



Mental Health America of Franklin County

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STRESSED OR DEPRESSED? KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

If you are feeling overwhelmed by stress, you are not alone; it's practically a fact of life on college campuses. A poll conducted by mtvU and the Associated Press in the spring of 2009 reported that 85% of students say they experience stress on a daily basis.¹

The pace of community college can be intense. You have classes to prepare for, papers to write and exams to take. There are bills to pay, and perhaps a part-time job to juggle with your schoolwork. Commuting can be a headache. And relationships can be stressful, too.

Stress is good if it motivates you but it's bad if it wears you down. Many factors can contribute to the stress you experience, and this stress can cause changes in your body that affect our overall physical, mental, and emotional health. This fact sheet will explain what stress looks like and how to beat it.

Depression is more serious and long-lasting than stress, and requires a different kind of help. In a 2010 survey by the American College Health Association, 28 percent of college students reported feeling so depressed at some point they had trouble functioning, and 8 percent sought treatment for depression.²

The good news is that depression is a highly treatable condition. However, it's not something you can snap out of by yourself, so it's important to get help. This fact sheet will tell you what to do.

How do you tell the difference between stress and depression? Both can affect you in similar ways, but there are key differences. Symptoms of depression can be much more intense. They last at least two weeks. Depression causes powerful mood changes, such as painful sadness and despair. You may feel exhausted and unable to act. Here are common signs of stress and depression. Which fits you best?

Common signs of stress

Trouble sleeping
Feeling overwhelmed
Problems with memory
Problems concentrating
Change in eating habits
Feeling nervous or anxious
Feeling angry, irritable or easily frustrated
Feeling burned out from studying or schoolwork
Feeling that you can't overcome difficulties in your life
Trouble functioning in class or in your personal life

Common signs of depression

Withdrawing from other people
Feeling sad and hopeless
Lack of energy, enthusiasm, and motivation
Trouble making decisions
Being restless, agitated and irritable
Eating more or less than usual
Sleeping more or less than usual
Trouble concentrating
Trouble with memory
Feeling bad about yourself or feeling guilty
Anger and rage
Feeling that you can't overcome difficulties in your life
Trouble functioning in class or in your personal life
Thinking about killing yourself

Reducing stress

If you are stressed out, there are many good ways to get relief. Drinking or taking drugs, however, won't solve anything and can lead to more problems. Here are some constructive choices:

Make a plan. Figure out what is really causing the stress. Think of as many possible causes as you can, and write them down. Now brainstorm for solutions that will reduce the stress, and write them down, too. A trusted friend, family member or school counselor could have good ideas, too. Now choose a few solutions to start on. If they are complicated, break them down in to manageable chunks. Then give your plan a try. If it doesn't help, try another one. Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

Get the stress out. Remember to take breaks when you feel worried or stuck. Do something relaxing every day. Sing, dance, and laugh--anything to burn off energy.

Take care of your body. A healthy body can help you manage stress. Get 7 to 9 hours of sleep, eat healthy food, and exercise regularly. Go easy on the caffeine. Shorting yourself on sleep, and especially pulling an all-nighter, robs you of energy and concentration. A healthy diet improves your ability to learn. Don't skip breakfast.

Don't suffer in silence. Get support, whether from family, friends, your academic advisor or campus counseling center. A heart-to-heart talk with someone you trust can help you get rid of bottled up feelings and give you a fresh perspective.

If these steps don't bring relief, you are unable to cope or feel as though your stress is affecting how you function every day, it could be something more, like depression. Don't let it go unchecked.

Getting help for depression

If you think you might be depressed, take the 3-minute mood monitor at www.mfahc.org. Print out the results and discuss them with a counselor or doctor.

To get help, start with your student health center or counseling service on campus. Most community colleges provide limited free counseling services and can refer you to local providers for longer-term treatment. You can also talk to your family doctor.

Remember, depression and other mental health conditions are nothing to be ashamed of. Depression is not a sign of weakness, and seeking help is a sign of strength. Telling someone you are struggling is the first step toward feeling better. You will need the help of a counselor or doctor to beat depression. Talking therapy, antidepressant medication or a combination can be very effective.

In crisis? If you or someone you know is in crisis now, seek help immediately. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to reach a 24-hour crisis center or dial 911 for immediate assistance.

¹ mtvU and Associated Press 2009 "Economy, College Stress, and Mental Health" Poll: <http://www.jedfoundation.org/about/jed-news/New-mtvU-Associated-Press-Poll-Shows-How-Stress-Economy-Other-Factors-Are-Affecting-College-Students-Mental-Health>.

² American College Health Association, National College Health Assessment, Fall 2010 Executive Summary, http://www.achacha.org/docs/ACHA-NCHA-II_ReferenceGroup_ExecutiveSummary_Fall2010.pdf

Mental Health America of Franklin County is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board and United Way of Central Ohio. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at www.mhafc.org.