

TIP SHEET

Managing Stress

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the term we use to describe our emotional, physical and psychological response to external demands. Stress can be helpful or unhelpful.

- Helpful stress is part of everyday living. It gives us the energy to engage in the challenges of life that are meaningful and offset boredom.
- Unhelpful stress is not beneficial – the balance is tipped towards being too low or too high. If it's too low, you may become bored and unmotivated. If it's too high, you might find yourself panicking.

If stress goes on for too long, you could burnout. Ongoing stress can lead to a depleted immune system, making you prone to disease, cell damage, infections and even organ shut-down.

PERFORMANCE AND STRESS

As your stress level increases, so does your performance. Some stress is good for your performance, but once that stress becomes too much, your performance will start to decrease again.

Medium levels of stress will help you achieve your highest level of performance. Think of it as a classic bell curve.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'RE TOO STRESSED?

The signs of overstress can be physical, emotional, thinking or behavioural.

Physical signs

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Gastrointestinal / heart / immune problems
- Sleep and eating disturbances
- High blood pressure
- Sweating/shaking

Emotional signs

- Irritability and being easily frustrated
- Crying
- Feeling anxious or panicky
- Feeling numb or having little emotional reaction
- Depression
- Feeling overwhelmed, constantly apprehensive or fearing the worst will happen

Thinking signs

- "I can't"
- "I'm not good enough"
- "I'm giving it up"
- "I'm such an idiot!"
- Cognitive signs, such as lack of concentration, slowed decision-making or difficulties with short-term memory

Behavioural signs

- Disruptive eating patterns
- Increased alcohol, smoking or drug use
- Isolation and withdrawal
- Compulsive behaviours, e.g. shopping, comfort eating, gambling
- Difficulty communicating
- Procrastination
- Difficulty relaxing or winding down

HEALTHY WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS

Physical

Exercise/activity, massage, relaxation, meditation or yoga

Emotional

Connect with family, friends, a psychologist or a counsellor

Thinking

Self-reflect via writing in a journal.

'Reality check' your thoughts:

- "What am I saying to myself about this situation?"
- "How true is it?"
- "Is it helpful to think this way?"
- "Where will it get me?"
- "What else can I think instead?"

Behavioural

Examine your lifestyle and stressors/triggers (people, activities)

Learn to:

- Say "no" to unrealistic demands on your time.
- Be assertive about your own needs.
- Set priorities and manage time realistically.

WANT TO CHAT TO SOMEONE?

For a confidential – and free – chat about your general situation, please contact Psychological Counselling Support to make an appointment at any of our campuses.

✉ counselling@ecu.edu.au 📞 (08) 6304 6706

Alternatively, you can discuss study techniques and tips with a Learning Adviser in our Academic Skills Centre.

✉ learningadviser@ecu.edu.au