

## COPING WITH END-OF-THE-SEMESTER STRESS

The end of the semester is quickly approaching and this is usually a time of increased stress for many students. With final exams looming as well as completing projects, lab reports, papers and other assignments, it's inevitable that stress levels increase. Don't despair, anxiety and stress are very common emotions among students at this time of the semester and there are ways to help you cope.

Stress is a part of life and reflects our body's response to challenging or threatening situations as well as excitement. The body's response to stress and perceived danger aids us in responding quickly and successfully to a situation and then we are able to move on to a balanced, more neutral response pattern. The stress response can help us to feel alert and focused or can allow us to react quickly and get away from a threatening situation. However, there are times when the stress response is too strong, or it occurs too often or it lingers, and this can interfere with functioning optimally. Stress can then negatively impact the ability to focus, concentrate on studying or completing assignments or the ability to remain calm enough to function on exams and "show what you know". At these times, you may feel anxious or overwhelmed and even avoid doing work because of these feelings.

It's important to remember that there are things you can do to cope and lower your stress levels, even during "crunch time" at the end of the semester. Below are some tips that may help you to cope with end of the semester stress.

- **Organization and Time Management:** There are often many things we need to get done at the end of the semester. It's very important to make a list of what needs to get done, prioritize those items and then schedule time to get the work done.
- **Take time for you:** Although you may have a lot to do, be sure to factor in time for breaks, relaxation and fun in your schedule. It often becomes unproductive to spend every waking hour focusing on schoolwork. You can also try to engage in some activities that will relax your mind and body such as yoga, meditation or some deep breathing exercises. Taking time out for you will help you to stay positive and ease some of the stress.
- **Get enough sleep:** Feelings of stress and anxiety can be heightened when you are running on insufficient sleep. Try to maintain a normal sleep schedule and get the full amount of sleep your body needs (usually 7-8 hours). Consistent sleep is critical for healthy and optimal functioning physically, emotionally and cognitively. Getting good sleep will help you to think clearly, concentrate and focus better and feel more balanced and in control of your emotions.
- **Pay attention to and work on your thoughts and attitude:** We all have thoughts that go through our heads that are automatic and we often are not even aware of these thoughts. The thoughts we have are critical to feelings, mood and behavior that we experience. At times, particularly when feeling anxious, overwhelmed or down, the thoughts that we have can be unhelpful and enhance stress and become debilitating. Examples of such thoughts that can be unhelpful are: thoughts that focus on comparing ourselves to others, thoughts that focus on putting ourselves down, thoughts of assuming the worst is going to happen, all-or-nothing thinking, and thinking or saying "I should" or "I just". These types of thoughts can all enhance stress feelings and result in negative mood and attitude and difficulty getting things done. Try to counter these unhelpful thoughts with balanced and more realistic thoughts such as "It doesn't help to compare

myself to others, let me just focus on doing as much as I can to understand this information rather comparing myself". Try to keep your thinking in perspective and avoid blowing things out of proportion.

- **Exercise:** Exercise and physical activity can provide great stress relief as well as help with long-term stress management. Activities such as: taking a walk or jog, playing a sport, or going to the gym can help to increase energy, put things in perspective, improve sleep, enhance mental productivity and reduce feelings of stress.
- **Eat Healthy:** Although you may feel that you are too busy to pay attention to eating properly or you may not feel like eating or “forget: to eat during stressful times, good nutrition is important at this time. Be sure to eat a variety of foods including fresh fruit and vegetables and drink plenty of water. Try to stay away from excess caffeine, energy drinks and sugar. Eating healthy can help to increase your mental, emotional and physical stamina.
- **Stay away from using alcohol, marijuana and other drugs:** Although some may turn to alcohol and other drugs to relieve stress, this is not wise and can lead to many problems and add stress to our lives. Alcohol and other drugs leads to poor decision-making, impairs thinking and concentration, can result in injury or other problems and can negatively impact the ability to focus on work that needs to be done.
- **Stay Connected:** At times the crunch of end-of-the-semester stress can lead to isolating yourself and staying away from the support of friends and family. Make time to connect with people and accept the help and support of those who care about you. This can help ease the stress.
- **Avoid unnecessary distractions:** Distractions such as Facebook, computer gaming, constantly texting or checking e-mails can interfere with focusing on your studies and significantly impact your ability to stay on task with completing your work. Although you want to stay connected, try to limit the time you spend on social media and other possible distractions.
- **Ask for help:** Don't be afraid to ask for help. This help can be in the form of studying with peers, going to the professor, advisors, TAs or tutors or asking for help from the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services(C-CAPS). Although some people feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness, seeking help indicates inner strength, insight and good self-care and judgment.

These general tips can be very helpful in managing end-of-the-semester stress, but if you find that you are experiencing feelings such as a great deal of anxiety, worry, fear of sadness that is overwhelming and does not seem to subside, the services of the **Center for Counseling and Psychological Services(C-CAPS)** are here to help.