

# Controlling Stress

Controlling stress involves learning strategies that you will use and develop throughout your life.

**BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE** — Including 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week is an important part of controlling the symptoms of stress and anxiety.

**NUTRITION** — Often when people are stressed out they eat poorly, grabbing junk food and overeating or ignoring their body's needs and not eating. This reduces the body's efficiency and results in decreased energy levels at just the time you are really needing that energy. So, it's important to focus on getting the nutrients your body needs during periods of stress. Focus on eating a variety of healthy foods regularly. Have these kinds of foods easily available for snacks.

**FRIENDS** — Having people around to work and play with is important. A balance of talking about the stressors and distracting yourself from the stressors is helpful.

**SAYING NO** — Learn to be able to pleasantly tell others “no” BEFORE you've reached your limit.

**PLANNING AND PACING** — One of the best ways to control stress is to control the amount of work and plan how to complete that work. It isn't unusual for students to think they perform better “under pressure” when actually they find their performance improves as they learn to pace academic demands throughout the semester. Read the syllabus and begin planning the semester in the first week. Then, when there is a crisis or something unexpected occurs (like the chance to go to a great concert) you aren't “stuck” and feeling stressed out.

**RELAXATION TECHNIQUES** — Planning and pacing yourself decreases the number of times you are stressed, but it does not eliminate stress. When you are feeling keyed up or stressed out relaxation techniques are often most useful. There are two general types of relaxation techniques: emergency techniques and lifestyle techniques. “Emergency” techniques respond to immediate stress and include breathing techniques, deep muscle relaxation, and progressive muscle relaxation. Lifestyle techniques involve a daily routine which includes meditation, yoga, self-hypnosis, imagery, listening to relaxation tapes, or some other quiet, “mind cleansing” time.

**TAKE A BREAK** — Taking even a short break to stretch and walk around for a few minutes will reduce the stress of a long study session or paper-writing marathon.

## **What to Avoid**

Feeling pushed to get things done? Need more time in your day? The first reaction may be to have another pot of coffee or drink more soda. **CAFFEINE** is often used for its stimulant effects. Unfortunately that very stimulation can also leave you feeling jittery, irritable, and even more stressed. This is also true for other **STIMULANTS** including over the counter and illegal stimulants.

**TOBACCO** has much the same effect, even though smokers will report feeling more relaxed while smoking, they also tend to feel more stressed when they increase the number of cigarettes in response to stressors.

Sometimes, stress can leave you feeling anxious and out of control. People also respond to stress by feeling depressed and helpless. If you find yourself feeling like this, or want help learning to control stress contact **Counseling Services** in the **Powell Resource Center** (ext. 6923 or 6144).