includes	



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