

Managing Stress

Stress is a normal part of life, and can't be avoided entirely, but it can be managed. Here are some strategies you can try:

Identify sources of stress

Take a moment to write down a list of the things that are stressing you out right now. Then, try to identify more specifically the way you are feeling about each of these items (overwhelmed, frustrated, anxious, worried, scattered...?) and how you are feeling in your body (wired, exhausted, tight muscles, short breaths, upset stomach, racing heart...?). Being curious and non-judgmental about your current situation creates greater self-awareness and prepares you to take steps to manage the situation.

Avoid unnecessary stress

There is so much to do at UCSC that it can be challenging to set healthy boundaries and prioritize self-care. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, that feeling is an invitation to evaluate how you are spending your time and energy, and to consider which obligations, relationships, and activities are nourishing you and helping you achieve your life goals, and which are not.

Others may feel disappointed when you need to opt out of activities, but if they care about your well-being, they will understand when you explain that you are taking care of yourself.

Change the situation

If your stress is self-imposed, the good news is that you have the power to change the situation! For example, poor time management is a major stressor for many students, and time management skills can be learned. If relationships are a stressor, you can work on your communication skills. If perfectionism and negative self-talk are stressors, you can work on self-compassion. Of course, making a change isn't always easy. Get help if you need it!

Change your perception

Sometimes you can't change your situation, but you can change the way you perceive and feel about the situation, and that can relieve stress.

Practicing gratitude is one proven way to increase your sense of well-being. At any moment you can pause and think about the things in your life that you are grateful for, and notice the changes you feel inside as a result.

Another option is looking at the bigger picture. Will the things that are stressing you out right now matter to you in a year, or 5 years from now? If not, take a deep breath and let them go.

Need more support? Talk with a SHOP Health Educator:
shop@ucsc.edu

Practice acceptance

There may be stressors that you cannot quickly change or see in a more positive light. You can lessen your suffering by practicing acceptance of your current situation. Do accept your completely valid feelings, whatever they may be, but do not add to your suffering by avoiding the situation, judging yourself, trying to re-write the past, or trying to control that which cannot be controlled. Long-term change often begins with awareness and acceptance of the present moment.

Use coping techniques

Release: Don't keep your stress bottled up. Talk to someone about it. Write about it. Let it out through movement. Turn it into music or art. Breathe it out. Have a good cry. Practice relaxation techniques or do relaxing activities. Renew: Laugh/find humor. Spend time in nature. Get sunlight exposure. Drink water. Practice self-care.

Increase your resiliency

Taking good care of yourself will increase your ability to handle stress. Prioritize self-care and make space in your schedule for sleep, eating, exercise, relaxation, fun, and social connection. Develop a spiritual practice. Practice self-compassion and positive self-talk. Get in the habit of asking yourself, "What I am feeling right now, and what do I need?" Check out:
<https://healthycampus.ucsc.edu/wellness-initiatives/radical-resilience/index.html>

Seeking support

UCSC students sometimes think that they are the only ones who are struggling, but everyone has their struggles. Sharing what you're going through with others can be a tremendous relief, and you might be surprised how well they can relate.

If you are experiencing stress due to the effects of marginalization, oppression, and/or trauma, self-care is still important, but may not be enough.

Don't hesitate to reach out to your support network. Friends, family, mentors, spiritual leaders, community groups, roommates, and/or classmates may be able to lend a sympathetic ear or a helping hand. UCSC also offers a variety of advising resources which can be found at:
<https://advising.ucsc.edu/>

If your efforts to manage your stress don't seem to be helping, or you'd just like to have professional support, consider scheduling a phone consultation with Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). CAPS offers individual counseling; skills and support groups at multiple campus locations; and referrals to community resources. Find out more at
<https://caps.ucsc.edu/> or call (831) 459-2628

Stress management is an ongoing practice, not a one-time activity. Make it part of your regular routine for best results. Visit: <https://healthcenter.ucsc.edu/wellness/index.html>

Relaxation techniques to try:

- *Breathing exercises *Guided imagery/visualization *Progressive muscle relaxation
- *body scan meditation *Yoga, tai chi, qi gong *Self-massage
- Guided relaxation exercises can be found all over the internet!

