

# Common Questions About Stress Management

## What is stress?

Stress is the "wear and tear" our body and mind experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment. Stress has physical and emotional effects on us that can create positive or negative feelings.

As a faculty or staff member, the greatest sources of stress are likely to be job related stressors, balancing relationships and work, environment and lifestyle. Such things as family pressure or commuting daily, managing finances, and juggling a job, parenting, other activities, and relationships all contribute to the normal stress of working at Truman State University.

Stress can come from exciting or positive events, not just negative events. Falling in love, preparing go on vacation, or buying a new car can be just as stressful as negative events. It is crucial to recognize stressful situations, address them, and develop strategies to manage your stress.

## What are the signs of stress?

The best way to cope with unhealthy stress is to recognize when your stress levels are building. Stress signals fall into four categories: feelings, thoughts, behaviors and physical symptoms. When you are under stress you may experience:

Feelings	Thoughts	Behaviors	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anxiety</li><li>• Irritability</li><li>• Fear</li><li>• Moodiness</li><li>• Embarrassment</li><li>• Depression</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-criticism</li><li>• Difficulty concentrating or making decisions</li><li>• Forgetfulness</li><li>• Mental disorganization</li><li>• Preoccupation with the future</li><li>• Repetitive thoughts</li><li>• Fear of failure</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Crying</li><li>• Acting impulsively</li><li>• Nervous laughter</li><li>• "Snapping" at friends</li><li>• Teeth grinding or jaw clenching</li><li>• Increased smoking, alcohol or other drug use</li><li>• Stuttering or other speech difficulties</li><li>• Increased or decreased appetite</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tight muscles</li><li>• Cold or sweaty hands</li><li>• Headaches</li><li>• Back or neck problems</li><li>• Sleep disturbances</li><li>• Stomach distress</li><li>• More colds and infections</li><li>• Fatigue</li><li>• Rapid breathing or pounding heart</li></ul>

## Is all stress bad?

NO!! Positive stress adds anticipation and excitement to life. We all thrive under a certain amount of stress. Deadlines, competitions, confrontations, and even our frustrations and sorrows add depth and enrichment to our lives. Our goal is not to eliminate stress but to learn how to manage it and use it to help us, perhaps even learn to enjoy it!

Insufficient stress acts as a depressant and may leave us feeling bored or dejected. On the other hand, excessive stress may leave us feeling overwhelmed. What we need to do is find the optimal level of stress which will individually motivate but not overwhelm each of us.

## How can I tell what is optimal stress for me?

There is no single level of stress that is optimal for all people. We are all individual creatures with unique requirements. As such, what is distressing to one may be a joy to another. Even when we agree that a particular event is distressing, we are likely to differ in our physiological and psychological responses to it.

The person who loves to be involved in many facets of campus & community life and likes to be involved with many projects at once would be stressed if their life was stable and routine. On the other hand, the person who thrives under stable conditions would very likely be stressed if their life became exceptionally busy and complex. Also, our personal stress requirements and the amount which we can tolerate before we become distressed changes with our age, life situation, health and many other factors.

## What are some tips for optimizing my stress level?

- ✓ Take a Deep Breath
- ✓ Organize Yourself/Don't Overcommit
- ✓ Watch out for Stress Signals
- ✓ Talk it Out with Others
- ✓ Talk it Out with Yourself
- ✓ Monitor Your Physical Comfort
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Feed and Rest Yourself Well
- ✓ Laugh
- ✓ Know Your Limits
- ✓ Control What You Can and Let Go of the Rest
- ✓ Have a Good Cry
- ✓ Avoid Self Medication
- ✓ Surround Yourself with Great People

## Need additional help?

Everyone now and again struggles with keeping their stress at an optimal level. Even the best athletes, artists and dancers benefit from coaching to enhance or recover their skills. Sometimes you may need some coaching too. If you've identified the sources of stress in your life and practiced some personalized strategies, but continue to have difficulties in managing stress, a smart step would be to seek assistance using University Counseling Services (UCS) as a starting point. UCS is available to provide a free one time consultation to all faculty and staff in order to help them find an appropriate referral for mental health treatment in the community. You may contact UCS to speak with a staff member for a referral or you can access the referral guide at <http://ucs.truman.edu/agencies.asp>.

**“Stress need not be a negative factor in your life. An increase in stress increases the adrenalin and energy in your body. Use this energy to make changes, overcome challenges and put stress to work for you.”**

**"Common Questions About Stress Management" was written for Truman State University UCS by Brian Krylowicz, Ph.D.**

Material was adapted from:

1. "Stress Management" University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Counseling Center; 2. "Managing Stress" University of Texas at Austin Counseling & Mental Health Center; 3. "Stress Management" SUNY at Buffalo Counseling Center; 4. "Top Ten Strategies for Wildly Effective Stress Management" University of North Carolina Counseling & Psychological Services.