Success Over Stress
Coping

Slide 1: Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define coping and the three main coping techniques
- Describe various coping styles, recognize your current style, and identify your preferred style
- Explain the three stages of coping
- Provide examples of various coping resources

Slide 2: Coping Toolbox

The bummer about coping with stress is that there’s no magic pill that works for everyone. But, that’s the beauty of it, too. What doesn’t work for one person works wonderfully for another. Similarly, what doesn’t help in one situation might be very effective in another situation.

Think of it this way: there are many tips, tricks, techniques, and tools you can utilize to help you manage your stress. You need to evaluate and try various options, decide what works for you, and discard what doesn’t. It’s kind of like putting tools in a toolbox. Hopefully, by the end of this course, you’ll have added many tools to your own stress management toolbox. You’ll have some that help you prevent stress, some that assist you in changing your perception of it, and others that keep you healthy in the midst of it. We’ll introduce tools to target each phase of the stress process.

Slide 3: What Is Stress?

When it comes to coping, many terms and definitions are floating around, so we need be clear about the definitions we’ll use in this course. We will define coping as the constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific internal and/or external demands that are perceived as stressful. It’s a broad definition that can encompass virtually everything we might do to reduce or mitigate stress.

We would also like to define a few other terms you’ll hear (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003):

- **Coping Responses** or **Coping Instances** are what you think and do as you deal with stressors. These may be positive or not-so-positive.
A Coping Style is a repeated pattern of dealing with demands and is any pattern which can be distinguished in an individual’s coping over time and across situations. Again, this could be positive or not-so-positive.

Coping Resources or Strategies are factors that influence the way people appraise stress and react to threat and challenge and can include skills, abilities, predispositions, behaviors, social resources, thought patterns, or health behaviors. These buffers or moderators are anything you might use or do to help you manage your stress.

We’ll focus on each of these terms, but much of our time will be spent on cultivating resources and developing techniques and strategies. Let’s explore those issues a bit further.

Slide 4: VIDEO: Handling It?

How do you handle stress?

I paint. I paint, um, I could write. I could go watch a movie. I could talk to a friend.

I have a pair of rollerblades and I toss in my headphones and campus is beautiful, especially around this time.

Definitely music. That helps a lot.

I listen to music because it helps with the dance of the movement and it gets me more in the flow.

Dancing. It's allows us to be expressive and then I love music, so uh, it's kind of, you know, you can enjoy something like music and then express yourself. It's just, and then the physical activity of it as well.

Me and my roommate play cards, typically every night, just to try to take the half-hour, hour off of studying and just kinda take a step back.

Just my own alone time. Just me. I feel ten times better.

One of the main things I've done to help cope with stress is definitely keeping a agenda, a planner.

Just making a list of what I have to do, like, makes me feel a hundred times better.

The best way for me to deal with stress is um just doing something physical, like, going, working out.
Exercising, just hanging out with friends. I think those are like the best ways to relieve your stress.

Deep breathing exercises, actually. And I try to have quiet time throughout the day.

Take five-minute breaks. Listen to some music. Go get some food. You know, get that energy level back up before I keep going at it.

**Slide 5: Coping Families**

You have a lot of control over what coping resources, techniques, and strategies you choose to use. As we’ve said before, one of the keys to successful stress management is figuring out which ones work best for you. Another key issue is figuring out which resources, techniques, and strategies work best for each given stressor. Some coping resources work at the beginning of the stress process to prevent a stressor or change your perception. Other resources can help you calm down during perceived stress. Yet others can better prepare you to deal with the effects of strain so that you can avoid long-term outcomes. Certain resources or techniques might work better in certain circumstances than others and part of the trick is finding out which ones work best for you, depending on the situation.

Generally, we can divide coping resources and techniques into twelve broad “families” (Skinner, et al., 2003). We’re going to discuss the six most positive, adaptive families of coping, in this lesson. The six remaining families are maladaptive; in other words, they could have negative outcomes and we will discuss those in another lesson. The six positive families are:

- Problem solving
- Information Seeking
- Self-reliance
- Support-seeking
- Accommodation
- Negotiation

**Slide 6: Problem Solving**

*Problem solving* is all the things you do to solve the problem or reduce stress. This includes strategizing, planning, and taking constructive action, such as: talking to your roommate about a behavior that bothers you; getting up 10 minutes earlier so you’re no longer late for class; talking to your professor about a concept that’s hard to understand; or successfully managing your money to avoid financial stress. These behaviors tend to be very effective at the beginning of the stress process.
Slide 7: Information Seeking

Information Seeking is gathering facts, data, and opinions to help you work through a situation and may involve things like reading about or researching potential solutions, observing similar situations, or asking others for advice and opinions. From a student perspective, this might mean reading content on a reputable website about an issue you’re experiencing; observing the study habits of successful students to learn new strategies; or talking to your advisor about degree or career plans. These resources can target both the perception and the action parts of the stress process.

Resource Link:
Databases to get you started

Slide 8: Self-Reliance

Self-reliance involves utilizing those resources and strategies through which you accept responsibility for your coping actions and reactions. This includes emotion regulation, behavior regulation, and emotional expression and approach which might be in the form of positive self-talk, self-soothing, expressing emotions in a balanced manner, or utilizing appropriate behavior. Examples of things like this may include calmly talking with a friend about a disagreement, rather than screaming, crying, and striking out at her; taking deep breaths before a big speech; exercising to blow off a little steam and clear your mind; or even doing a relaxing visualization exercise to calm yourself. Often, these behaviors come into play after you’ve already perceived stress and are experiencing strain.

Slide 9: Support-Seeking

Support-Seeking is using available social resources to help you manage your stress. This involves cultivating relationships, accessing others for comfort or help, and even seeking spiritual support from other people. Examples may include maintaining contact with your advisor so that she knows you and can provide guidance when you have questions or concerns; turning to close family members or friends for support when you need it; or talking to a faith leader about deeper issues. These strategies can be utilized at any stage of the stress process.

Slide 10: Accommodation
Accommodation is flexibly adjusting to life’s ups and downs. These strategies might include changing your thinking about a situation, accepting situations you can’t change, or even minimizing the real or imagined impact of something. For example,

- You abandon your perfectionist tendencies and decide that a B is not a sign of failure
- You realize that not everything in life is an emergency and instead, choose to approach issues in a more realistic manner
- You adapt to a different class schedule each semester
- You recognize that the world will still turn even if you are a few minutes late for class or an appointment—though we don’t recommend you make this a habit

These behaviors target the perception phase of the stress process.

Slide 11: Negotiation

Negotiation is adapting to or addressing a stressful situation through compromise or finding new options. Negotiation involves things like bargaining with or persuading others and searching out alternatives. For example, you may persuade a professor to give you an extra point or two on an exam essay; bargain or compromise with your roommate on an agreed-upon lights out time; or search for another class to satisfy a degree requirement when your first choice is full.

Now, as we said, these are the six most positive families of coping; again, there are also some not-so-positive options for coping, too, some of which we’ve been hinting at throughout the course, but we talk about them in greater detail in a different lesson.

Slide 12: Does Coping Matter?

This may seem obvious, but we want to point out that coping is a crucial element in effective stress management; in fact, it may be the most important element. When all other things are balanced, people who use effective coping resources often report reduced perceptions of stress, fewer stress-related complaints, and an improved outlook when compared to people who don’t utilize these resources.

What’s great is that we’re all capable of learning new techniques and cultivating new resources. Some are internal techniques and resources that depend upon changing how we think about things, or how we behave in response to stressful events. Other techniques and resources are external in that they involve us seeking advice, a listening ear, or help from another person.
You just have to remember that you can change if you don’t like the results you’ve been experiencing. It may not be easy, but it is certainly possible. And there are many options and resources available to help you!

**Slide 13: What’s Your Coping Style?**

Start by thinking about your coping style; what is your usual mode of operation when perceiving and dealing with stress? Is it generally effective? In other words, does your coping style usually yield less stress, a solution to your problem, and reduced worry, without creating other stress or problems? If so, then you might not want to change many aspects of your style.

For most of us, though, if we’re being honest with ourselves, we have to admit that there are some times when we could manage our stress in a more productive manner. So, this is where being open comes into play. We will have to be willing to take an honest look at ourselves and admit that what we’ve always done might not be the most effective way of handling stress. We also have to be open to trying new ideas, techniques, and suggestions. Having a closed mind and saying, “Oh, I know what won’t work for me!” can prevent us from realizing new insights and, ultimately, better health. One other thing that we need to be willing to do is to ask for help. Seeking advice and suggestions from friends, family, and even professionals can be an incredibly important part of managing stress effectively. And, it’s OK to ask for more concrete help when it’s needed. Humans are meant to be social beings; thus, we’re designed to work together and help each other. It is not a sign of weakness to ask for help; rather, it’s an honest approach to an overwhelming circumstance. Finally, keep in mind that if someone offers advice, help, or assistance to you, you’ll probably be likely to do the same for them or another person in the future. In the end, it’s a win-win situation because what goes around comes around.

**Slide 14: Finding The Right Fit**

This was mentioned earlier in this lesson, but a little more elaboration on the importance of recognizing individual differences in coping preferences is warranted here. The coping techniques and resources that work for you will be influenced by your likes and dislikes, but also by your environment or climate, gender, age, cultural background, family, economics, and other personal factors. When you consider all of these factors, it’s easy to see why some coping resources and techniques are effective for some people, but not others. Each of us has to find our own solutions in this journey of life.

Similarly, it’s good to keep in mind that we shouldn’t criticize the choices others make in their attempt to manage and cope with stress. For instance, your roommate might like to listen to hard rock music to relax, but you might hate that kind of music for relaxation. Or, maybe your best friend likes to do tai chi,
whereas you would prefer a good run or cardio workout. Maybe another friend likes to go salsa dancing to blow off some steam, while you might prefer to stay home and relax by watching your favorite movie. Your dad or mom might find a game of golf relaxing, but you might find golf to be either incredibly frustrating or extremely boring! The point is that you will need to find the solutions that work best for you and are appropriate for the given situation. The strategies you use should help you relax, change the situation, or change your perspective – without causing additional stress or harm to you or other people. For instance, screaming at your roommate for something that irritated you might feel good at the moment but could make the situation even more stressful and may not actually solve the problem. Similarly, going out to a party and drinking too much might sound like an attractive way to relax, but, given the regrets and hangover you might experience the next day, you could end up with more stress in the end.

**Slide 15: VIDEO: Where Do You Go?**

Where do you go when you feel stressed?

Besides the gym? Uh, I, a friend's house.

My room. I just lock my door, turn my space heater on, and feel a lot better.

I like to go on a bike ride. Working out always helps.

Coffee shops.

And why is that?

They're quiet and most people are happy in coffee shops.

**Slide 16: Your Current Coping Style**

Before you explore new options for coping, it’s a good idea to really think about your current style, habits, and resources.

There are various ways to contemplate your coping style. Firstly, is your coping style scripted or deliberate? Having a scripted coping style means that you react with little contemplation; in other words, you react according to your life script. A life script is a habitual, learned reaction. Usually you learn this script from family, close friends, and others who have influenced you as a child. The point here is that a scripted coping style is often employed with little forethought; it’s an ingrained response. Sometimes, these scripted responses are positive and effective, such as taking a moment to calm yourself before reacting when something angers or frustrates you or employing problem-solving
when difficulties arise. But, it is much more common that scripted responses are ineffective and potentially problematic. Scripted responses could be something along the lines of yelling at others when you’re angry or frustrated or panicking when something goes wrong. In fact, scripted responses often create more stress.

On the other hand a deliberate coping style is one in which you react with thoughtfulness and intention. If you have a deliberate style, you’re not limited by life scripts. In most situations, you try to choose positive responses that will be effective in helping you reduce or manage your stress. You consciously choose to break away from less-than-positive coping responses. Sometimes this involves acknowledging that you may be choosing to react to stress very differently than your family members and friends do. With luck, maybe they will learn about the benefits of deliberate coping by watching you!

The next time you feel stressed, we encourage you to take a deep breath and slowly count to five before reacting. This deliberate time-out will give you time to process the situation before your respond!

So, is your typical coping style scripted or deliberate?

**Slide 17: Adaptive or Maladaptive?**

Another way to think about coping style is to consider whether it is adaptive or maladaptive. An adaptive coping style helps you deal effectively with stressful events and eventually contributes to your overall wellness. A maladaptive style does just the opposite: it often creates additional, unnecessary stress for yourself or others. An example of an adaptive style would be someone who pauses to take a deep breath or counts to five before reacting to a stressor. The pause usually gives the person time to think about what he or she will say or do next. This usually minimizes regrettable words and actions.

You can probably think of several maladaptive styles you’ve witnessed. One example of maladaptive coping might be gambling. For some, this behavior seems to temporarily relieve stress through the fun and excitement of risk but can ultimately lead to more stress due to financial loss and even debt. Another example of a maladaptive coping style common among college students is procrastination. We’ll discuss procrastination in greater detail later, but, for now, it’s enough to simply acknowledge that putting things off until later—often until it’s too late—doesn’t do any good! Do you think your typical style is adaptive or maladaptive?

**Slide 18: Your Style, Cont.**

Determining whether your style is transformational or regressive is one other way to evaluate your coping style. If you have a transformational coping
style, you are someone who often takes constructive action to change a stressor or situation. You believe in your ability to effectively address the problem and you view it optimistically – even if the stressor is particularly difficult.

If you have a regressive coping style, you will tend to avoid dealing with stressors and you view your ability to address them pessimistically. This often leads to inaction, or maladaptive coping, both of which just serve to perpetuate your stress.

What’s interesting is that we all have the ability to develop transformational coping styles. This may take a bit of work—it requires changing our thinking about things and beginning to believe in our resiliency and abilities—but, really, it can be done, and it is definitely worth the effort!

Slide 19: Cognitive Coping

The phrase cognitive coping refers to how we think and feel about a stressor. Some things are universally stressful for most of us, such as the death of a loved one, doing something embarrassing, a car accident, or doing poorly in an important class. But often, with many things in life, even the previous examples, our thoughts can actually create more stress, rather than alleviate our stress. Cultivating more rational, realistic, and optimistic thoughts is a key to effective cognitive coping. Positive cognitive coping strategies can fall into any one of the six “families” of coping we’ve just discussed.

Slide 20: Self-Talk

Self-talk refers to all of the things you can mentally say to yourself. When we are stressed about something, our self-talk can either help us cope, or it can make the situation even worse. Take a moment to think about how you responded to the last few stressors you experienced; what thoughts ran through your head as you dealt with the stressor? Did you say things like:

“I am SUCH an idiot! I can’t believe this happened!”
“I should have done this or that.”
“I feel so guilty for what happened; I am such an awful person.”
“This is horrible! Now everything is ruined.”
“I am a failure.”
“This is all his fault. I wish I didn’t have to deal with him.”

These statements may sound extreme, but they are quotes from actual college students just like you. In fact, we could probably add many more comments to this list. As you read through the list, you hopefully noticed a few things about the statements: none of them are positive; none of them do anything to help solve the problem or reduce stress; and all of the statements only serve to make you feel worse.
Would you talk to a friend this way? So, why do we talk to ourselves this way? Maybe it’s because no one’s ever introduced us to another option. Also, maybe it’s just become a habit. When we constantly think in a certain way, our brain actually adapts to that way of thinking! These thought patterns become the default. The great thing is that this can work both ways: the more we are kind to ourselves and think positive thoughts, the more those habits are cultivated.

**Slide 21: Positive Self-Talk**

You can actually train yourself to think more positively, even in stressful situations. And this is important because, as we’ve indicated before, a good amount of stress begins with and is magnified by our thoughts. One option that many people find effective is to use a simple technique called the pause and question method whenever they perceive something as stressful. It’s really simple, but it can yield amazing changes in perception. Here’s how it works: when you perceive something as stressful, ask yourself these questions and answer them honestly:

- What’s really going on here?
- Is it worth getting upset about?
- Will this matter a year from now? A month? A day? An hour?
- Can I do anything about this?

It really is incredible how asking these simple questions can cause you to stop and think about your situation differently and probably decrease your perception of stress! Remember, the key is to answer the questions honestly and rationally.

**Slide 22: Instant Replay**

You probably know what an instant replay is in sports—it provides an opportunity to take a second look at a situation to analyze it or to make sure the referees made the correct call. The instant replay method of self-talk works in somewhat the same manner. You use this method when you’ve perceived something as stressful and you’ve started to talk to yourself in a negative manner.

Here’s what you do: if you’ve perceived something as stressful, and you’ve started to compose a string of negative messages to yourself, catch the negative comments and stop them; replay the situation in your head for a second look; challenge yourself to look at it differently; and change the tone of your talk so that it’s more positive and helpful.

This seems simple—and it is! But it can be amazingly powerful in changing your perspective on and reaction to a situation.

**Slide 23: Practice Statements**
A final suggestion for improving your self-talk and reducing your perceptions of stress involves the old adage, practice makes perfect! Try making a list of simple, realistic statements that you could use in stressful situations to calm yourself. What you’ll find is that if you repeat these statements often enough, you’ll commit them to memory and you’ll find that they may become habitual responses when you’re stressed. You can no doubt think of many positive statements on your own, but we’d like to share a few of our favorites here. As one is read, try to think of a situation in which you could have used it.

- This will pass.
- Stay calm.
- I’ve done my best.
- Does this really matter at all?
- This isn’t so bad after all.
- I can do this.
- I’m not going to let this ruin my day.
- No one is perfect.
- I’m not alone; I know people who can help me.
- This isn’t worth getting angry about.

To create helpful statements for yourself, they should be personal, positive, present tense, practical, and brief.

We suggest that you write a few of these positive statements on post-it notes and put them in places you will see, such as on your bathroom mirror, on the visor in your car, or in the front of your school planner. Try to talk to yourself more like you would to a friend in need of comfort.

**Slide 24: Reexamining Beliefs**

As indicated previously, some of our perceptions of stress stem not just from negative self-talk, but from irrational beliefs we may hold. Often, irrational beliefs are unreasonable, but they are powerful moderators of our perceptions. And, it’s often true that one irrational belief can lead to another, which may create a self-fulfilling prophecy. So, to prevent irrational beliefs from kidnapping your thoughts, there are a few steps you can try.

Begin by recognizing your irrational beliefs. Some common examples include:

- I must always have an A. If I don’t have an A, I am a failure.
- If I am a good person, I should be guaranteed a good life with no tragedy.
- Things should always turn out the way I want them to.
- Nothing is ever my fault.
- I am always right about everything.

Next, question your irrational beliefs:
• Is a B really the same as an F?
• Is anyone ever really guaranteed a life with no troubles?
• Do I really need to have things my way?
• Am I somewhat responsible?
• Was I right about this?

Finally, change your irrational beliefs so that they are more realistic. You may have to do a little research to help you find evidence that a given belief is irrational, but that shouldn’t take long! Replace your irrational beliefs with realistic comments, and then try to live by them. Some more realistic thoughts might include:
• A B is above average and is a perfectly acceptable grade.
• I was never promised a life without problems, and no one else was, either, no matter who they are or what they do.
• I don’t always need to control other people and situations and it’s OK to let others direct the show once in a while.
• I should own up to the fact that some of what happened is my responsibility.
• I made a mistake, and that’s OK, but I need to admit it.

Slide 25: Physical Coping

Sometimes, changing our thinking just isn’t possible or appropriate for a given situation. For instance, there is an element of finals week that invokes a bit of dread and stress even in the best of us! On a more serious note, a death in the family is a significant stressor, no matter how you look at it. There are some situations in which cognitive coping just isn’t enough and we need other options for dealing with our stress. This is where physical coping comes into play. Physical coping refers to a broad range of activities and practices that focus on engaging and relaxing the body, and then, hopefully, the mind! These strategies are great for helping you navigate through stressful circumstances. They tend to work to calm you after you perceive stress, or to even help your body handle stress so that you don’t develop some of those long-term outcomes, such as illness. Some of the many options for physical coping range from simple breathing techniques, relaxation and visualization exercises to full cardio, yoga, or martial arts workouts. Again, it’s crucial that you find the options that suit you best. It’s also important that you have an open mind when considering your options. You never know when you’ll try out a new activity and find that you like it!

Slide 26: Just Breathe!

One of the easiest and most effective methods of physical coping is breathing. We’re not talking about your basic life-sustaining breathing that you
do every few seconds, (although that’s important, too). What we’re referring to here is breathing for relaxation. And, while this type of breathing is very easy to do, it is important that you attempt to do it correctly to gain the greatest benefit.

Breathing for relaxation is often called deep breathing or diaphragmatic breathing. Ideally, this type of breathing originates from your diaphragm, the muscle that separates your thoracic and abdominal cavities. When you take a really deep breath and expand your lungs, your diaphragm naturally moves downward toward your abdomen, allowing maximum inhalation. This type of inhalation should occur slowly, as you visualize your lungs expanding and your diaphragm stretching downward. Many people recommend breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, but if that’s uncomfortable for you—because, say you have a stuffy nose—you can inhale and exhale through your mouth.

Often, when we tell people to take a deep breath, they inhale and exhale quickly and shallowly. This really doesn’t do anything to relax you! Once you learn proper techniques for taking a deep breath, you’ll find that you can use deep breathing at virtually any time, and in any place. It’s a great way to relax or calm yourself, especially if you’re nervous before an exam, a speech, or an athletic game.

Research has shown that taking deep, slow breaths actually activates the parasympathetic nervous system—the part of your nervous system that relaxes you and slows things down. The parasympathetic nervous system slows your breathing and heart rate, calms your mind, and eases muscle tension (Greenberg, 2008).

Resource Link: Diaphragmatic Breathing Video

**Slide 27: Relaxation Exercises**

Some people find that they like to practice relaxation exercises to help them cope with stress or even to just relax.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is an active type of exercise that relies on muscle contractions to help invoke the relaxation response. It’s really very simple. You lie down in a comfortable position on your back and then alternately tense and then relax various muscle groups in your body. You can choose to target as many or as few muscles as you like, although standard PMR instructions try to focus on several muscle groups. Give it a try! It will only take a few minutes, and you might just find you like the results.

Resource Link: Progressive Muscle Relaxation Instructional Video
Slide 28: Relaxation Exercises Cont.

Another relaxation exercise that many people like is called Autogenic Relaxation (AR). It is similar to PMR in that it requires you to focus on various muscle groups. However, it’s also different from PMR because it requires no active movement or muscle contraction on your part. Rather, AR is an exercise mainly of the mind. Instead of contracting various muscle groups, you’re asked to imagine that you can sense increased blood flow to them, and that they become warm, heavy and relaxed.

Resource Link:
Autogenic Relaxation Instructional Audio (MP3)

Slide 29: Visualization

Visualization techniques are also sometimes called mental imagery or guided daydreaming. The purpose of these techniques is to reduce mental activity—thinking—and quiet the mind. They can be used to help induce deep relaxation or even sleep, or they can be used on the spot to instill a sense of calmness. Visualization techniques take various forms, but many of them have these elements in common: a relaxed, comfortable posture or position; imagining a peaceful environment; and tuning out the real world to allow oneself to imagine being present in the visualized environment.

Audio recordings describing a peaceful environment - such as the beach or a meadow - and instructing you to imagine that environment can often be helpful. However, these recorded instructions aren’t absolutely necessary. You can relax, close your eyes, breathe slowly and deeply, and use your own imagination to find a peaceful environment as well.

Resource Links:
Visualization Relaxation Exercise (Beach in MP3 format)
Mindful Visualization Relaxation Exercise (Stream in MP3 format)

Slide 30: Meditation

Meditation is similar to visualization in that the intent is to relax you by quieting your mind and body. However, meditation does not generally involve imagining another environment. Rather, when people meditate, they are instructed to close their eyes, and concentrate on a mantra. A mantra is a focus that has no meaning. It can be a phrase, a sound, a chant, or even one’s breath. The idea is to repeat the mantra mentally with each and every breath, thus removing all mental distractions and worries. There are many different types of meditation—mindful, transcendental, Zen, Benson—but they generally all have the previously mentioned elements in common.
Research on meditation has yielded some interesting insights into potential benefits. A few commonly reported benefits include (MacLean et al., 2010; Pal, Velkumary, & Madanmohan, 2004; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992):

- After meditating, people seem better able to focus.
- People who meditate often report that their perceptions of stress are reduced after they meditate.
- Physiologically, meditation has been shown to reduce heart rate and blood pressure, which are two common bodily responses affected by the stress response.

If you would like to see videos demonstrating the previously mentioned relaxation techniques, there is a resource link located on each slide and also in the resources section on the course site.

Resource Link:
Meditation Relaxation Exercise (MP3)

Slide 31: Physical Activity

Some people find that the best way to relax is simply to move their bodies. Whether your preference is a leisurely walk, an intense cardio workout, a yoga session, or a good game of pick-up basketball, the result for many people is the same: they find that physical activity actually calms their minds, reduces muscle tension, and generally makes them feel better. We’ll go into quite a bit more detail about the importance of exercise in another lesson, but we felt it should be acknowledged here, as well.

Physical activity cannot only take your mind off your worries, but it can also give you time to think and problem-solve. Additionally, exercise improves your cardiovascular and muscular fitness, thus lessening the impact stress may have on your health.

Many people say that they don’t exercise because they don’t have time. Given all of the wonderful benefits of physical activity, though, it’s definitely worth it to make it a priority by scheduling it into your week. If it seems like a daunting task, start small, with just a few stretching exercises while studying or watching TV or take a 10-minute walk three or four times a week. Every little bit helps with stress management and health in general.

Resource Links:
Anteater Recreation Center (ARC)

Slide 32: Other Coping Techniques

We could go on and on and on about various options available to help you cope with stress. Remember, something is an effective coping resource if it
helps you reduce your stress and doesn’t create additional harm or distress for you or others. This definition could encompass an endless variety of things (NCCAM, 2011; Micozzi, 2006):

- Music is another very powerful relaxation tool. Sometimes, when you’re stressed, it does wonders to just take a break and listen to your favorite song. Doing so can be a momentary escape, or even a chance to change your perspective. You might be able to think of a song that makes you smile whenever you hear it, no matter your mood. Your favorite music may not be the same as everyone else’s and that’s just fine. The point is that it comforts, distracts, and calms you when you listen to it or play it!

- Humor has actually been shown in research studies to reduce stress and improve relaxation. This is because laughter causes our body to release endorphins, which are chemicals that induce relaxation and even relieve pain. Maybe you’ve heard someone say, “Laughter is the best medicine!” They just might be right! So, find your favorite funny movie or episode of your favorite show and laugh!

- Prayer has also been shown to be a wonderful stress reliever. We’ll cover this topic and other issues related to spirituality in a different lesson. For now, know that many people find prayer helpful in coping with stress and this has been supported by research studies. For many people, prayer elicits the relaxation response.

- Hobbies can serve as wonderful coping techniques because they can take your mind off your worries by providing an enjoyable diversion. So, if you have a favorite hobby and it helps to relax you or it provides a healthy escape, definitely don’t feel guilty about engaging in it now and then.

- Some people consider massage a wonderful coping technique. Other people, however, can’t stand it. Massage has been shown to significantly reduce muscle tension. A professional massage is always great, but if you’re on a budget, you can trade shoulder rubs with a friend or roommate!

- Talking with friends and family members is a great coping resource, as well. Whether other people help you solve your problems, or they merely just listen, they can provide valuable support.

**Slide 33: Coping As Choice**

We’ve covered a lot of ground in this lesson and have introduced many different options and tools for coping with stress. It’s up to you now to choose which options, techniques, and resources work best for you. It’s probably a good idea to first attempt to understand your general coping style and then make changes as necessary. It might take a while to get used to a new
technique or resource, but, if it works to help you cope and manage your stress, it's definitely worth the effort!

References


