

Stress

Stress is your body's natural response to life events. When we are in a stressful situation (real or perceived) our bodies go into the stress response. We do what we can to survive the situation. Positive and negative events create a similar response in the body. When stress is too high for too long, it is known as bad stress and can cause negative side effects. Smaller doses of stress that help us face our fears and provide drive and strength are known as good stress. Recent research suggests that good stress does not involve the physical response that contributes to heart disease risk.

In order to prepare for stress, our bodies go through some changes such as an increase in heart rate, breathing rate, and change in blood flow. Our digestive and immune systems slow down during this time as well. As far as how we behave in response to stress, we rely on our past experiences and reflexes. We may automatically run away from what is causing the stress or we may shut down. Running away can look like leaving a party where you feel uncomfortable or taking a beach break instead of studying for a hard exam. Shutting down can look like fainting, not moving, or mentally checking out. These responses can help us to survive in the moment but we can also learn new responses in order to deal with stress.

Signs of bad stress:

- Behavioral: Eating more or less, sleeping too much or too little, separating yourself from others, procrastinating, engaging in nervous habits (e.g., nail biting, pacing), and using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs
- Physical: Aches and pains, diarrhea or constipation, nausea, dizziness, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, loss of sex drive, and frequent colds.
- Emotional: Irritability or short temper, agitation, inability to relax, feeling overwhelmed or a sense of loneliness and isolation, depression, and anxiety.
- Cognitive: Memory problems, trouble focusing, poor judgment, negative outlook, anxious or racing thoughts, and constant worrying.

Managing Stress:

- Self Care: make sure you are eating, sleeping, moving, relaxing, and connecting with friends, peers, and family
- [Deep breathing](#): Using the diaphragm to breathe deeper and longer
- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#): Process of making and letting go of tension in one muscle group at a time
- [Visualization](#): Refocusing your mind on positive thoughts and images
- [Meditation](#): The act of focusing on one object, word, thought, or action for a period of time
- [Body Scan](#): Process of finding tension throughout the body and slowly releasing it

Body Image

Body image is how we see ourselves. It is how we imagine our body looks and how we feel about it. This can be positive or negative, depending on our views. When we have a negative body image, we have

body dissatisfaction. The factors that shape body image are interactions with family members and friends, genetics, media messages, cultural pressures, and experiences. Body dissatisfaction affects both men and women, regardless of size.

The social pressures to look a certain way affect our body image. The media portrays a very narrow definition of beauty. This often includes specific traits such as weight, skin tone, hair type, behavior, body shape, and muscularity. These beliefs are harmful because they can encourage people to try unhealthy behaviors to meet them. A negative body image is a risk factor for eating disorders, depression, anxiety and risky behaviors. There is no one right way to have a body or to love the body you have. There are some steps you can take that can start the journey to a positive body image.

Foster Positive Body Image

- Focus on specific health goals and not weight goals
- Appreciate everything your body does for you
- Value yourself as a whole person
- Be critical of media
- Have a broad definition of beauty
- Create an environment that values who you are

Students who want to learn more about body image and create a positive body image can join The Body Project. The Body Project is a body acceptance program that is free for all FAU students. This proven 5-hour program empowers students to:

- Resist cultural pressures to accept the appearance ideal
- Reallocate your valuable time to something other than striving for an unrealistic body
- Increase confidence and body satisfaction
- Bond with other like-minded students

Time Management:

Time management helps to keep us on track and achieve our goals. Before choosing your planner, understanding the difference between non-negotiable and negotiable tasks is essential. Non-negotiable tasks are responsibilities that should be prioritized first and include things like class, working, studying, eating, sleeping, etc. Negotiable tasks are activities that can be important, but that do not need to be completed right away, such as social gatherings, laundry, video games, etc. Negotiable and non-negotiable tasks can vary from person to person, but it ultimately comes down to prioritizing effectively. No matter what your commitments look like, utilizing a scheduling system is necessary.

Choose the best planner for you that includes an hourly breakdown.

- Smartphone calendar
- Written planner
- Wall calendar

Fill out each with the following (if applicable) in this order.

- Class

- Work
- Sleep (planning 7 to 9 hours each night)
- Meals (include preparation time)
- Other non-negotiable responsibilities
- Identify gaps where you can study or do homework

Add in negotiable activities.

- Avoid completely filling your planner with activities so that you don't overextend yourself
- Prioritize negotiable tasks so that you are still meeting your goals
- Fill in time for self-care and relaxation each day

For online classes, having a consistent schedule and routine are helpful for keeping on task. Get prepared for the day as you usually would and designate an area for your work. You don't need to have an entire home office, but avoid doing work on your bed as this may affect your sleep.

Often, womxn and caregivers are expected to perform work that is unpaid and undervalued. This can involve activities such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, planning, and managing emotions. These tasks take up time and energy and can have an impact on our ability to manage time effectively. One way to address this is to negotiate these tasks with loved ones to reclaim your time. Some tips for negotiation are:

- Plan ahead: know specifically what you want and consider what you will do if a deal is not possible
- Find ways to compromise: consider where the other person is coming from and find common ground
- Practice: ask for more than you would normally and try it in all aspects of life

If your social support network isn't able to help, then try expanding that network. There are many resources at FAU dedicated to helping students, especially those in the [Women and Gender Equity Resource Center](#). This can be a great way to connect with other students and services, such as school supplies, children's clothes and toys, condoms, and menstrual products. Students can email wgerc@fau.edu for availability of products and to get involved!

For more information on these topics, to request an individual consultation, or to sign up for The Body Project, please visit:

http://www.fau.edu/owlscare/caring_for_self/mental_and_emotional_wellness.php