

Introduction

Stress is a normal part of everyday life. However, being in the midst of a global pandemic, and the change from face to face learning to a completely online platform can cause us to become more anxious and have increased stress levels. Coping with stress in adaptive ways can enable you, the people you care about, and your community to be stronger and more productive.

Understanding the effects of stress

What is stress?

Stress is the “wear and tear” our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment, it has physical, emotional and psychological effects on us and can create positive or negative feelings. Positive stress (Eustress) motivates and propels us forward and negative stress (distress) can be detrimental in many areas of our functioning.

Effects of stress

- **Body:** unexplained headaches and pains, skin irritations, fatigue and lethargy, breathlessness
- **Mind:** increased anxiety and worry, going over negative things constantly, paranoid
- **Emotions:** irritability, crying, intolerant, moody, sad, apprehensive
- **Behaviour:** changes in sleep or eating patterns, Difficulty with attention, focus and concentration, increased use of substances such as alcohol or drugs, insomnia.

Ways to cope with stress

- It's vital to **stay informed**, so you can follow advised safety precautions and do your part to slow the spread of coronavirus.
- **Stick to trustworthy sources** for information like the World Health Organisation.
- **Step away from media if you start feeling overwhelmed** especially if anxiety is an consider limiting your media consumption to a specific time frame and time of day (e.g. thirty minutes each evening at 6 pm).
- **Keeping in regular contact** with family and friends, especially peers.
- Don't resort to **unhealthy habits** such as smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.
- Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.
- **Keep to regular routines and schedules** as much as possible, or create new ones in a new environment, example follow your study timetable and keep up to date with online learning platforms on Blackboard.
- **Staying active** will help you release anxiety, relieve stress, and manage your mood. There are many things you can do even without equipment, such as yoga and exercises that use your own bodyweight, walking, stretching etc.

Additional Resources

- https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a_2
- Kelly McGonigal: How to make stress your friend
http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend
- Dr. Hans Selye <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxcTEiTrS0k>

Summary

There are so many things outside of our control, including how long the pandemic lasts, how other people behave, and what's going to happen in our communities. Shift your focus to things you can control. For example, you can't control how severe the coronavirus outbreak is in your city or town, but you can take steps to reduce your own personal risk (and the risk you'll unknowingly spread it to others).

Stress levels can be exacerbated during a global pandemic, becoming aware of our own stressors, understanding how we are affected by stress and how to become more resilient can help us cope better.