

BACK TO CAMPUS

INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues are on the rise on college campuses across the country. More mental health education, coupled with improved and accessible screening as well as earlier diagnoses of mental health conditions, are critical to getting treatment and improving one's quality of life. This has allowed more students with mental health conditions to go on to college, manage their condition and be successful.

Living in a new environment outside the familiarity of home can create overwhelming and stressful circumstances. College students can greatly benefit from understanding that a certain amount of stress is normal, but that too much stress can be unhealthy and unproductive. Knowing the signs of stress, its' causes and how to manage it can be great tools in promoting and preserving good mental health.

This year's Back to Campus toolkit includes fact sheets for students, a poster/flyer and information for colleges and universities about what types of services should be in place to address the mental health needs of the student body. To maximize your distribution of this information throughout the school year, consider reaching out to the following offices and groups at each community college:

COUNSELING SERVICES

Counselors make referrals to campus and community-based mental health resources, educate students on mental health, and conduct screenings and support students with disabilities. They are also concerned with campus safety and students in crisis. Ask how you can support their work with the fact sheets, information and referrals, education and campus presentations.

DEAN OF STUDENTS/OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE OR STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Discuss the importance of communicating with students about mental health and stress reduction. Ask staff in this office to post the poster/flyer in buildings across campus. Request that they make the fact sheets available to student clubs on campus, including sororities and fraternities.

NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

Every university has some form of an orientation that is typically mandatory for all incoming students. Orientation may occur at the beginning of each semester to accommodate new students arriving in the fall and spring. These are great opportunities to reach freshmen!

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Many students regularly take part in religious groups on campus. Reach out to the college Chaplain or Office of Religious and Spiritual Life to share the fact sheets and other mental health resources you may have.

STUDENT ATHLETICS ASSOCIATION

Student athletes experience a lot of stress as they are expected by universities to balance a demanding athletics schedule while maintaining a high grade point average. Student Athletics Associations make sure students involved in inter-collegiate sports are doing well and staying on track. Ask if they'll share the fact sheets with their athletes and coaches

RESIDENCE LIFE OFFICE

If a college has on-campus housing, Resident Advisors (RAs) are key contacts that students may go to for questions, concerns or help. Ask the Residence Life office to make the fact sheets available to Resident Advisors in all dormitories. We hope that you find this information helpful in your outreach efforts.



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham



BACK TO CAMPUS



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

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 stress can cause changes in your body that affect your overall physical, mental and emotional health.

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 help you make some important decisions.

How can 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
- Thoughts of suicide

¹mtvU 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>.

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

MORE ➔



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham

MHA
Mental Health America

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 commit them to paper. A trusted friend, family member or school counselor may be able to offer some good ideas as well. Now choose a few solutions to start tackling the issues. If they are complicated, break them down in to manageable chunks. Then give your plan a try. If one particular solution doesn't help, try another one. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. It's all a part of the process.

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 the energy.

Take care of your body. A healthy body can help you manage stress. Get 7 to 9 hours of sleep, eat healthy food, stay hydrated with healthy beverages 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, campus counseling center, or a trusted online community. A heart-to-heart talk with someone you trust can help you get rid of toxic feelings and may even give you a fresh perspective.

If these steps don't bring relief, or if you are still unable to cope and feel as if the stress is affecting how you function every day, it could be something more acute and chronic—like depression. Don't let it go unchecked!

GETTING HELP FOR DEPRESSION

If you think you might be depressed, take the "What's My M3" screening test at www.mentalhealthamerica.net. Print out the results or email them to yourself and then show them to a counselor or doctor.

To get help, start with your student health center or counseling service on campus. Most community colleges provide limited free mental health services and can refer you to local providers for longer-term treatment. You can also talk to your family doctor. Your local Mental Health America (MHA) affiliate can refer or some cases provide services as well. To find the nearest MHA affiliate, call 800-969-6642 or go to www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/find_affiliate.

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. Talk 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.

LEARN MORE

The American Institute of Stress	(682) 239-6823	www.stress.org
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)	(800) 826-3632	www.dbsalliance.org
Active Minds	(202) 332-9595	www.activeminds.org
Anxiety Disorders of America	(240) 485-1001	www.adaa.org
Freedom From Fear	(718) 351-1717	www.freedomfromfear.org
National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH)	(866) 615-6464	www.nimh.nih.gov
Amen Clinics	(888) 564-2700	www.amenclinics.com



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham



BACK TO CAMPUS

BOOST YOUR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE BY TAKING CARE OF YOU

It can be hard to maintain a healthy lifestyle in college. If you are running to classes, studying, commuting to school and working or taking care of your family, time can seem to evaporate. If you are just starting college, the changes can feel overwhelming—and you may neglect your health.

Taking good care of your body and mind can make a difference in how well you do in school and how well you cope with change. Exercising, eating right, getting enough rest and relaxing will help you do better, enjoy school more and improve how you deal with the pressures. Caring for yourself may take a little extra time, but you will feel better and be more successful. Here's what you need and why it helps:

REGULAR EXERCISE:

- Elevates mood, reduces stress, increases energy level, improves appearance, and stimulates the release of endorphins and serotonin, which makes you happier.
- Increases alertness and creativity.
- Improves your overall mental and physical well-being. Even taking a 15-minute walk, 3 times a week, can help.
- Like playing intramural sports, keeps you active and also creates more opportunities to meet new friends!
- Decreases stress. On days when you are feeling overwhelmed, hit the gym.

A HEALTHY DIET:

- Improves your ability to learn.
- Means eating a nutritious breakfast everyday. Skipping meals leads to a lack of energy.
- Includes eating something nutritious every time you are in the cafeteria. Try vegetables from the salad bar or an apple from the fruit stand.
- Means limiting your alcohol intake.
- Avoids excessive amounts of caffeine. Caffeine dehydrates you. Drink at least 8 glasses of water a day to prevent dehydration.

PLENTY OF REST:

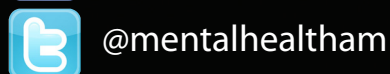
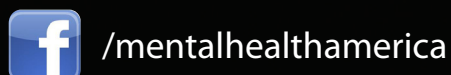
- Means getting at least seven to nine hours of sleep daily. This is essential and to being more attentive and energized. Inadequate sleep can lead to mood changes and lowered resistance to illness.
- Means you have more physical and psychological resources to cope with everyday life. Without it you have to work harder to get school assignments done and you have less energy.
- Is half the battle, the other half is cutting back on your alcohol consumption because it can disturb your sleep. Though you might fall asleep faster, your body will not be as rested.

RELAXATION:

- Means taking short study breaks, especially when you feel stuck.
- Means taking time each day to unwind, especially before sleeping. Listen to music, read or do whatever you enjoy. Alcohol or drugs are not the way to go.
- Offers a distraction from problems, a sense of competence and many other benefits.
- Means getting a good laugh. Laughing decreases pain, may help your heart and lungs, promotes muscle relaxation and can reduce anxiety.

Take care of your mind as well as your body. If you find that you are struggling emotionally or you are unable to cope, reach out to others for help. Seeking help is a sign of strength. Talk with someone you trust, and go to your college counseling service or doctor. Your local Mental Health America (MHA) affiliate can refer you to services as well. To find the nearest MHA affiliate, call 800-969-6642 or go to www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/find_affiliate.

Go to www.liveyourlifewell.org for more wellness tips.



BACK TO CAMPUS

TOP TEN FRESHMAN YEAR ISSUES AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

1. GREAT EXPECTATIONS: Expect to feel overwhelmed and know that you are not alone. You've been hearing about college for years and now you're here. College can be one of the best times of your life but it can also be one of the most difficult. New friends, new home, new classes, new routine...exciting and overwhelming at the same time. If you experience feelings of sadness and loneliness, don't worry—these feelings are normal and usually pass within the first few months of school. Get involved in campus activities, join a study group, and use social media to help stay connected with your friends and family back home.

2. ROOMMATES: You may have never had to share such a small space with someone before—let alone a perfect stranger! Living with others can be challenging. Work through conflicts by regularly communicating with your roommate(s) and setting rules for the room or suite that everyone can agree on. You and your roommate (s) don't have to be best friends; the important thing to remember is to respect one another.

3. DRINKING: Drinking, for some students, is part of the college experience. If you're not interested in drinking, there are many other things you can do that don't involve alcohol like having a game night, going to a comedy club, seeing a movie or checking out a concert. First and foremost, make sure you are of the legal age to drink. If you decide to drink it is important to remember to be smart and stay safe. Never accept a drink from a stranger, know your limits and stick with your friends.

4. FRESHMAN 15: Urban Legend or not? The "Freshman 15" may be an exaggeration but it is no myth that people can get out of shape during their freshman year. Eating lots of junk food and drinking too much alcohol as well as sugary beverages can cause you to pack on the pounds. Remember to eat healthy, drink plenty of water and exercise so you can stay fit!

5. SLEEP: Sleep is vital! If you don't get enough quality sleep, it can affect your class work and grades. You'll have to work harder to get through assignments and have less energy to enjoy time with friends. Recharge your body by cutting down on the caffeinated beverages and getting at least seven to nine hours of sleep each night.

6. MONEY: Everyone knows that the average college student is on a tight budget. Fortunately, many restaurants, movie theaters, and museums offer student discounts. Be creative—it is possible to have fun without spending a lot of money! If tuition is a problem, visit your campus career center for help. Be careful with credit cards—it is very easy to get into debt, so spend wisely and avoid impulse purchases.

7. HOMESICKNESS: Freshmen struggle with homesickness whether half an hour away from home or at a campus across the country. Keep in touch with your family and old friends, but be sure to be a part of the campus community and make new friends at school. As time passes and the campus feels more comfortable, your homesickness will lessen.

8. SEX AND SEXUALITY: If you are sexually active, remember to stay safe. Go to your health center to get more information on safer sex practices. Even if you trust your partner, you may not know his or her entire sexual history. If you have questions about your sexuality, talk to a campus counselor or a trusted family member or friend.

9. SCHOOLWORK: Remember why you are here in the first place? Set aside a certain time each day devoted to studying. Studying with other classmates can help you meet people and get better grades. Set realistic goals for yourself. If you feel stressed out, take a break, stretch, exercise, or call a friend. Avoid pulling all-nighters. It can interfere with the quality of your work as well as your mood and attentiveness in other classes.

10. ORGANIZATION: At home you have your parents, teachers and coaches to provide you with structure, schedules and timelines for completing homework assignments. College professors may give you all of your assignments for the semester on the first day of class! There is an expectation that you will manage your time, resources and workload effectively.



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham



MHA
Mental Health America

BACK TO CAMPUS

CHECKLIST FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES

- Do we have a mental health and/or behavioral health management plan in writing?
- Have we allocated enough financial resources to accommodate the plan and all of its components?
- Do we have a Medical Leave policy in place that includes mental health conditions?

RISK-IDENTIFICATION PROGRAMS

- Do we have a screening program in place?
- Do we have a transitional support program in place for parents and families of incoming students who have already been diagnosed with mental health conditions?
- Have we trained our faculty, coaches, clergy, and student/resident advisors to identify students who may be at risk for suicide and/or suicidal behaviors or other mental health conditions?
- Have we educated our students so that they are able to identify at-risk behaviors within themselves and among their peers?

ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT SERVICES

- Do we have an on-site mental health services center?
- Do we have on-site wellness services that include mental health promotion?
- Have we hired providers who are appropriately trained to handle suicidal clients? If not, are we willing to train them?
- Do we have an on-site medical center with personnel who can provide talk therapy as well as prescribe the appropriate psychotropic agents?
- Do we have a 24-hour emergency service that is accessible to students?
- Do we have a crisis-management plan in place in the event of a suicide or other traumatic event on campus?
- Do we provide students with support programs (social, academic, etc.)?
- Have we made our students and faculty aware of exactly what services are offered on campus and in the community?
- Have we publicized the names and contact information of on-campus and off-site support providers?

COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT SERVICES

- Do we have working relationships with community mental health providers to ensure appropriate off-site referrals?
- Do we know their appointment hours and fees?
- Have we arranged for a sliding scale?
- Do they accept insurance?
- Have we identified which hospital/center in the community is on call to handle any campus emergencies?
- Does our university website and our other social media platforms offer links to mental health information and services?



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham



BACK TO CAMPUS

ALCOHOL, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND DEPRESSION

When people are depressed, they may experience other health or mental health problems. To relieve the misery of depression, some people turn to drugs or alcohol. Likewise, when people abuse alcohol and/or drugs, depression can develop. On the surface, it may seem like a good idea— to get high, to have fun, to relax, and to escape—but the consequences of consuming large amounts of alcohol; particularly binge drinking and drug abuse soon become apparent in your life. Like depression, alcohol and drug abuse is serious. Fortunately, it is also treatable and the key to treatment is to **recognize the symptoms** and to **get help**. Take a look at this basic information about the connection between alcohol and/or substance abuse and depression.

SIGNS OF BINGE DRINKING

On many college campuses, binge drinking—heavy episodic drinking—has become an acceptable social norm. Here are some things you should know about binge drinking.

Binge drinking can cause lasting damage. One night of heavy drinking can impair your ability to think clearly for up to 30 days. Tens of thousands of today's college students will eventually die of alcohol-related causes, such as car accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, heart disease and other diseases. Women are also more likely to develop alcohol-related organ damage, developing liver disease sooner than men, and perhaps increasing the risk for breast cancer.

Behavioral changes and consequences of binge drinking may include changes in overall personality, depression, declining grades, loss of interest in family and friends, over-sensitivity, moodiness, nervousness, paranoia, secretive or suspicious behaviors, and excessive talkativeness. Often people also experience difficulty in paying attention, and a general lack of motivation and energy, sometimes characterized by a “who cares” attitude.

Physical Changes are often changes in eating habits, lack of physical coordination, puffy face, hyperactivity, tremors, excessive sweating, runny nose or hacking cough.

Binge drinking can compromise your personal safety. As many as 7% of college students admit to having engaged in sexual activity as a result of alcohol influence, and 90% of all campus rapes occur when alcohol has been used by either the victim or the assailant. Alcohol lowers inhibitions, and can make people more vulnerable to troublesome situations. When women drink alcohol they are more easily impaired than men, because of the way their bodies absorb the alcohol. People's perceptions of potentially dangerous situations often change when alcohol or drugs are involved.

ARE YOU ABUSING ALCOHOL AND/OR DRUGS?

Here are some questions to ask yourself about your use of alcohol and/or drugs. If you answer “yes” to most of them, then you're probably misusing them.

- Is your personality different when you drink or do drugs?
- Do you drink or do drugs to gain courage to face social situations?
- Has your drinking or drug use ever caused you to miss class or appointments?
- Do you use alcohol or drugs to escape when you are upset?
- Is it hard for you to stop drinking after you have one or two drinks?
- Do you always end up drunk, once you start drinking?
- Have you tried, and failed, to drink less alcohol or drink none at all?
- Have you tried and failed to cut down or stop using illicit drugs?
- Do you sometimes have trouble remembering what you did while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs? Do you regret doing some of the things you do remember?
- Have friends or family members tried to express their concern about your drinking or drug use?
- Has your classwork suffered because of your drinking or drug use?
- Have you needed a drink in the morning to get going after a night of heavy drinking?

GETTING HELP

If you need help dealing with your drinking or drug use, contact your student health and/or counseling services. Your local Mental Health America (MHA) affiliate can refer you to services as well. To find the nearest MHA affiliate, call 800-969-6642 or go to www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/find_affiliate.

In addition to those services, ask friends and family for help and support. Most people who care about you will be glad to support your efforts to reduce your drinking or drug use.