Recognizing and Combating Stress

Warning Signs of Unhealthy Stress

- Changes in sleep patterns; taking longer to fall asleep, waking up often and early
- Changes in eating patterns; eating more or eating less
- Recurring colds and minor illness; more frequent headaches
- Frequent muscle aches and/or tightness
- Increased difficulty in task completion and more disorganization
- Frequent worrying and feeling overwhelmed
- Increased generalized frustration and anger and/or shorter temper

How to Combat Stress

- **Exercise at least every other day.** Doing things like jogging, walking, or swimming can keep your stress level lower. Also, exercise increases your endorphins, also known as the body’s natural painkillers, which make you feel better!

- **Manage your time.** Create long-term and short-term goals, and write them down. When coming up with a time management plan, be sure to provide for academic, social, and physical time. Make sure you follow your schedule!

- **Work at least twenty minutes into your schedule for “you” time.** Read a book, meditate, take a walk, or just sit and relax.

- **Don’t sweat the small stuff.** Ask yourself if the issue at hand is really worth getting upset about. If it doesn’t affect your goal setting and achievement, it’s probably not worth fretting over.

- **Have a sense of humor and think positively.** Try to look on the bright side as much as you can!

- **Communicate!** Talk to someone you trust, whether it’s a friend or family member, your roommate, a professor, a co-worker, or a counselor if you have any issues of concern. Sometimes all we need is someone to listen to us.

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Healthy Sleep Habits

- Develop a regular sleep schedule—go to sleep and get up at the same time each day and avoid daytime naps.
- Retrain from stimulating activities and drugs, such as caffeine or nicotine, just before bedtime.
- Try to exercise at regular times each day (but not late in the evening.)
- Refrain from drinking alcohol close to bedtime in an effort to help you sleep. Drinking even small amounts of alcohol can make it harder to sleep.
- If you are unable to fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and “do something boring” until you begin feeling sleepy. Don’t try to force yourself to sleep.
- Do something pleasurable before bed to help you unwind. Take a relaxing shower or bath and, if you like to use fragrances, consider using lavender scented soaps, lotions, or oils for a naturally calming effect.
- Minimize light and noise when trying to sleep and avoid heavy meals before bedtime. If hungry, eat a light carbohydrate snack.
- Keep paper and pencil by the bed to record worries and reminders so you don’t have to keep thinking about them.
- Try using a relaxation visualization. (See back of sheet for example.)