



## ***COPING WITH STRESS IN COLLEGE***

Stress may be defined as an emotional, intellectual, or physical reaction to change or demands. The stress reaction prepares the mind and body to react to any situation that is new, threatening or exciting. The way a person handles stress determines whether it is helpful or harmful, and chronic unrelieved stress can cause headaches, backaches, loss of appetite, fatigue, depression and potentially serious physical problems.

As a college student you may face many changes and challenges that can be very stressful. You may experience problems with your roommates, pursue a demanding class load and face tough competition from classmates. Another stressful situation involves decision-making. Whether you are choosing your classes or your career, your available options may be confusing. Other common stressful situations include relationship problems, conflict with parents, and self-esteem and identity issues.

In adjusting to the stressful situations and the independent lifestyle of a college student, keep in mind three important concepts -- consequences, change, and cooperation. Every decision you make will have certain consequences. Just remember that even though the decisions you make will be up to you, the results aren't always as easily controlled. Whenever you find yourself facing a decision, think it through. Carefully consider the options and the consequences before you move forward, and your new independence should be manageable.

It is important to remember the key fact that things change. If you are unhappy at first with your life as a college student, don't give up. With each passing day, some of the hard new edges of the unfamiliar collegiate life will begin to smooth out. Many changes are under your control and the ability to adapt to change provides a great opportunity to learn skills for coping with stress.

Taking advantage of the cooperation and resources that can be found on campus is also another factor in controlling stress. There are offices to assist you with the academic, financial, and personal concerns common to college students. Although you may feel isolated sometimes, you do not have to feel alone.

Effective stress management includes healthy diet and exercise habits. Exercising gives you a break from the mental and emotional strain that you experience while helping to reduce physical tension. It will also increase your stamina and your overall physical well-being. In addition minimize such behaviors as overeating, excessive drinking, smoking, or using mood altering drugs -- all of which are detrimental to your health. Also, don't overwork yourself; all work and no play can cause you to feel stressed out, irritable and less motivated to study. Schedule time for rest, social activities, recreation and relaxation. With good health habits and effective techniques for coping with stress, you will be better able to handle the stressful situations that you encounter.

Don't let your college years "distress" you. Recognize situations that may cause stress, develop effective ways to manage stress and seek help if you need it.

*For more information or assistance:*

*USF students may call 974-2831;*

*Faculty and staff may call 974-5469*