

Understanding... Stress

Student life can be very stressful: decisions need to be made, problems solved, assignments completed, exams revised for, money managed and relationships worked out. It is often very difficult to find the time, energy and resources to deal with everything, and it's not hard to see why stress levels can rise.

What is Stress?

Stress is our reaction to anything that makes a demand on us. It's a natural, healthy reaction, which helps us tackle challenging situations. Adrenaline is produced as a response to the demand, giving us extra energy and alertness. This is sometimes called the 'fight or flight' reaction. When faced with a situation which we interpret as making a demand on us, the following reactions occur:

- Adrenaline is released, our senses are activated and we become mentally alert
- Our breathing rate speeds up, nostrils and air passages in the lungs open wider to get more air in quickly
- Our heart beat speeds up and blood pressure rises
- Sweating increases to help cool our body
- Blood and nutrients are concentrated in the muscles to provide extra strength

Events that we experience today rarely present a physical danger, but they can still be sufficient to produce the fight or flight reaction. However, if all of this pent-up energy provided by the adrenaline cannot be utilised, the physical response

will continue, with the body remaining on 'full alert' for long periods of time. It is this long-term response that can adversely affect our physical and mental well-being. Some or all of the following signs may be experienced:

- Decision-making is difficult
- Disturbed sleep
- Guilty feelings
- Feeling tense, impatient or irritable
- Feeling the need to interrupt when others are talking
- Feeling frustrated when people don't or won't do what you want
- Feeling that you have too much to think about, and finding concentration difficult
- Drinking or smoking more than usual
- Loss of appetite, overeating or a tendency to eat hurriedly
- A tendency to argue more or be more aggressive
- Avoiding difficult situations
- Thinking negatively

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Helping Yourself

- Talk to someone about how you feel. Sharing your worries is one of the best ways to ease things. Talking about the amount of work you have to do can help to put things in perspective, and make you feel less isolated and more normal. If you are unable to talk to a friend about your feelings, then the "Getting Support" section of this leaflet gives other sources of support.
- Prioritise tasks and plan your time ahead to avoid last minute panics over deadlines. Read about, or take a course on time management and study skills.
- Do something to help you relax. For example, you could try a relaxation tape; listen to music.
- Do something enjoyable. Think of things that you have enjoyed in the past or present. Do one of these each day.
- Do some exercise. Regularly spending time doing exercise you enjoy will help you unwind and use up the pent-up energy created by stressful situations.
- Try to eat healthily and sleep well. If sleeping is a problem discuss this with your doctor or make an appointment with the Dean of Student Affairs, other members of the Student Support Team, or your Personal Tutor/Academic Mentor.
- Some things that you might think of doing to try to relieve stress can actually make it worse. Drinking too much alcohol will probably make you feel worse in the long run as alcohol is a depressant. The cause of the stress will still be there when you sober up.



GETTING SUPPORT

In the University:

You can talk confidentially to the Dean of Student Affairs or other members of the Student Support Team.

Email: student.support@ncl.edu.my

Webform: studentsupport.newcastle.edu.my

Or make an appointment at the Student Office.

Outside the University:

Your GP or family doctor can be a useful first point of contact. In some cases, your doctor will refer you for more specialised help and support. Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone over the phone.

The Befrienders Johor Bahru

The Befrienders offers confidential emotional support through a helpline and email service.

Helpline (1pm to 12am): 07 33 123 00

Email: sam@befriendersjb.org

Website: <http://www.befriendersjb.org/>

Hospital Permai

Trunk Line/Operator: 07 231 1000

Emergency (BDM): 07 231 1170

URGENT HELP OR SUPPORT

Emergency Services

If you are worried about your safety or feel at risk of harming yourself, or if you are worried about the safety of a fellow student, you need to access help immediately.

If you feel your life is in imminent danger, you should call 999 or go to Accident and Emergency at the nearest hospital.

For emergencies on campus, call NUMed Security.

NUMed Security (24/7): 07 555 3881/3984/3985

Out-of-Hours Help

Out-of-hours on weekdays and on week-ends, you may call the NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day emergency number.

NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day: 011 1231 1276

