

STRESS BREAKERS

College can be a stressful period in your life. We've come up with a list of different ways to help prevent and break your stress, and support you in reaching a place to succeed.

First, take a moment to reflect and identify different components of your personal stress- What causes your stress? How does it make you feel? What have you found to be a relaxing or useful tool to mitigate stress? How do you feel after using your current stress-relief measures?

Tips to mitigate stress:

1. **Get enough sleep.** It may be tempting to hit the hay at 4 a.m. and then attend an 8 a.m. class but shortchanging yourself on rest can increase your stress level. "Winging it on not much sleep has a profound effect on how we experience the stressors of the day," Forbes says. Plus, insufficient sleep can put you at risk for serious illnesses, such as diabetes, obesity, and depression. Adults typically need seven to nine hours of sleep a night for best health. Forbes also recommends that you align your sleep schedule with normal resting hours by getting to bed before midnight, rather than staying up until dawn and sleeping until mid-afternoon. "The more that our internal clock is closely aligned with the clock of the sun, the better it is," Forbes says.
2. **Eat well.** A steady diet of pizza and vending-machine fare can decrease energy levels in the body, leading to a lower threshold for stress. "You end up feeling very tired and looking for the same [junk food] to kick you back up," Forbes says. "It's a lousy cycle of hunting for short-term comfort food or sugar highs that actually keep you feeling worse." Follow a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.
3. **Exercise.** When you're stressed, moving around may be the last thing you feel like doing. But as little as 20 minutes a day of physical activity can reduce stress levels. Forbes says just three or four half-hour sessions can lighten stress considerably. As for what type of exercise, try something that you enjoy doing, like swimming or yoga. "You're not going to continue something you don't like," Forbes notes.
4. **Avoid unnatural energy boosters.** Artificial stimulants like caffeine pills or prescription meds may help you stay awake for that all-night study session but putting off your body's need to sleep will ultimately result in an energy crash, resulting again in a greater susceptibility to stress. "It's like clipping the wires to your fire alarm while the house burns down," Forbes says. "Just because you didn't hear it doesn't mean the house didn't burn."
5. **Get emotional support.** Adjusting to college can be difficult and venting your frustrations to a trusted friend can go a long way in fighting stress. "It's a way to empty out tensions and make them lower," Forbes says. Choose a friend or family member who won't be judgmental or try to give lots of advice. Or seek the help of a professional counselor or psychologist. To find a trusted practitioner, check with your student health center for recommendations. University Counseling Services can also be an excellent resource for navigating stressful situations.