

STRESS

College is a highly stressful time activating two main types of stressors—life events and daily hassles. Life events are prominent experiences such as transitioning into and staying in college, moving, getting married, and the death of a loved one. Daily hassles are smaller stressors that when accumulated over time, can create a high level of turmoil in one’s emotional, psychological, or physical health. Daily stressors may include challenges such as not having enough money to fulfill necessities, living in a chaotic environment, enduring crowded or hectic public transportation, feeling rushed at home or while doing academic work, interacting with difficult people, and maintaining responsibilities such as completing chores, paying bills, and juggling a hectic schedule.



Being under a chronic state of stress can wear you down and start to negatively affect your physical and mental health. Stress disorders can develop, intensifying a person’s response to overwhelming or unmanageable situations. By identifying interactions, environments, and situations that trigger stress in advance allows you to find productive ways to proactively intervene. Working to prevent increasingly harmful outcomes such as heightening the body’s sensitivity to activate its flight or fight response, suffering from cognitive or emotional overload, and triggering physical and behavioral stress symptoms can help you manage harmful physical and mental health outcomes caused by stress.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

PHYSICAL

- Headaches
- Sweating
- Increased heart rate
- Back pain
- Change in appetite
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Increased need for sleep
- Trembling or shaking
- Digestion problems
- Stomach aches
- Dry mouth
- Feeling restless or “keyed up”
- Nausea, dizziness
- Chest pain
- Frequent colds or flu
- Loss of sex drive
- Memory and concentration problems

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Anger over relatively minor things
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Using alcohol or drugs (or wanting to)
- Problems concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Being prone to accidents
- Feeling that activities are meaningless
- Disengagement
- Boredom
- Insecurity
- Pessimism
- Unrealistic expectations/perfectionism
- All-or-nothing attitude
- Rigid thinking, lack of flexibility
- Relationship difficulties

COPING WITH STRESS

- **Be aware of situations that caused stress before.** If you found a situation stressful before, it will commonly occur again. Reflecting on past situations will allow you to think differently about how to handle future stressors.
- **Schedule meaningful, enjoyable activities.** Participate in activities that are significant and enjoyable. Find time to also laugh and maintain your sense of humor. Consider who might also join you.
- **Schedule time for relaxation.** Take breaks during studying to maintain peak performance.
- **Work to achieve balance in your daily life.** Be realistic about what you can accomplish in a day and know your limits.
- **Get organized and Do it now.** Plan, schedule, take notes, and keep good files. Also, don't wait! Procrastination breeds stress.
- **Develop a support system.** Seek supports who encourage you rather than criticize or pressure you.
- **Take care of your health.** Try to eat nutritious meals, get exercise, and get enough sleep.
- **Avoid self-medicating.** Alcohol and other drugs mask or disguise problems leading to an increase in stress after use.
- **Talk about your feelings or write them in a journal.** Holding in your feelings can increase stress. Having an outlet to release feelings is a positive form of stress relief. If you struggle with talking about it, write them down.
- **Show self-compassion.** Being self-critical can increase stress. Try to be compassionate and reasonable with yourself. Be sure to also give yourself credit for your talents and strengths.
- **Take a deep breath.** Deepening your breath helps relieve physical signals of stress such as muscle tension and hyperarousal.

SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR STRESS

Mental Health Services at the Colonial Health Center offers a number of services for students experiencing anxiety:

- **Individual counseling:** Students can see a counselor for brief therapy to work on issues related to stress and how to manage it; sessions usually occur on a weekly basis
- **Group counseling:** Students coping with ongoing stress may wish to consider joining at group at MHS, which are free and unlimited to GW students
- **Learning skills and Self-Help Library:** Students can peruse pamphlets, books, podcasts, and videos on stress as well as many other topics
- **Workshops** are offered throughout the year on various topics, including stress management; visit our website for information about upcoming workshops
- **Referrals** are available for therapists in the community, mental health agencies, and other campus and community resources
- **MHS's website** (healthcenter.gwu.edu) has up-to-date information on services offered by MHS, as well as links to related topics; also visit us on Facebook (facebook.com/GWHealthCenter) or Twitter ([@GWHealthCenter](https://twitter.com/GWHealthCenter))
- **Call-a-Counselor 24/7:** Students may contact MHS anytime, day or night, to speak to a counselor about their mental health concerns, including anxiety; (202) 994-5300



Mental Health Services at the Colonial Health Center offers workshops, an online self-help library, and other online resources as well as individual and group counseling. To access services, come in or call us at (202) 994-5300.