

## Stress at the start of school <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

How can I reduce stress as school begins?

### Answer

Dear Reader,

The beginning of the school year can bring changes and challenges such as new classes, new roommates, and for many, a new environment. It's no wonder that one would feel stress as a result! Making a stress management plan at the beginning of the semester is just like getting vaccinated prior to the start of flu season: you want to inoculate yourself, as best as possible, to the volumes of stressors that await you in the coming months ? especially around mid-terms and finals. Consider a "stress-management vaccine" with four primary components:

**SLEEP:** Try to get the nightly sleep you require to feel right and rested the following day, and avoid having to drag yourself from class to class. Not only is it more difficult to deal with stress when fatigued, but according to research findings, sleep-deprivation also weakens immune system functioning. Sleeping the same number of hours each night, during the same time-block (i.e., going to bed and rising at the same time each and every day), can give you a more reliable energy supply.

**EXERCISE:** Engaging in aerobic activities helps strengthen your body and allows it to be more resilient when it faces many of the psychological and physiological responses to stress. (Hint: some great aerobic exercise could include walking briskly, jogging, swimming, cycling, blading, playing tennis, basketball, volleyball, or racquetball, doing calisthenics, and working out on all those contraptions at the gym, including the stair-climber, treadmill, and rowing machine.) Aerobic action spends stress hormones, strengthens organs targeted by stress, improves sleep, and increases energy, just to name a few benefits. Most gyms have orientation programs to familiarize new users to exercise equipment, and to reduce the fear and discomfort felt by many workout novices.

**EAT:** A healthy, balanced eating plan is another key ingredient in stress management. Search the *Go Ask Alice! Nutrition & Physical Activity* <sup>[2]</sup> archives for nutrition particulars ? especially the question, [Food Guidelines ? How much is a serving?](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, for healthy eating tips. Eating patterns also need to be taken into consideration: heavy, meat-laden lunches make for lethargic afternoons, while caffeine, alcohol, and other drugs can put your energy cycle on a roller coaster ride. You might also see if you can speak with a registered dietitian to discuss

personal eating plans.

**MANAGE TIME:** Time management is really about self-management and priorities, and is discussed in the *Go Ask Alice!* [Time management](#) [4] Q&A. For starters, you might try making a priority list and a to-do list, and having a back up plan in case unforeseen interruptions occur. What must you accomplish every day/week/month? What other activities are fun and/or a priority for you? How would you ideally like to balance work, life, and personal/social activities? When will you take care of needs such as eating, sleeping, exercising, and relaxing? Making a list, or mapping your time on a calendar, can help you understand what is a priority for you and how you can work activities into (or out of) your schedule.

The way a person experiences stress relies partially on one's perception on the stressor. Keep a positive attitude and remember that stress is not always negative. Maybe you can find a way to harness any stress you feel into motivation for organizing and completing tasks. Additionally, if you keep a list of times you feel stressed, or things that stress you out, you may also be able to identify patterns and work out a plan of action.

Need a few other tips on how to relax? Try [yoga, meditation](#) [5], guided imagery, or diaphragmatic breathing. If you do end up getting very stressed out, you may consider making an appointment with a counselor at your school about any number of stressors, including life-, work-, and school-related issues, including stress.

For now: inhale? .2?.3?.4?. and exhale? .2?.3?.4?.

Alice!

Category:

[Emotional Health](#) [6]

[Stress & Anxiety](#) [7]

## Related questions

[Sharp chest pains ? Heart attack? Stress? Heartburn?](#) [8]

[Meditation](#) [9]

[Head and muscles ache from stress: What can be done?](#) [10]

[Stress and the stomach ? how do I avoid getting an ulcer?](#) [11]

[Shaking: Psychological or physical cause?](#) [12]

## Resources

[a!Sleep website](#) [13]

[Columbia Health Nutrition Services \(Morningside\)](#) [14]

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CPS\) \(Morningside\)](#) [15]

[Dodge Fitness Center \(Morningside\)](#) [16]

[Student Health Service Nutrition Services \(CUMC\)](#) [17]

[Mental Health Service \(CUMC\)](#) [18]

[Bard Athletic Center \(CUMC\)](#) [19]

Published date:

Sep 12, 1996

Last reviewed on:

Apr 17, 2014

## Footer menu

- ▼ Contact Alice!
  - Content Use
  - Media Inquiries
  - Comments & Corrections
- ▼ Syndication & Licensing
  - Licensing Q&As
  - Get Alice! on Your Website
  - Full Site Syndication
  - Link to Go Ask Alice!

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### Links

- [1] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/stress-start-school>
- [2] <http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nutrition-physical-activity>
- [3] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/food-guidelines-%E2%80%94-how-much-serving-0>
- [4] <http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/time-management>
- [5] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/meditation-yoga-tai-chi-how-do-i-begin>
- [6] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/emotional-health>
- [7] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/stress-anxiety>
- [8] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/sharp-chest-pains-%E2%80%94-heart-attack-stress-heartburn>
- [9] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/meditation>
- [10] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/head-and-muscles-ache-stress-what-can-be-done>
- [11] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/stress-and-stomach-%E2%80%94-how-do-i-avoid-getting-ulcer>
- [12] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/shaking-psychological-or-physical-cause>
- [13] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/asleep-website>
- [14] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/columbia-health-nutrition-services-morningside>
- [15] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/counseling-and-psychological-services-cps-morningside>
- [16] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/dodge-fitness-center-morningside>
- [17] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/student-health-service-nutrition-services-cumc>
- [18] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/mental-health-service-cumc>
- [19] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/bard-athletic-center-cumc>