Dear Alice,

I was wondering what the number one cause of stress is and the best way to relieve it?

? Worried Already

Answer

Dear Worried Already,

Whether you're experiencing acute or chronic stress, you're not alone? most Americans experience stress at some point during the year. Stress is a major issue on college campuses as well. Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to curb your stress levels? both on- and off-campus.

According to the 2013 National College Health Assessment, nearly 82 percent of undergraduate students and 74 percent of graduate students at Columbia University experienced stress last year. Of those who reported experiencing stress, many reported that the stress had an impact on their academic performance. The most commonly reported causes of stress were a cluttered living environment, university administrative processes, availability of healthy food choices on campus, and noise in living and studying environments. Furthermore, academics, career-related issues, intimate relationships, and finances were the most common issues reported by Columbia students as traumatic or very difficult to handle within the past 12 months. Anxiety and depression were reported as the top mental health conditions that Columbia students were diagnosed with or treated for in the last 12 months.

Here's the good news: there are tons of great ways to tackle your stress! You can start by checking out the Stressbusters Links to Success [2] for a guide to campus resources to help you cope with (and relieve) stress. The Support Network includes resources related to academics, relationships, and nutrition to name just a few. Here are some highlights from the guide to help you conquer the most common causes of stress (and become a super stress-busting machine):

- **Time management = self-management.** Make prioritized lists of tasks you need to accomplish during the day. Make these lists before you go to bed or just after you wake up.
- **Find your happy space.** try to create a calm, relaxing, and organized living environment. You can even build "quiet hours" into your schedule, when you don't take phone calls and visitors.
• **Seek academic support.** Columbia Student Affairs offers tutoring on a broad range of courses as part of its academic success program.

• **Eat a healthy, varied diet**, which will load you up with energy and help you get your recommended nutrients, vitamins, and minerals.

• **Incorporate exercise** into your daily routine. Exercise provides time to clear your head, and can help keep you fit. Regular exercisers also report more energy and improved concentration.

• **Employ basic relaxation techniques**, such as yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, tai chi, mindfulness, and/or simply being in nature.

Remember, you’re not alone? there are resources aplenty to help you out. If you are a Columbia student, Alice! Health Promotion offers workshops on Stress and Time Management. Also, the Stressbusters team offers free neck and back rubs at various events around campus as well as at regularly scheduled events.

Additionally, about half of Columbia students have ever seen a counselor, therapist, clergy, psychiatrist, or other mental health professional. Counseling and Psychological Services (Morningside) offers workshops, support groups, and individual counseling to help students manage their workload and personal lives. If you are a student on the Medical Center campus, you can contact the Mental Health Service.

If you are not a student, you may want to see if your local community center offers any stress or time management courses. You may even consider speaking with your health care provider, or seeing a therapist who specializes in stress management. Remember, it is unlikely to totally eliminate stress from your life. However, properly managing stress can help you make the most out of every day.

Alice!

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Stress & Anxiety

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