

## Stress Management Tips

### Understanding and controlling *your* response to stress:

#### Attitude

- Work on becoming more of an optimist:
  - When something good happens, give yourself credit—both for the actions you took and for your inherent characteristics that might have played a role. Now extrapolate on that—what else are you capable of? What else would you like to accomplish?
  - When negative events occur, try to minimize them in your mind. For example, see problems or challenges as short-term, local (vs. global), and external, not as permanent, all-encompassing signs of your own failure.
  - In short, optimists give themselves credit for success and blame failures on external circumstances. Pessimists see their success as “just luck” but assume their failures are a result of deep personal flaws.
- Try one of these stress-busting activities if you need a short escape from your workload and a change in attitude: gardening, reading, drawing, arts and crafts, making or listening to music, journaling, exercising, taking photos, taking a bath, puzzles, knitting, dancing, cleaning, or talking to a friend.
- Being around children or animals can help remind you of the simpler things. Play with your pet (or your friend’s pet), volunteer to read to kids, or visit a park where you expect to find dogs and kids.

#### Take care of yourself

- **Sleep!** Caffeine (which has a half-life of 4-6 hours), too much on your mind, overscheduling and cortisol (the stress hormone) can all interfere with your ability to get good sleep. Your likelihood of getting in a car accident triples if you get less than 6 hours of sleep. Sleep also impairs information processing, short-term memory, vision, and judgment—useful things to have if you’re studying! Try progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, and power naps. If you’re in danger of oversleeping, set an alarm.
- **Eat right!** Do yourself a favor and stock up on healthy snacks before you start a big paper or studying for finals. When we’re busy, it’s tempting to go with whatever food is the easiest to find. Drink lots of water, take your vitamins, and don’t skip meals.
- **Exercise!** Release tension, get some endorphins flowing, improve your self-esteem, and clear your head. Exercise can even give you more energy. Best bets: yoga, swimming, walking, team sports (if you like your team, that is!).
- **Play!** Laughter is an excellent stress reliever; it reduces “bad” hormones and replaces them with “good” ones. Laughter also strengthens your immune system. It can connect you with others and reduces the stress in your relationships. Watch your favorite goofy movie, play charades with your friends, tell jokes, and work on maintaining a good sense of humor in your daily life.

## Understanding and controlling external forces:

### Stuff

- Organize your academic stuff. Take the time to look through your accumulated papers. Toss what you can, organize what's left. If you're missing something, ask your professor or a fellow classmate for a replacement.
- Stock up on highlighters, index cards, notebooks, printer paper, whatever you need. School supplies won't get the work done for you, but they may increase your confidence!
- Are there other material things that could help you control stress? You might try investing in a journal, aromatherapy, classical music, your favorite childhood book, a yoga DVD, fuzzy socks, or bath beads.
- Request library loan books early! Print off readings ahead of time so you're ready to start work when inspiration strikes you.

### Your environment

- Find a healthy place to study—the library isn't your only option.
- Take control of your environment. If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic's got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the mall is an unpleasant chore, do your shopping online.

### Your time

- Stressed out people tend to rush around everywhere. Take it slow! Is there really a difference between arriving one minute early or one minute late? If you race to class, you'll arrive flustered and tense—not the best thinking mode.
- Break your assignments down into smaller pieces. It's easier to tackle, gives you opportunities for taking breaks, and it's much less daunting.
- Get to know your work pace. How long does it actually take you to write a 5-page paper? How many pages of biology can you read in an hour? If you know what to expect, you can plan your time more effectively.
- Get to know your daily rhythms. If you think clearly first thing in the morning, you might want to get up 20 minutes earlier every day. If you hate the mornings, pack your bag the night before so you can steal another 5 minutes of sleep.

### Other people

- Use your resources! Visit office hours, make appointments with student services folks (including Academic Support, Health & Counseling, etc.), meet up with a tutor, study with the folks in your conference. Everyone who works at Reed, including student workers, wants to see you succeed.
- Avoid toxic personalities, distracting individuals, and anyone who makes you feel bad about yourself. Some of the best friends make the worst study partners.
- Find an academic role model. Believe it or not, there are students here who manage to get their work done without staying up three nights straight, losing their hair, ruining relationships or getting depressed. Find them. Follow them around. Learn from them.

- Sometimes, other people can take responsibilities off your plate. If you've over committed yourself, ask someone else to step in help you out!