

Tips for managing stress

University life can be very stressful. At the end of the semester, the pressure of multiple exams and papers can cause stress levels to skyrocket, and if you end up having to work extra shifts at your job on top of that, you may easily find yourself overwhelmed.

Stress affects everyone differently. People can experience a range of stress levels, depending on their own temperaments and the resources available to them.

Here are a few tips for managing stress. Check to see which of the strategies below can best help you:

Recognize Stress

- In order to deal with stress effectively, it is important to recognize the following: In which situations do I feel stressed? What is the cause? What factors can I control and/or remove? Regular self-observation can help you figure out how to combat stress. You may find it helpful to keep a “stress diary” for your observations.

Time Management

- It's a good idea to prioritize your tasks and carefully plan them into your calendar, in order to keep stressful situations from arising. It's your turn to clean the apartment on the same week you have two exams? Talk to your housemates. Maybe someone will switch weeks with you.
- You have to give an important presentation tomorrow, and your boss asks you to take a last-minute extra shift at the bar? Practice saying “no” and holding to your calendar.
- Look over your daily schedule: Do you have enough time for yourself between studying and working? Plan regular breaks between important tasks. Try not to work longer than 90 minutes at a time without standing up, breathing deeply, and stretching your legs or doing something else. If you find yourself at your wits' end, take a short break.
- You can find more time management tips under the Downloads section of our homepage at www.pbs.uni-mainz.de.

Rewards and Positive Activities

- You are likely to be more stress-resistant if you recognize your achievements and reward yourself regularly. Ask yourself, therefore, if you remember to congratulate yourself for completed tasks and significant progress in your work. Examples of rewards could be eating your favorite food or getting together with friends. You should also be careful to plan enough fun activities into your week. For example, you could play sports regularly or have monthly film evenings with friends.

Mental and Physical Balance

- If you're feeling stressed, check to see that your basic needs are being met. Getting enough sleep, eating regularly and well, drinking plenty of water, and moving around throughout the day help make your body stronger and reduce the effects of stress.
- If your stress keeps increasing, sometimes you just need to let off some steam. Physical activity boosts your circulation and moves more blood through the brain. It also releases pleasure hormones called endorphins, which reduce stress levels.

Constructive Outlook

- Do you find yourself thinking or saying things like “I can’t do it” or “Something is going to go wrong”? Take a moment to reflect: Are these things really true? Do these thoughts help you? Try to develop more constructive thoughts. Repeat these new sentences to yourself in order to internalize them. A realistic opinion of your own abilities makes many challenges manageable.

Negative Thoughts:	Constructive Thoughts:
“I’m going to fail the test.”	“I will try to do my best.”
“I have too much to do.”	“I will do one thing at a time and manage my time well. Maybe I can delegate a task to someone else.”
“Something will go wrong.”	“Not everything works perfectly the first time, but I won’t let myself get discouraged.”

Redirect Attention

- If you continually have negative, stress-increasing thoughts, it can be helpful to consciously redirect your attention to other things. Look out the window or review vacation photos. You can also create a calming scene in your mind. Picture a pleasant place, like a white beach with palm trees. Focus on your senses: what can you see, hear, taste, and smell? Do you have trouble stopping negative thoughts? Picture a large STOP sign before you begin your mental journey.

Relaxation Techniques

- Relaxation techniques require regular practice before you can effectively use them in stressful situations. We recommend following along with audio guides.
- In many situations, such as before an exam, you can experience quick stress relief through relaxed breathing. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, and then slowly out through your mouth, making sure to breathe out all the way. Stop and count to five. Repeat this breathing process several times until you feel more relaxed.
- Longer relaxation techniques include Jacobson’s Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) and Schultz’ Autogenic Training (AT). PMR focuses on tensing and relaxing various muscle groups one after another, reducing overall muscle tension. AT is an autosuggestive technique. Practitioners envision warmth and weight being placed on different areas of their own bodies (arms, legs, torso) to promote relaxation.

Suggestions for Further Reading and Listening

- Bergner, T. M. H. (2010). Burnout-Prävention. Sich selbst helfen – das 12 Stufen Programm. Schattauer-Verlag.
- Buchenau, P. (2010). Der Anti-Stress-Trainer. 10 humorvolle Soforttipps für mehr Gelassenheit. Gabler-Verlag.
- Hölker, R. M. (2012). Wege in die Entspannung + Gesunder Schlaf. Audio-CD. Kölner Institut für Stressverminderung.
- Ohm, D. (2011). Stressfrei durch Progressive Relaxation (Buch und CD). Trias-Verlag.
- Wiesemann, C. (2009). Die 10-Minuten-Entspannung. Sieben wirksame Übungen für jeden Tag. ARPS-Verlag.