



# Surviving Finals

## STRESS IS...

Stress is ... being a University student at the end of the term! Attending classes, completing assignments and preparing for finals make the end of a University term a very stressful time for most students.

Stress is ... not simply the result of undesirable or challenging events (like exams!). The way we interpret situations, and perceive our ability to cope with them, will contribute to how stressed we feel. The way we think and behave can maintain, increase or reduce stress.

**S**tress is necessary for normal human functioning. The nervous system requires a certain amount of stimulation to function properly. However, stress that is too intense or prolonged can be damaging.

Stress is better managed by:

- being aware of stress symptoms
- learning to identify sources of stress
- developing effective strategies to cope with stress

## WHAT ARE SOME SOURCES OF STRESS?

Certain experiences, whether positive or negative, can make exam time more stressful for many people. Some examples:

### Major Life Events

- getting married
- pregnancy
- death of a loved one
- new job
- ending a relationship
- moving

### Long-Term Worries

- chronic illness
- financial concerns
- academic difficulties
- conflict in a relationship
- conflict with family members
- children with school problems

### Daily Hassles

- traffic jam
- parking ticket
- no clean socks
- missing the bus
- computer break down
- line up at ATM

## WHAT STRATEGIES CAN I USE TO COPE WITH THE STRESS OF FINALS?

The following strategies can be helpful in reducing exam stress:

- **Gather Information.** Determine your exam schedule, how much each exam will contribute to your final course grade, what type of questions will be on each exam (e.g., essay, multiple choice), what class material will most likely be on the exam (e.g., emphasized by the professor) and if old exams are available in the exam library.
- **Make a Plan.** Use a calendar to record the dates of your finals. Next, indicate how much time and when you will study for each exam. Follow your progress and keep your plan flexible to allow for new decisions about how much study time you require. Adequate preparation is a key strategy in reducing exam stress.

## WHAT ARE SOME SYMPTOMS OF STRESS?

Some common symptoms of stress include:

### PHYSICAL

- fatigue
- back pain
- chest pain
- headaches
- upset stomach
- weight loss or gain
- frequent colds or flu

### BEHAVIOURAL

- disturbed sleep
- frequent crying
- hurried behavior
- social withdrawal
- procrastination
- increased alcohol use
- increased caffeine use

### EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

- anger
- worry
- anxiety
- sadness
- irritability
- confusion
- frustration

Do not ignore the signs of stress. Frequent or long-term problems with stress can have serious effects on your emotional and physical health.

## WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

Student Counselling Services (966-4920)  
Student Health Services (966-5768)

- **Ask for Help.** If you are experiencing difficulty in understanding class material, don't wait to contact your professor, classmates or a tutor. Talk to your professors immediately if you have outstanding assignments at exam time – you may be able to negotiate an extension.
- **Take Breaks.** No one can be productive for hours on end. Your studying will be more effective if you intersperse a break each hour. Also, take time for fun (e.g., coffee with friends).
- **Sleep.** Your exam performance will improve with adequate rest. Try to avoid all-nighters. Getting sleep before an exam usually has a bigger payoff than the extra hours of cramming.
- **Eat.** Your body and brain will function better when you feed it. Try to eat 3 meals/day, including some protein and carbohydrates each time you eat (e.g., have some milk with your muffin).
- **Exercise.** Physical activity will help burn off tension and improve your mood and concentration.
- **Breathe.** During times of stress, we tend to breathe in a shallow and rapid manner; this increases feelings of tension. Breathe from your abdomen (your stomach, not chest, should rise and fall) and inhale and exhale slowly (take about 4 seconds for each).
- **Focus on the Present.** Dwelling on negative exam experiences from the past undermines confidence.
- **Replace Negative Thinking** with encouraging self-statements ("I'll do my best to prepare.").
- **See Your Success.** Practice visualizing yourself writing the exam, staying calm and doing well.
- **Stay Connected** to the people in your life that support your efforts at University.
- **Say "No"** to demands that contribute to increased stress and leave you without adequate study time.
- **Give Yourself Time.** Having to rush to get to your exam will increase your level of stress. Take what you need (e.g., pencil, calculator) and avoid last minute discussions of the exam material with other students.

Remember that it is impossible to have a completely stress-free life as a student. Focus on using the stress management strategies that work best for you. If stress significantly interferes with your life, you use alcohol or drugs to cope, or you have thoughts of harming yourself, seek professional assistance.