

# Columbia Health

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## Stress

Stress is a pervasive health concern impacting the physical and emotional health of college students. It's good to know that it's not just you — most students experience some periods of high stress during their course of study. Stress is typically a feeling of physical tension caused by an identifiable, external source such as exams, deadlines, interpersonal conflicts, or job interviews. Stress, which is generally short-term, is the body's way of alerting us to an external danger or threat.


More about stress: a perceived threat or stressor activates our physical fight or flight system, an evolutionarily useful response that tenses our muscles, increases our heart rate and breathing, focuses us, and leads to a sharpened awareness. In the process, some of our systems slow down, while others speed up.

Further, stress can be either positive or negative. Positive stress can be very motivating! It can get us in gear to meet a deadline and can even boost our efficiency and memory. Negative stress, however, may lead to irritability, uncomfortable physical symptoms, difficulties with sleep, or feeling overwhelmed.

## Getting Help

Recognizing how you respond to stress and learning some ways of coping can help you address stress before it becomes overwhelming (potentially leading to distress). Columbia Health works with students, faculty, and staff to develop initiatives designed to support members of the campus community.

To speak to someone about managing stress:

- Schedule an appointment with a mental health professional at [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) by calling 212-854-2878
- [Schedule an appointment online](#)  with a health care provider at [Medical Services](#) or call 212-854-7426
- Contact [Alice! Health Promotion](#) at 212-854-5453 or [alice@columbia.edu](mailto:alice@columbia.edu)

## Coping with Stress

From time to time, many people feel overwhelmed or “stressed out.” These techniques may help you take care of yourself and cope with stress in your life:



- **Take a deep breath!** Deep breathing calms the body and soothes the mind. Pay attention to your diaphragm — focus on how it moves in and out. Close your eyes, breathe in for four counts, hold for three, and exhale for five. Repeat until you feel calm and energized.
- **Relaxation is just a stretch away.** Stretching can help relax your muscles, and it's a step toward relaxing your mind. You can use just about any stretching technique or try this quick neck stretch: Reach your left arm over your head until your fingers are just touching the top of your right ear. Gently pull your head toward your left

shoulder. Feel a subtle stretch through the right side of your neck. Hold for a few seconds and feel the muscle lengthen. Then do the same on the other side. Be careful — if you feel any pain while stretching, it's critical to stop. If done correctly and in the right spots, this can be an effective technique for releasing tension in the muscles.

- **Catch some ZZZs.** Though it's good to get the sleep you need each night (seven to nine hours), taking a 20-30 minute nap in the afternoon is a great way to recharge for the rest of the day.
- **Get some nutrients in your system.** Feeding your active body and mind with wholesome food can help you charge ahead and maintain energy throughout the day and the semester. You might try a sweet banana, an apple, or grapes if that's your type of snack. If it's not your preference, try nuts, veggies, or cereal bars. Check out the Columbia Health [nutrition resources](#) to help you get started.
- **Move towards greater relaxation.** [Physical activity](#) can get your heart pumping and your endorphins flowing, re-energizing your body and mind. Taking a brisk walk or dancing around your room can also be some simple ways to get your body moving and thoughts flowing.
- **Reach out to people who can help.** Whether it's with a friend or a professional, getting support can do wonders to help you through a stressful time.
- **Check out [Links to Success](#)** for ideas on who to reach out to for help coping with stress on-campus.

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## Help with Stress Coping

- [Go Ask Alice!](#)  Health Promotion
- Asleep! [sleep assessment](#) 
- Alice! Health Promotion [nutrition resources](#)
- [Stressbusters](#)
- [Stressbusters Links to Success](#)