

Effective Stress Management Techniques

Stress management strategies are most effective when they 'match' the symptoms that an individual is feeling and when multiple strategies are used. These include:

- Talking with friends, parents, teachers, Priest, coaches, etc.
- Counselling with Ms. Beck (mbeck@vc.bc.ca) or an outside counsellor or psychologist.
- Aerobic exercise.
- Learning better time management.
- Healthy distractions.
- Learning more effective study skills.
- More sleep (even modest sleep deprivation reduces our emotional resources, our ability to cope, and our mood).
- Learning new thinking styles (that are coping oriented).
- Deep breathing.
- Learning more effective problem solving.
- Relaxation training.
- Dealing with procrastination.
- Yoga and other meditation techniques.
- Prayer.
- Fueling your body with proper nutrition.

More Information & Resources

Contact Ms. Beck by dropping in or by email: mbeck@mail.vc.bc.ca for help with your stress management or for detailed information about strategies or resources.

Many self-help pamphlets covering a variety of topics are available in the Student Services Centre.

A variety of stress/anxiety management tools are available on the Anxiety BC website at: www.anxietybc.ca and in the free Mindshift app available for download on the site.

Stress Management



VANCOUVER COLLEGE

Stress Management

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What is Stress?

Stress is a term that is typically overused to describe when we are feeling a variety of emotions. It is important that we learn to label our feelings appropriately so we and those around us understand and can be supportive.

Stress is a constellation of thoughts, feelings, physical effects, and behaviours which are triggered in response to our perception that there is a threat to either our physical or emotional well-being.

Fight or Flight

Once our brain detects a threat a response is triggered through our nervous system. This is known as the 'fight or flight mechanism' and can be thought of as a 'red alert'.

A host of changes rapidly occur in our body as a result of this activation. These changes are biologically programmed to prepare us to fight or to run in the face of danger.

Each individual experiences stress, and the fight or flight reaction, differently but common symptoms and their biological functions include:

- Fast and shallow breathing (to bring more oxygen into the body).
- Stomach/gastrointestinal problems (blood is shunted away from the digestive system to provide more blood and oxygen to the large muscles).
- Sweating (our skin is made slippery to avoid capture).
- Fast heartbeat (to provide more blood and oxygen to the large muscles and the brain).
- Strong emotions (to induce action).
- Feeling 'on edge' (to make us hypervigilant to/ aware of dangers).

Ineffective Stress Management Strategies

We all do our best to cope with stress using strategies we have watched others use, have been taught, or have developed ourselves. Some of these are not effective, provide only short term relief, or can create additional difficulties. These include:

- Pushing things down/keeping our stress to ourselves.
- Becoming irritable and/or angry, possibly taking out our stress on others.
- Withdrawing.
- Avoiding the stressful situation.
- Distracting ourselves excessively.
- Using substances, such as tobacco, alcohol, and or drugs to 'numb out' the feelings.
- Pushing through stressful times on an 'adrenaline wave', then 'crashing'.

When is Stress Something Else?

- Feelings persist despite reasonable attempts to relax and/or the situation changing.
- Other strong emotions, e.g. sadness, are present.
- Reactions are out of magnitude with the event.
- Relationships are negatively affected.

- Worry is persistent and excessive.
- Ability to perform, e.g. in school, is affected.

How Stress Affects Performance & Health

Without any stress we would likely get very little accomplished! We need some stress in order to feel motivated and to be productive. Feeling nervous before a test or performance is normal and helps us to work hard.

We all have an individual limit; however, to how much stress is helpful versus harmful. If we approach this limit or surpass it, and thus our resources to cope, our stress will begin to negatively impact our performance and productivity.

When we are stressed our immune system is adversely affected and thus our ability to fight infections is reduced. This is one of the reasons that so many students seem to be fighting a cold or flu during exam time.

Chronic stress that goes unchecked can cause much more serious health difficulties and has been linked to a host of illnesses including cardiovascular disease, immunological diseases, and cancer.