**Skills for Success:**

**STRESS MANAGEMENT**

**Objectives:**
1. Connect with peers
2. Learn about the CC services
3. Identify ways in which you’re feeling stressed
4. Discover how your peers’ stress is similar to and different from your own
5. Understand how stress can be beneficial
6. Learn general strategies and techniques that can decrease your stress level
7. Generate ideas about how you can decrease the stress level in your life

**Take home messages...**

1. 
2. 
3. 
Coping with the Stress of College Life

What is Stress?
Stress is a person’s response to any situation or event that requires adjustment or change. We often think of stress only in terms of negative events, but stressors can be positive as well. Stress is a natural response to a threatening situation. The result has more to do with the interpretation than it does with the stressor itself. For example, one student may see failing an exam as a warning to seek help while another student sees this event as a terminal blow to his or her life plans.

How is College Stressful?
During their college years students experience constant challenge and demand for adjustment and change. Along with academic pressures, students are seeking independence and autonomy from their parents and responsibility for themselves, acceptance from their peers in a world of mixed values, and more intimate relationships. When we experience stress, most of us rely on our support systems to help us cope with or resolve the situation. Most students attend college away from their family, hometown, friends, local hangouts, etc. Thus, they experience the developmental and academic stressors of college life at a time when they are separated from most of their support systems.

How Does Stress Affect You?
We experience the effects of stress physically, emotionally, behaviorally and mentally. Physically, the body reacts to threat with an increased adrenalin flow. Muscles become tensed and heart rate and respiration are increased. Emotionally, you may experience anxiety, irritability, sadness and depression, or extreme happiness and exhilaration. Behaviorally, you may experience reduced physical coordination and control, sleeplessness, and irrational behavior. Mentally, you may have a severe reduction in your ability to concentrate, store information in memory and solve mental problems. "Test anxiety" is due to the brain’s reduced ability to process information while under severe stress. This can be of particular concern to college students.

How Do I Eliminate Stress?
Stress is a necessary part of life. We cannot and would not want to eliminate all sources of stress. Students can, however, learn to cope more effectively with stressors by employing effective physical, behavioral and cognitive coping strategies.

Physically, one strategy is to learn to relax. With relaxation training, which is offered at University Counseling Services, students can learn to counteract the stress response and enhance their ability to think more clearly. Meditation is another effective method of achieving relaxation. Regular exercise is another physical coping and stress reduction technique. Getting an adequate amount of sleep is another technique.

There are a number of behavioral strategies which can be used to reduce the intensity of stress. Time management is a particularly effective method. Making a schedule of available time and prioritizing demands can put some sense of structure into a seemingly overwhelming semester. It is also important to establish realistic and achievable goals and to maintain a balance between academic, work, and social commitments.

One of the most important strategies for reducing stress is to examine the thoughts and beliefs we have about what is causing the stress. Putting the situation into its proper perspective reduces the perceived threat that it poses. Ask yourself, "What is the worst that could happen?" Usually the "worst" is not as bad as it first seems.

Finally, perhaps the best coping strategy is to talk over your problems with a good friend or counselor. Discussing your problems with someone can greatly reduce the tension you feel and provide you with valuable insight into the situation. University Counseling Services has a professional staff of therapists who can help you cope with the demands of academic life.

Adapted from Texas State University

For more information about self-care, visit

UMBC Counseling Center
Division of Student Affairs
www.umbc.edu/counseling
(410) 455-2472
Some Stress Warning Signals
Here is a list of some, but not all, possible reactions to stress. Check all of the symptoms you experience when you feel stressed. Notice that symptoms of stress can affect us physically, behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. You can learn to recognize these symptoms or signals in yourself before stress gets too far out of hand. When you recognize your unique signals, that's the time to take action!

### Physical Symptoms
- Headaches
- Indigestion
- Stomach Aches
- Sweaty Palms
- Cold Hands, Feet
- Dizziness
- Easily Fatigued
- Muscle Tension
- Back Pain
- Tight Neck, Shoulders
- Racing Heart
- Shallow Breathing
- Restlessness
- Ringing in the Ears
- Constipation
- Diarrhea

### Behavioral Symptoms
- Excess Smoking
- Bossiness
- Eating Too Much or Too Little
- Critical Attitude of Others
- Short-Tempered
- Procrastination
- Sleeping Too Much or Too Little
- Driving Too Fast
- Grinding Teeth
- Overuse of Alcohol
- Inability to Finish Tasks
- Nail Biting
- Fidgeting

### Emotional Symptoms
- Bothered by Unimportant Things
- Nervousness, Anxiety
- Boredom
- Edginess
- Irritability
- Feeling "Burned Out"
- Feeling Powerless
- Crying Easily
- Overwhelming Pressure
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Unhappiness, Depression
- Moodiness
- Feeling Helpless

### Cognitive Symptoms
- Trouble Thinking Clearly
- Difficulty with Concentration
- Forgetfulness
- Lack of Creativity
- Expecting Too Much From Others
- Inability to Make Decisions
- Constant Worry
- Loss of Humor
- Being Self-Critical
- Being Pessimistic

Adapted from Georgia Southern University

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**Vulnerability to Stress**

Certain aspects of our habits, our lifestyles, and our environments can make each of us more or less vulnerable to the negative effects of stress. How vulnerable are you to stress?

For each of the following 20 items, rate how much time each applies to you.

(Please choose one category only for each item.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I eat at least one hot, balanced meal each day.</td>
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<td>2. I get 7-8 hours of sleep, at least 4 nights a week.</td>
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<td>3. I give and receive affection every day.</td>
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<td>4. I have at least 1 relative within 50 miles on whom I can rely.</td>
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<td>5. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.</td>
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<td>6. I smoke less than a half a pack of cigarettes a day.</td>
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<td>7. I drink fewer than 5 alcoholic drinks a week.</td>
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<td>8. I am the appropriate weight for my height.</td>
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<td>9. I have an income adequate to meet my basic needs.</td>
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<td>10. I get strength from my religious/spiritual beliefs.</td>
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<td>11. I regularly attend club or social activities.</td>
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<td>12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.</td>
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</table>
**Vulnerability to Stress [cont.]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For each of the following 20 items, rate how much time each applies to you. (Please choose one category only for each item.)</th>
<th>Almost</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. I have at least 1 friend in whom I confide about personal matters.</td>
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<td>14. I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, teeth, etc.).</td>
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<td>15. I am able to speak openly about my feelings when angry or worried.</td>
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<td>16. I have regular conversations with my housemates about domestic problems.</td>
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<td>17. I do something fun at least once a week.</td>
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<td>18. I am able to organize my time effectively.</td>
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<td>19. I drink fewer than 3 caffeine drinks a day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. I take quiet time for myself during the day.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Vulnerability to Stress: Scoring**

Add up the total score for all 20 items using the following guideline:

- "Almost Always" = 0
- "Usually" = 1
- "Sometimes" = 2
- "Almost Never" = 3
- "Never" = 4

What your score means:

- 0-10 Indicates you have excellent resistance to the vulnerability of stress
- 11-29 Indicates you have little vulnerability to stress
- 30-49 Indicates you have some vulnerability to stress
- 50-74 Indicates you have serious vulnerability to stress
- 75-80 Indicates you have extreme vulnerability to stress

Adapted from Georgia Southern University
5 Step Guide to Stress Management

1. Determine whether you have too much stress in your life.
2. Identify the stressor(s).
3. Determine the reason for the stressor(s).
   ~ What is threatening/demanding about this situation?
   ~ How much control do I have over this situation?
   ~ What resources/skills am I lacking?
4. Select and apply an appropriate stress management tool.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of your efforts to reduce stress.

Tools for Stress Management

- Time Management
- Engage in pleasurable activities
- Take care of your body, mind, spirit
- Establish/use a support network
- Communicate your concerns to trusted others
- Learn how to relax

Quick Tips for Relaxation

Take a deep breath and exhale slowly
Splash cold water on your face
Count to ten
Hummmmm or sing a song
Close your eyes and imagine something peaceful
Take a break
Sigh
Say something positive about yourself
Walk around
Stretch your neck, shoulders, and legs
Get some fresh air
Scream loudly (where and when appropriate)
Smile or make a funny face
Ask someone for a hug

If you would like additional assistance with these or other areas, contact UMBC-Counseling Services at (410) 455-2472
Relaxation Exercises

Breathing Exercise (Counting Breath)

Rest palms on abdomen. Picture a pouch, balloon, or bottle under palms. Inhale (approximately 2-3 seconds) and imagine the pouch filling with air and expanding. The rib cage and upper chest will systematically rise after the abdomen. Pause and hold breath (approximately 1-2 seconds) after inflation. Slowly exhale (approximately 2-4 seconds, 1-2 seconds longer than inhalation) and imagine the pouch emptying. The chest, rib cage, and abdomen should recede. Brief (1-2 second) pause before reinhalation. Repeat several times daily.

Deep Breathing (5 minutes)
1. Select a comfortable sitting position.
2. Close your eyes, and direct your attention to your own breathing process.
3. Think about nothing but your breathing, let it flow in and out of your body.
4. Say to yourself: "I am relaxing, breathing smoothly and rhythmically. Fresh oxygen is flowing in and out of my body. I feel calm, renewed, and refreshed."

Mental Relaxation (5 to 10 minutes)
1. Select a comfortable sitting or reclining position.
2. Close your eyes, and think about a place that you have been before that you found to be a perfect place for mental and physical relaxation. This should be a quiet environment, such as the ocean, the mountains, a forest, a panoramic view, etc. If you can't think of a real place, then create one.
3. Now imagine that you are actually in your ideal relaxation place. Imagine that you are seeing all of the colors, hearing all of the sounds, smelling all of the different scents. Just lie back and enjoy your soothing, rejuvenating environment.
4. Feel the peacefulness, the calmness, and imagine your whole body and mind being renewed and refreshed.
5. After 5 or 10 minutes, slowly open your eyes and stretch. You have the realization that you may instantly return to your relaxation place whenever you desire, and experience a peacefulness and calmness in body and mind.

In all cases it is important to keep your attention focused. If external thoughts or distractions wander in, let them drift out. If necessary, visualize attaching the thoughts to objects and then move the objects out of your attention. You may find that your attention keeps breaking as you worry that time is running out. In this case it may be easiest to set an alarm to go off when you should stop meditating. You will find that as you practice meditation your attention will improve.

Some Brief Relaxation Exercises
For all of these exercises, it is best to be seated, eyes closed, feet flat on the floor or crossed at the ankles and hands resting comfortably in the lap. Begin each exercise with a deep breath that you let out gently. As you let it out, feel yourself beginning to relax already. Gentle Arousal: after the exercise, slowly and gently activate by breathing a little more deeply, wiggling your fingers and toes, and opening your eyes at your own rate.

- Tense-Relax. Clench your fists. While keeping them clenched, pull your forearms tightly up against your upper arms. While keeping those muscles tense, tense all the muscles in your legs. While keeping all those tense, clench your jaws and shut your eyes fairly tight - not too tightly. Now, while holding all those tense, take a deep breath and hold it for 5 seconds . . . . Then, let everything go all at once. Feel yourself letting go of all your tensions. Just enjoy that feeling for a minute, as your muscles let go more and more. Actually, if we had a finely-tuned electromyography hooked up to you measuring the level of tension in your muscles, it would show that you relax more and more for up to 20 minutes. Just enjoy focusing, gently, on the letting go. (Arouse gently).

- Heaviness and Warmth. Just imagine that your feet and legs are getting heavier and heavier and warmer and warmer. It's almost as if you are wearing some lead boots. Feet and legs, heavy and warm, heavy and warm. Now, imagine your stomach and the whole central portion of your body getting warm . . . warm and relaxed. My forehead is cool . . . cool . . . relaxed and cool. And my breathing is regular . . . easy and regular. Just feel the warm and heaviness spread all over the body. (Arouse gently).

- Breathing Your Body Away. Gently focus your attention on your feet and legs. Be aware of all the sensations from your feet and legs. Now, inhale a long, slow breath... as you do, breathe in all the sensations from your feet and legs. In your mind's eye, imagine that you are erasing this part of your body. Now, as you exhale, breathe out all those sensations. Once again, breathe in your feet and legs, and exhale it from your body, so that, in your mind, you can see only from your hips up. Now, with another long breath, breathe in all the parts of your body to your neck, and, as you exhale, breathe it away.
Guidelines for Practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation (Or Any Form of Deep Relaxation)

The following guidelines will help you make the most use of progressive muscle relaxation. They are also applicable to any form of deep relaxation you undertake to practice regularly, including self-hypnosis, guided visualization, and meditation.

1. Practice at least 20 minutes per day. Two 20-minute periods are preferable. Once a day is mandatory for obtaining generalization effects. (You may want to begin your practice with 30-minute periods. As you gain skill in relaxation technique, you will find that the amount of time you need to experience the relaxation response will decrease.)

2. Find a quiet location to practice where you won't be distracted. Don't permit the phone to ring while you're practicing. Use a fan or air conditioner to blot out background noise, if necessary.

3. Practice at regular times. On awakening, before retiring, or before a meal is generally the best time. A consistent daily relaxation routine will increase the likelihood of generalization effects.

4. Practice on an empty stomach. Food digestion after meals will tend to disrupt deep relaxation.

5. Assume a comfortable position. Your entire body, including your head, should be supported. Lying down on a sofa or bed and sitting in a reclining chair are two ways of supporting your body most completely. (When lying down, you may want to place a pillow beneath your knees for further support.) Sitting up is preferable to lying down if you are feeling tired and sleepy. It's advantageous to experience the full depth of the relaxation response consciously, without going to sleep.

6. Loosen any tight garments and take off shoes, watch, glasses, contact lenses, jewelry, and so on.

7. Make a decision not to worry about anything. Give yourself permission to put aside the concerns of the day. Allow taking care of yourself and having peace of mind to take precedence over any of your worries. (Success with relaxation depends on giving peace of mind high priority in your overall scheme of values.)

- **Breathing Your Body Away [cont.]** Now, beginning with your fingers, breathe in your fingers, hands, wrists and arms, and exhale them away. Now, your neck and head... as you breathe in, imagine your neck and head being erased, and now breathe them away. Let's go back over the whole body in one breath, beginning with the feet. A long slow breath in, and as you do, erase any little parts that still remain. Now, a long slow breath out, as you exhale all the remaining parts. Now, just sit quietly for a minute and enjoy feeling yourself relax deeper and deeper. (Arouse gently)

- **A Favorite Scene, Place, or Person.** As you're sitting quietly, recall, in your mind, the most relaxing thought you can. Perhaps it's a favorite place (a vacation spot or favorite retreat of some sort), or it may be a person with whom you feel especially at peace, or perhaps some ideal scene (a meadow, mountaintop or undersea panorama, for instance) - choose whatever works for you. Take a few seconds to get that in mind. Now let yourself relax and feel at home within that image. Allow all the good feelings that the person or place inspires in you to wash over your mind and body. Let them take over your whole awareness. If your thoughts wander, just take them gently back to that peaceful, relaxing world. Enjoy it for a few minutes. (Arouse gently)

- **Cool Air In, Warm Air Out.** With your eyes closed, and while relaxing quietly, gently focus on the end of your nose. As you breathe in, feel the air coming in the tip of your nose. As you breathe out, feel the air coming out of the tip of your nose. Notice that the air coming in is cooler than the air going out. Quietly focus on the cool air coming in, and the warm air going out. If your attention wanders, just gently bring it back to the tip of your nose. (Arouse gently)

- **Focus on a Word.** Pick some word which has "good" vibrations associated with it for you - a word which you associate with relaxation, comfort, peace. It could be a word such as "serenity," "cool," "joy," or "free" etc. Now, just let that word hold the center of your thoughts. As your mind wanders to more stressful thoughts, gently bring it back to that word. After awhile, perhaps your mind will drift to other gentler, restful thoughts. If so, just let it wander... and if and when it does drift to stressful thoughts, bring it back to your original word. (Arouse gently)

- **Something for Use Anywhere.** With practice, you will become more adept at relaxing while awake, anywhere. As you do, here's a way to let yourself relax while going about your day. You can do it while walking, sitting in class, taking a test, on a date, etc. First, smile. Yes, smile, to remind yourself that you don't actually have all the cares of the world on your shoulders - only a few of them. Then, take a long deep breath, and let it out. Now, take a second long deep breath and as you let it out, feel yourself releasing the tensions in your mind and in your body. Just let yourself relax more and more, as you continue whatever you were doing.

Adapted from Kansas State University, Texas Woman's University
Once you are comfortably supported in a quiet place, follow the detailed instructions below:

1. To begin, take three deep abdominal breaths, exhaling slowly each time. As you exhale, imagine that tension throughout your body begins to flow away.

2. Clench your fists. Hold for 7 to 10 seconds and then release for 15 to 20 seconds. Use these same time intervals for all other muscle groups.

3. Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up toward your shoulders and "making a muscle" with both arms. Hold...and then relax.

4. Tighten your triceps - the muscles on the undersides of your upper arms - by extending your arms out straight and locking your elbows. Hold...then relax.

5. Tense the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as far as you can. Hold and then relax. Imagine your forehead muscles becoming smooth and limp as they relax.

6. Tense the muscles around your eyes by clenching your eyelids tightly shut. Hold...and then relax. Imagine sensations of deep relaxation spreading all around the area of your eyes.

7. Tighten your jaw by opening your mouth so widely that you stretch the muscles around the hinges of your jaw. Hold...and then relax. Let your lips part and allow your jaw to hang loose.

8. Tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by pulling your head way back; as if you were going to touch your head to your back (be gentle with this muscle group to avoid injury). Focus only on tensing the muscles in your neck. Hold...and then relax. (Since this area is often especially tight, it's good to do the tense-relax cycle twice.)

9. Take a few deep breaths and tune in to the weight of your head sinking into whatever surface it is resting on.

10. Tighten your shoulders by raising them up as if you were going to touch your ears. Hold...and then relax.

11. Tighten the muscles around your shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back as if you were going to touch them together. Hold the tension in your shoulder blades...and then relax. Since this area is often especially tense, you might repeat the tense-relax sequence twice.
12. Tighten the muscles of your chest by taking in a deep breath. Hold for up to ten seconds...and then release slowly. Imagine any excess tension in your chest flowing away with the exhalation.

13. Tighten your stomach muscles by sucking your stomach in. Hold...and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen.

14. Tighten your lower back by arching it up. (You can omit this exercise if you have lower back pain.) Hold...and then relax.

15. Tighten your buttocks by pulling them together. Hold...and then relax. Imagine the muscles in your hips going loose and limp.

16. Squeeze the muscles in your thighs all the way down to your knees. You will probably have to tighten your hips along with your thighs, since the thigh muscles attach at the pelvis. Hold...and then relax. Feel you thigh muscles smoothing out and relaxing completely.

17. Tighten your calf muscles by pulling you toes toward you (flex carefully to avoid cramps). Hold...and then relax.

18. Tighten your feet by curling your toes downward. Hold...and then relax.

19. Mentally scan your body for any residual tension. If a particular area remains tense, repeat one or two tense-relax cycles for that group of muscles.

20. Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading throughout your body, starting at your head and gradually penetrating every muscle group all the way down to your toes.

The entire progressive muscle relaxation sequence should take you 20 to 30 minutes the first time. With practice, you may decrease the time needed to 15 to 20 minutes. You might want to record the above exercises on an audiocassette to expedite your early practice sessions. Or you may wish to obtain a professionally made tape of the progressive muscle relaxation exercise. Some people always prefer to use a tape, while others have the exercise so well learned after a few weeks of practice that they prefer doing them from memory.

Remember - regular practice of progressive muscle relaxation once a day will produce a significant reduction in your overall level of anxiety. It will also reduce the frequency and intesnity of panic attacks. Finally, regular practice will reduce anticipatory anxiety that may arise in the course of systematically exposing yourself to phobic situations.

Adapted from: The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook by Edmund J. Bourne, Ph.D., 4th Ed, 2005

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Self-Help: Self Care

Some people may think self care or nurturing is just for the fragile, the "weak willed" or "wimps." It certainly couldn't be for strong, ambitious college men and women. Actually, it is a vital part of maintaining good health and a vibrant life. It's not just an occasional manicure or an afternoon off. Building up a repertoire of reliable self care habits now can affect your quality of life today, and in the future. It's not a manicure, then what is it? Self care is a way of living that incorporates behaviors that help you to be refreshed, replenish your personal motivation, and grow as a person. It's the equivalent of keeping your car filled with gas so that you are ready to "motor" when you want to go somewhere!

Three Main Components of Self Care

Here are some examples of self care in action:

Physical

Moving your body, whether in some structured sport or exercise, or just dancing around, stretching, walking over to the park to feed the ducks. Give it something good to eat, that doesn't come in a bag or box from a drive through. Cook it yourself - take time for yourself, don't just do whatever is the fastest thing. Get a massage or buy something to wear that has great texture and color. Go to the doctor when you are sick.

Mental/Emotional

Be accepting, kind, easy to forgive yourself - how would you treat a good friend who needed some TLC? Take every 3rd "I should" out of your vocabulary and say "no" at least once a week! Develop reasonable expectations. This doesn't mean the end of motivation or working hard. The point is to stretch yourself, not break yourself. Set limits if that is what you need - and keep in mind, overindulgence is not nurturing either.
Get enough people in your life – people you can laugh with, share that pizza with, talk to seriously when an occasion comes up, people who respect you and don’t expect you to do all the work of keeping up the friendship or relationship. Do a variety of things for fun and stimulation, some that you can do with others, and some that you do alone. Having trouble coming up with an idea? Remember things you liked when you were a child, but have long ago given up. Get the creative juices flowing – paint, draw, get out the hammer and nails and construct something.

**Spiritual**

Develop a practice that exercises your mind and soul, however you define them. Whether it is a routine of prayer, meditation or sharing in group experiences that build up your spirit and faith with like-minded others, exploration of yourself helps you to identify your values and priorities. Reading wisdom literature and discussing your impressions with peers can deepen your knowledge of yourself and the universe, and help you to find a way to contribute to the well being of others.

**Dirty Rumors about Self Care**

*Isn’t it Selfish to Put Myself First?*

Some people might consider self care the territory of the self-involved, who have little consideration for others around them. Wrong! Taking care of your needs lays in a balanced, steady place on the middle of a continuum, with intense selfishness on one end, and extreme sacrificing what you need or want for others’ sake on the other end.

In fact, nurturing oneself is a key factor in being able to keep up strength, resolve, motivation and inner resources to continue to give to others, whether it be your immediate partner, family and other important people in your inner circle, or the larger community around you. You might consider that doing too much for others could deprive them of the opportunity to learn how to provide their own self care.

**Meditation and Relaxation**

Meditation is a very effective method of relaxation. The idea of meditation is to focus your thoughts on one relaxing thing for a sustained period of time. This rests your mind by diverting it from thinking about the problems that have caused stress. It gives your body time to relax and recuperate and clear away toxins that may have built up through stress and mental or physical activity. Meditation slows breathing, reduces blood pressure, helps muscles relax, gives the body time to eliminate lactic acid and other waste products, reduces anxiety, eliminates stressful thoughts, helps with clear thinking, improves focus and concentration, reduces irritability and reduces stress headaches.

**Meditation Techniques**

The essence of meditation is to quiet your thoughts by focusing completely on just one thing. Unlike hypnosis, which is more of a passive experience, meditation is an active process which seeks to exclude outside thoughts by concentrating all mental faculties on the subject of meditation. In all cases it helps if your body is relaxed. Meditation should practiced in a position that you can comfortably sustain for a period of time (20 - 30 minutes is ideal). Sitting in a comfortable chair, lying on a bed, or the lotus position are a few possibilities. A number of different focuses of concentration may be used. Which one you choose is a matter of personal taste. Some of these are detailed below:

- **Breathing**: A useful method may be to focus your attention on your breathing. Concentrate on breaths in and out. You can accompany this by counting your breaths using the numbers 0 to 9. You can visualize images of the numbers changing with each breath. Alternatively you could visualize health and relaxation flowing into your body when you inhale, and stress or pain flowing out when you exhale.

- **Focusing on an object**: Here you completely focus attention on examination of a particular object. Look at it in immense detail for the entire meditation. Examine the shape, color differences, texture, temperature and movement of the object. Objects often used are flowers, candle flames or flowing designs. However, you can use other objects equally effectively (e.g. alarm clocks, desk lamps, or even coffee mugs!)

- **Focusing on a sound**: Some people like to focus on sounds. The classic example is the Sanskrit word 'Om', meaning 'perfection'. Whether or not this is practical depends on your lifestyle.

- **Imagery**: This can be a very refreshing and pleasant way of meditating. Here you create a mental image of a pleasant and relaxing place in your mind. Involve all your senses in the imagery: see the place, hear the sounds, smell the aromas, feel the temperature and the movement of the wind. Enjoy the location in your mind.
That may be just the ticket for some nights, but do you have enough nurturing choices for the other nights of the week? While not discounting the value of building up your knowledge of 1950's television trivia, the consequences of making this a nightly habit might include indigestion, sleep loss, weight gain, oversleeping in the morning, a feeling of grogginess and little energy the next day.

Maybe you could use some alternatives? Perhaps you could use the comfort of a cozy chat with a special person, or some quiet time with your mind engaged - not just checked out.

Don't Have Time to Take Care of Myself!

If you do a "self care audit," you will likely find that some of the time you spend on activities now, could be better spent "recharging your own battery." Studies show that mental acuity decreases after a short period of concentrated study. You likely need more true breaks, not just time killers stolen from study time which you rarely devote to anything really relaxing or satisfying recreation.

All the time management/life goal experts say put your self care into your schedule, just like another class or job shift. How many times do we have to hear "make a commitment to yourself" before we believe it?

My "self care" comes on the tube at 11:30 every night and is accompanied by a large pepperoni - isn't that enough?

Do I Have to Do It Alone?

No - the best balance is achieved with a combination of time shared with others, as well as some time alone. The attitude of looking for opportunities to practice self care can go with you almost anywhere.

The therapists at UMBC University Counseling Services are specially trained to help college students put together individually-tailored self care plans that are easy to stick to. Stop by UCS to find out more about our services, sign up for a workshop or make an appointment to meet with a therapist individually.

52 Proven Stress Reducers

1. Get up fifteen minutes earlier in the morning. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful.

2. Prepare for the morning the evening before. Set the breakfast table, make lunches, put out the clothes you plan to wear, etc.

3. Don't rely on your memory. Make a list of what needs to be done, and check it off as you do it.

4. Do nothing which, after being done, leads you to tell a lie.

5. Practice preventive maintenance. Your car, appliances, home, and relationships will be less likely to break down/fall apart "at the worst possible moment."

6. Be prepared to wait. A paperback can make a wait in a post office line almost pleasant.

7. Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.

8. Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank get below one-quarter full; keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of home staples; don't let your laundry get out of control; keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of home staples; don't wait until your last bus token or postage stamp to buy more; etc.

9. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this weekend.

10. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this weekend.

11. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this weekend.

12. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this weekend.

Adapted from University of Texas at Dallas
16. Ask questions. Taking a few moments to repeat back directions, what someone expects of you, etc., can save hours. (The old "the hurrier I go, the behinder I get," idea.)

17. Say "No!" Saying "no" to extra projects, social activities, and invitations you know you don't have the time or energy for takes practice, self-respect, and a belief that everyone, everyday, needs quiet time to relax and be alone.

18. Unplug your phone. Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep, or read without interruption? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect. (The possibility of there being a terrible emergency in the next hour or so is almost nil.) Or use an answering machine.

19. Turn "needs" into preferences. Our basic physical needs translate into food, water, and keeping warm. Everything else is a preference. Don't get attached to preferences.

20. Simplify, simplify, simplify...

21. Make friends with non-worriers. Nothing can get you into the habit of worrying faster than associating with chronic worrywarts.

22. Get up and stretch periodically if your job requires that you sit for extended periods.

23. Wear earplugs. If you need to find quiet at home, pop in some earplugs.

24. Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.

25. Create order out of chaos. Organize your home and workspace so that you always know exactly where things are. Put things away where they belong and you won't have to go through the stress of losing things.

26. When feeling stressed, most people tend to breathe short, shallow breaths. When you breathe like this, stale air is not expelled, oxidation of the tissues is incomplete, and muscle tension frequently results. Check your breathing throughout the day, and before, during, and after high-pressure situations. If you find your stomach muscles knotted and your breathing is shallow, relax all your muscles and take several deep, slow breaths.

27. Writing your thoughts and feelings down (in a journal, or on paper to be thrown away) can help you clarify things and can give you a renewed perspective

28. Try the following yoga technique whenever you feel the need to relax. Inhale deeply through your nose to the count of eight. Then, with lips puckered, exhale very slowly through your mouth to the count of 16, or for as long as you can. Concentrate on the long sighing sound and feel the tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.

29. Inoculate yourself against a feared event. Example: before speaking in public, take time to go over every part of the experience in your mind. Imagine what you'll wear, what the audience will look like, how you will present your talk, what the questions will be and how you will answer them, etc. Visualize the experience the way you would have it be. You'll likely find that when the time comes to make the actual presentation, it will be "old hat" and much of your anxiety will have fled.

30. When the stress of having to get a job done gets in the way of getting the job done, diversion - a voluntary change in activity and/or environment - may be just what you need.

31. Talk it out. Discussing your problems with a trusted friend can help clear your mind of confusion so you can concentrate on problem solving.

32. One of the most obvious ways to avoid unnecessary stress is to select an environment (work, home, leisure) which is in line with your personal needs and desires. If you hate desk jobs, don't accept a job which requires that you sit at a desk all day. If you hate to talk politics, don't associate with people who love to talk politics, etc.

33. Learn to live one day at a time.

34. Every day, do something you really enjoy.

35. Add an ounce of love to everything you do.

36. Take a hot bath or shower (or a cool one in summertime) to relieve tension.

37. Do something for somebody else.

38. Focus on understanding rather than on being understood; on loving rather than on being loved.

39. Do something that will improve your appearance. Looking better can help you feel better.
duly a realistic day. Avoid the tendency to schedule back-to-
appointments; allow time between appointments for a breath-
pell.
me more flexible. Some things are worth not doing perfectly
some issues are fine to compromise upon.
hate destructive self-talk: "I'm too old to . . .", "I'm too fat to . . .

your weekend time for a change of pace. If your work week is
and patterned, make sure there is action and time for sponta-
 builtin into your weekends. If your work week is fast-paced
full of people and deadlines, seek peace and solitude during
days off. Feel as if you aren't accomplishing anything at

? Tackle a job on the weekend which you can finish to your

try about the pennies and the dollars will take care of them-
's." That's another way of saying: take care of the today as best
can and the yesterdays and the tomorrows will take care of

one thing at a time. When you are with someone, be with that
on and with no one or nothing else. When you are busy with a
ct, concentrate on doing that project and forget about every-
else you have to do.

w yourself time - everyday - for privacy, quiet, and introspec-
 especially unpleasant task faces you, do it early in the day and
over with, then the rest of your day will be free of anxiety.

 to delegate responsibility to capable others.

 t forget to take a lunch break. Try to get away from your desk
ork area in body and mind, even if it's just for 15 or 20 minutes.
et about counting to 10. Count to 1,000 before doing someth-
ying anything that could make matters worse.

 e a forgiving view of events and people. Accept the fact that
ve in an imperfect world.

 e an optimistic view of the world. Believe that most people are
g the best they can.