

Stressed out and anxious from schoolwork and everything ^[1]

Alice,

I think I just had my breaking point. I don't know how much more stress I can take. I tried to check out stress-reduction workshops, but the next one is next semester. I don't really want to see a psychiatrist. I don't know what to do. Basically, I think a lot of my stress is because it is just so difficult for me to focus or concentrate on anything. My thoughts are running everywhere. I try, I really do. I even moved into a single for it. I feel so incompetent. I don't give a damn about making friends. I'm always feeling lonely. And worst of all, there is always something that makes me so worried, panicked, to the point of just wanting to die to relieve me of it. I have chest pains when I sleep sometimes. When I stand up to do something, I always forget what to do... always. This letter that I'm writing has taken me an hour to write because I have to pause so many times to think about my classes. Whenever I do anything away from my desk during my designated "study time," I feel so guilty. Last weekend, I couldn't eat because I didn't want to leave my room to go to the kitchen to eat anything. Yet I am always behind in my schoolwork. Since transferring here this semester, I have never felt confident, relaxed, or satisfied about anything. Everything annoys me. I annoy me. This letter probably sounds really unorganized, but I can't organize my thoughts. I went to see a Broadway play and loved it, but just really hated myself for seeing it when there was so much work I had to do. When I would read my texts, I would try to read faster so I could get all of it done, and a lot of times, just out of nowhere I would get so upset and start crying over my book and myself and my life. I've decided I don't want to live like this anymore. I'm tired of not being able to breathe and get chest pains when I get stressed. Please help me.

— Feelingsuffocatedandconfused

Answer

Dear Feelingsuffocatedandconfused,

Reaching out for help, as you've done by writing this letter, is a sign of strength. Seeking out support doesn't mean that anything is "wrong" with you; rather, it's a way to explore new strategies for reducing your stress, minimizing your physical symptoms, and changing the way you see and talk with yourself. There are many strategies you may take to begin to address your concerns, so keep on reading to learn more about them.

You noted that the next stress reduction workshop isn't until next semester; you might check to see if the workshop is offered through your campus' health promotion or education office (often associated with the campus health services). Seeking out the professionals who work in such an office may meet your needs — they may be able to provide the same information to you in a one-on-one setting, rather than at a workshop. They may also have some of the information available online. You may also find it helpful to see if workshops on focus or time management are available on campus. This type of workshop may provide new information or strategies on how to stay focused, and how to better manage your time in order to prioritize everyday needs such as eating and sleeping. This may help to reduce the stress and anxiety you feel over your schoolwork. In addition to the workshops and walk-in appointments, you can find out what type of stress relief activities they may have happening on campus.

Speaking of taking care of everyday needs, taking the time to prioritize taking care of yourself and your body can help manage your everyday stressors (although it may feel like a challenge to do so). This includes eating a balanced diet, getting enough quality sleep, and being physically active. You may want to check your school fitness center to see if they have any class offerings that appeal to you, such as yoga, spinning, or aerobics. If that's not your thing, you can try exercises such as a [body scan](#) [2] or [progressive muscle relaxation](#) [3] to help ease some of the stress you're feeling. Whatever you do, remember, the time you take to invest in your well-being is time well spent.

If you're not ready to talk with a mental health professional, perhaps you can start by visiting your health care provider to address your physical symptoms. They can talk with you and ask questions to better understand what you're experiencing. Based on the information gathered, they can make appropriate recommendations and they may be able to provide you some more information. If it's necessary, they may recommend other tests to see if there are any other reasons that could cause you to feel this way. Their recommendations may also include seeing a mental health professional and identifying options for short- or long-term care. If you choose to see one at the suggestion of your medical provider, you can start by asking for a one-session consultation to determine if that person is someone with whom you feel comfortable and safe. If, after the initial meeting, you believe that you might not get the help you need, you can ask your health care provider for another referral. They may also be able to provide some other background information or check to see if there are other causes that may make you feel this way.

All of this being said, some of these strategies may not be enough to help relieve you of the stress and anxiety that you're experiencing. You mentioned not wanting to see a psychiatrist. Would you be open to seeing another type of mental health professional? There are many different kinds that aren't a psychiatrist that could still provide some guidance and help you with your concerns. Based on the concerns you've expressed, you may find it helpful to talk with someone about how you're feeling. You can read [Types of therapists](#) [4] in the [Go Ask Alice! Emotional Health](#) [5] archives to learn more about the types of mental health professionals that are out there and if any may be a good fit for you. If you're not comfortable speaking with a one-on-one visit format, you may want to look into whether or not your school offers support groups for students experiencing stress and anxiety around school. You certainly aren't alone in experiencing these kinds of feelings, and they may have resources for you to talk to other students about that they're

experiencing and what strategies work for them to manage them.

No matter what your next step might be, finding some relief and strategies to mitigate stress moving forward is definitely worth taking the time to tackle.

Take care,

Alice!

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Published date:

Dec 02, 1994

Last reviewed on:

Aug 17, 2018

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