

Top 25 WELLNESS TIPS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

STRESS

#1

Keep track of your emotional, physical, mental, and behavioral symptoms of stress, and then identify the stressors (real or imagined situations that are perceived to be a threat or that which causes stress) that are causing these symptoms. Ask yourself if you can avoid, alter, accept, or adapt these identified stressors:

Avoid: You should think about how you can avoid adversarial relationships, toxic load from a variety of chemicals, and any potentially stressful environments and situations. Learn to say “no” to any optional opportunities (Mayo Clinic, 2020).

Alter: If you can’t avoid someone or something that causes you stress, you should communicate your feelings openly, set boundaries, and develop a plan for how to better manage the stressor (Mayo Clinic, 2020). Talk to your roommate(s) or family about how to rearrange your living space to be more friendly for everyone.

Accept: Practice acceptance of what you are not able to control or change, and put energy into what you can change. Avoid ruminating on the past and worrying about the “what ifs” of the future. Accepting the present moment for what it is and using any mistakes or setbacks as wisdom for how to move forward will make you more resilient (Mayo Clinic, 2020).

Adapt: Set realistic expectations, adjust your standards for success, and try viewing your stressor from a new perspective (Mayo Clinic, 2020).



#2

Try experimenting with using healthy coping skills that work for you, such as: journaling, time management, deep breathing, positive self-talk, creative arts (i.e. art, dance, music). Also try replacing problematic or unhealthy coping mechanisms (i.e. alcohol/drug use, binge watching Netflix, complaining, excessive social media/phone use) with healthy coping skills.

#3

Pay attention to your eating. It can be easy to skip meals, eat beyond fullness, and reach for less nutritious foods when you're stressed out about an impending exam, project, or other responsibilities. Eating for emotional reasons may soften the stress momentarily, but it will still be present. Instead, find alternatives for stress reduction, whether that involves nurturing yourself, distracting yourself from your feelings momentarily, or directly tackling the stress through journaling, talking to someone, or counseling.



#4

Incorporate ~30 minutes of gentle movement that you enjoy into your day, such as walking, biking, swimming, jogging, hiking, or practicing yoga. This will help you reduce physical stressors in the body, increase mental clarity, improve learning, and sleep better at night. Focus on how it makes you feel!

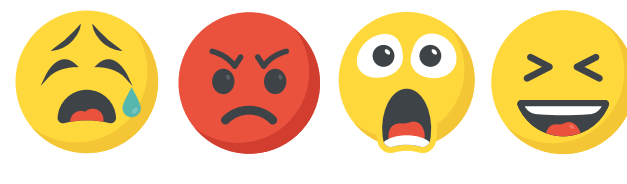


#5

Start to practice being mindful of the world around you. Learning to pay attention to your body's physical sensations and enjoy the world in this present moment is a key component to managing stress. Try noticing colors, shapes, smells, sounds, and different lights. Simply looking at natural elements, such as plants and sunshine or images of nature on a computer screen, are scientifically proven to help reduce stress, in addition to noticing nature through your other senses.



ANXIETY/DEPRESSION



#6

Identify your emotional distress. Are you feeling sad, mad, glad, or scared? Perhaps you are having a hard time figuring out how you feel, and you are confused. Acknowledge and accept all of your emotions and express emotions appropriately.

#7

Talk to someone. Talk to someone that you trust about whatever is happening. Talk to a family member, a friend, a counselor, anyone. Call a National Helpline or UNI's 24-hr crisis text line. There is no shame in asking for help.



#8

Unplug! Limit screen time, if you can. The average college student spends 10 hours per day on a smartphone (Wood, 2018). If you can't reduce screen time, find creative ways to take a break from the screen, even if it means that you take a break once an hour just for a few moments. Be aware of your social media use. If possible, stick to about 30 minutes of social media per day. This helps reduce FOMO (the Fear of Missing Out), comparison to others, and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Additionally, use of more social media platforms rather than less (7-11 platforms v. 0-2 platforms) increases the odds of experiencing higher levels of anxiety and depression (Primack, et al. 2016).

#9

Emotional and physical wellness are greatly intertwined. Underlying mental illnesses can contribute to emotional eating, dieting, bingeing, and eating disorders (Ekern, 2018). Taking care of your physical wellness can also help you cope with mental health diagnoses as well as experiences of anxiousness, sadness, or anger. Try eating more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fish to boost your mood (Tello, 2018). Try taking a 10-15 minute walk two times during your day. Work yourself up to 30 minutes of gentle movement 3-5 days/wk to significantly lift your spirits (Mayo Clinic, 2017).



#10

Become aware of your self-talk and challenge your irrational thoughts. Ask yourself: “Is my thinking based on a fact?” Is it helping me reach my goals? Is it making me feel the way I want to feel?” Your thoughts greatly contribute to the stress you experience – irrational thoughts lead to greater worry and stress, and rational thoughts promote mental clarity and decrease stress.

SLEEP

#11

Stick to a consistent sleep schedule: Go to bed and get up at approximately the same time every day, even on weekends and days off. Avoid napping during the day or limit your naps to 30 minutes or less.

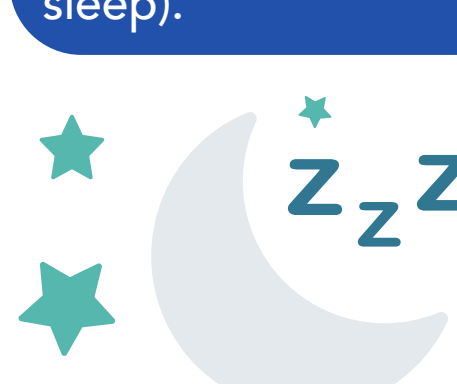
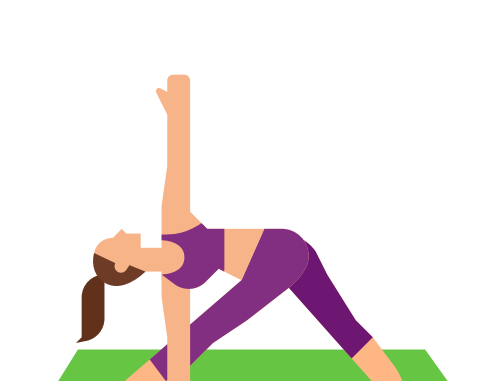


#12

Avoid caffeinated beverages, nicotine, and alcohol at least 6 hours before bed so you can get the best quality rest. Make sure you know which foods/drinks contain caffeine!

#13

Create a regular nighttime routine to remind your body that it's time to sleep: practice mindfulness exercises (i.e. breathing exercises, yoga, light stretching, body scan, gratitude) or take a warm shower/bath. Also, put your phone and other technology away at least 30 min. before bed (the blue light from screens blocks the production of your natural sleep hormone and prevents you from getting quality sleep).



#14

Create a sleep-friendly bedroom environment: keep your bedroom at a cooler temperature (between 60-67 degrees); choose comfortable bedding; reduce noise with earplugs or create white noise (constant ambient sound) with a fan or sound conditioner; block out early morning light with an eye mask or room-darkening curtains; and surround yourself with soothing scents.

#15

ONLY utilize your bed for sleeping: avoid studying, working, watching TV, and other tasks in bed so that your body associates your bed with sleep.



WORK

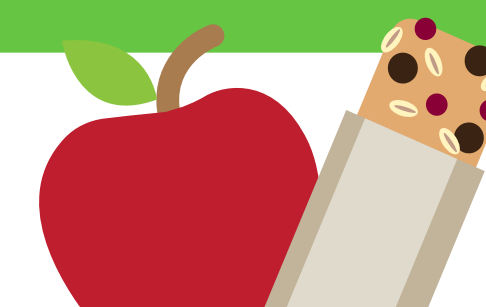


#16

Take a look at how you use all of your time. Track a week of your life in 30-minute increments to see how you are really spending all of your time. Then, figure out what needs to change in order to fit in the classes, studying, working, social time, sleep, and down time that you need each semester. Give yourself permission to say no. It is easy to get run down by trying to do everything. Focus on the priorities that you truly love in order to balance your need for rest and work.

#17

Make a plan for when and what to eat. Have snacks readily available if you are on campus a lot of the day and have a tight schedule. Your body needs to refuel about every 4-6 hours or less. Make sure to eat when you are hungry!



#18

Seek continued growth by engaging in learning opportunities, such as coursework, reading, volunteering, certifications, or gaining new skills. Update your resume or list of experiences every semester. Reflect on the value of your experiences and identify what has been most satisfying.

COLD/FLU/SORE THROAT

#19

The single best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year; get your flu vaccine early in the fall before flu season begins (CDC, 2019).



#20

Practice everyday healthy habits to prevent illness: wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, mouth) with unwashed hands, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when coughing/sneezing, and avoid close contact with sick people (CDC, 2019).

#21

Keep your environment clean: regularly clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces in household common areas, especially when someone is sick, such as: doorknobs, light switches, phones, desks, sinks, toilets, remotes, laptops (CDC, 2019)

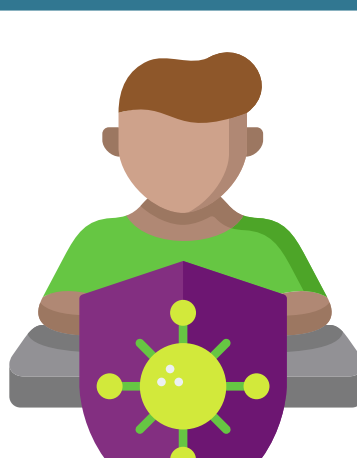


#22

Stay home, stay hydrated, and rest if you are sick (avoid going to class, work, student organization meetings, etc.), and keep your distance from others; this will help prevent spreading your illness to other students. It's recommended that you stay at home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone (your fever should be gone without the use of medicine) except to obtain medical care or other necessities (CDC, 2019).

#23

Take the recommended antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them. When treatment is started within two days of becoming sick with flu symptoms, antiviral drugs can lessen fever and flu symptoms, and shorten the time you are sick by about one day (CDC, 2019).



#24

Build a resilient immune system by proactively taking care of yourself: aim to get 7-9 hours of sleep each night to promote healthy immune function and help fight off infections; incorporate a variety of fruits & vegetables in your diet; pursue regular joyful movement throughout the day & avoid sitting for long periods of time; effectively manage your stress; decrease toxic chemicals that go into your body such as reducing consumption of alcohol and other drugs; and drink plenty of fluids (Sood, 2020).

#25

In college, it's difficult to get to the store, rest, and do college life when you're down with an illness! Prepare a “sick kit” to have on hand if and when illness strikes; you'll thank yourself later! Include items to include in your kit: soup, crackers, over the counter medicine, tea, sports drinks, sprite, thermometer, disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, wash clothes, kleenex, nasal spray, cough drops, insurance card, number of doctor or nearest clinic, movie or book.



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