

Stress and Anxiety

Anxiety and stress are common parts of the university experience. Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. Stress is a sensation or physiological response that often accompanies anxiety. Our bodies release cortisol as a response when we meet a demand, danger, challenge or other difficult circumstances (this chemical reaction and release we call the stress hormone).

Symptoms

- Anxiety
- Frazzled or overwhelmed
- Trouble concentrating
- Restlessness
- Low energy
- Headaches
- Upset stomach
- Aches, pains and muscle tension
- Insomnia
- Avoiding others
- Irritability

Causes

Often times we want to know 'why' we are experiencing stress and anxiety. We can look at four different categories to get a better sense of the origin:

- Situational - Do we have papers due, outstanding bills, family drama? Was there a car accident or a break up? All of these circumstances can cause us stress or anxiety.
- Biological - Sometimes the way we are wired has an impact on how we manage stress and anxiety. You can learn skills and helpful coping strategies but sometimes we just have a propensity toward anxiety.
- Physiological - At times our bodies alarm system, brain chemistry and the interaction between our mind and bodies can be out of sync which can contribute to feelings of anxiety even if there aren't any situational factors to consider.
- Trauma - When we experience anything that was shocking, confusing or overwhelming we can call that trauma. Sometimes when we have unprocessed trauma it can lead to and cause anxiety and stress.

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Things you can do

Here are some steps you can take to help manage your stress:

- Breathe - Just closing your eyes and taking several, deep breaths can help you relax the tension and reduce stress. You can download apps like Breathe or Calm that help you relax.
- Listen to music - Find music that is soothing or affirming to calm down. Or you can use music to dance and move and let off some steam.
- Exercise - When your body is stressed, it releases stress hormones, but exercising can burn up some of those stress hormones and release endorphins that will improve your mood.
- Go outside - The fresh air and sounds of nature can give you a fresh perspective.
- Hang out friends or family - Having a good support system is sometimes the best medicine. Spend time with someone who is encouraging and can provide loving support.
- Good sleep - Our bodies need sleep to replenish. The best sleep happens from 10 pm to 6 am and your body functions best on a consistent schedule.
- Notice eating patterns - Our diet affects our gut health which has a direct effect on our mental health. Watch out for too much sugar and overly processed foods.

The GCU Office of Student Care has counselors who provide short term, individual and group counseling where you can gain helpful support in learning to manage stress and anxiety. Our office is on the second floor of Building 26. You can also go to the How to Make an Appointment section on the Student Care page.