



MANAGING STRESS

Being a successful student

A certain amount of stress is an inevitable and useful part of studying. It assists students to work harder, be focused and return to study rather than doing other things. However, if students are too stressed, they cannot study effectively. It is important to distinguish between stress that assists you to study and stress that prevents you from studying effectively. You can then reduce the latter type of stress.

Stress can be represented along a scale between zero and ten. Between one and four students could be described as having so little stress that they do not study. Normal study is done in the four to eight stress zone. In this zone the harder you work the better you do. Between eight and ten is when you are too stressed to study effectively. There are many signs to help you recognise this:

- the more you try or worry the less you can study
- your mind is racing everywhere
- trying to relax but all you can think about is study
- when you try to study you cannot.

This problem can be remedied by developing the right balance between study and not study (up time and down time).

A BALANCE BETWEEN STUDY AND NOT STUDYING

When we do physical work or sports it is very obvious that we need to shift between working and not working. If you try to work hard all day without stopping you would become so exhausted that you could not continue, however, if you pace yourself correctly you will get the maximum from yourself. It is the same with study.

If when you are not studying you are worrying or feeling guilty about not studying, from the point of view of your mind and emotions this is like trying to study all the time. This is very exhausting. It is like trying to do physical work all the time without pacing yourself. If on the other hand you spend the time you give to worry and guilt relaxing then you will be refreshed and able to study more effectively.

Some students say that their stress is not between nine and ten because they have not studied for a long time and therefore a rest is not what they need. If asked "when you are not studying do you worry and feel guilty about study?" they often reply "Yes - all the time!". These students tend not to want to study because rather than being refreshed they are exhausted by worry and guilt. All that time is wasted.

If, on the other hand, you rest and relax, then you can return to study refreshed after time off and can have something to look forward to when you are studying. Rest is most efficient when it is worry and guilt free.

In terms of this way of thinking there are two total time wasters:

1. trying to study but not studying;
2. having time off from study but not relaxing because you are worrying.

Time is most effectively used if there is a rhythm between concentrated study and real relaxation. Relaxing can then be seen as a legitimate support for study.

BREAK THE DEADLOCK BETWEEN WANTING TO STUDY AND DOING OTHER THINGS

When students cannot study they often get caught between two conflicting goals (wants or needs), one of which would have them studying and the other would have them doing something other than studying. On the one hand they move towards studying because they really want to study or at least believe they should study. On the other hand they do not feel like studying or want to do something else. They become paralysed between these two conflicting activities and do neither properly or even worse, do neither at all. To get out of this bind you need to view both study and non study as legitimate and necessary.

BALANCING YOUR LIFE

This balance between study and non study is best maintained by having a number of non-study activities in your life. If you have too many non study activities, of course you will not do well at university because all your effort will go into them rather than study. If you have too few then you may get so stressed that you will not be able to effectively study.

Let's look at a few examples:

Sport

Sport or physical activity is an excellent way to have a break from study. For some people no sports in their life would remove the best support for study from their lives, however, too much sport means they do not study well because all the effort and time that could go into study has gone into sport.

Television

Some television can help you relax too much and can have you not studying on the other hand for some people no television means removing their best relaxation technique and they become too stressed to effectively study.

The same can be said for most activities eg hobbies, part time job, relationship, friends, partying, movies, clubbing etc all these in the right amount will give you a useful break form study. Too little will rob you of that chance and too much will mean that not enough effort goes into you study.

HOW TO STOP WORRY AND GUILT

1. Distinguish between worry that is useful and worry that inhibits study. Inhibiting worry needs to be seen as not useful and stopped.

2. Accept the essential role of non-study time and its long term benefits towards effective study.

3. It is difficult to simply stop worry if stopping worry means doing nothing while not worrying. It is much easier to find something other than worry to do that is relaxing and will give you a break from study eg reading, sports, walking, talking to friends etc. The relevant question is then: what would you do if you were not studying and not worrying?

4. Develop a balance between relaxing and study one that maximises effectiveness. Only experience will tell you what that balance is.

FOUR GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A LIFESTYLE THAT REDUCES STRESS AND WORRY

Here are four guidelines to help develop this rhythm between study and not study to prevent you from becoming too stressed and achieving your maximum potential as a student. It is only one suggestion and should be adapted to what works best for you.

1. **Every semester and mid semester break** (4 times a year) you should have some period of holiday time. This will give you something to look forward to each term and you can then return to study refreshed. It can be an excellent motivation. Many students say they will study during holiday breaks and even take their books with them. What usually happens is that they put the study off and have time off anyway. However, it is not effective time off because they worry and feel guilty which exhausts them. It is much better to remove the worry and guilt and get rejuvenated.

2. **Every week** you should have at least one day off. You and everyone around you should know it is your day off from study, it should be worry and guilt free. On that day it is fine to do other things like cleaning, cooking, shopping etc but not study. When you do this you find you get a new perspective on what you are doing and many problems naturally solve themselves.

3. **Every day** have some time that you know and feel is legitimate to not study perhaps 3 hours. It is during these times that you can do the things that give your life its balance that will help you study more effectively.

4. **Every hour** you need some time off. Time sitting at your desk trying to study but not studying is wasted time. It is much better to get up have a break and then return when your mind is very clear. Very few people can study for more than thirty to fifty minutes with full concentration. You should then have a short break, maybe 10 to 15 minutes, then continue to study, then a break again - and keep up this rhythm. People can study for a long time like this. When you are having extreme difficulty studying you can even reduce the study time to 15 minutes and in a short time you will be able to increase it again. Many students study until they cannot study any more. It is often better to stop while study is going well because it is much easier to return to it. During the short break do things that refresh you: go outside, do something physical, dance, walk, play some musical instruments whatever gives you a break from study. Then return to your study.

Keep this up until it is time to take one of your bigger breaks that you have each day. Keep this daily rhythm up until your day off arrives and keep this weekly rhythm up until the term break arrives. This rhythm is part of a life style that will help you to perform to your best potential and is sustainable over a long time.

If you want further help with stress or other concerns Counselling Support has workshops on this and other topics or you can make an appointment to speak to a counsellor.

GUIDELINES

Rest + (guilty & worry) = exhaustion

Study + distraction = waste of time

No rest = inability to study

Study + too much effort = inability to study

Rest - (No guilt or worry) = rejuvenation

Study + right amount of effort = effective study

Study + rest = effective study

Counselling Support is available to assist students with personal difficulties that are affecting their study.

The service provides:

- Individual Counselling by appointment
- Telephone Counselling by appointment
- Mental health emergency response

Counselling Support

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After hours support: 1300 167 654 or sms 0488 884 197