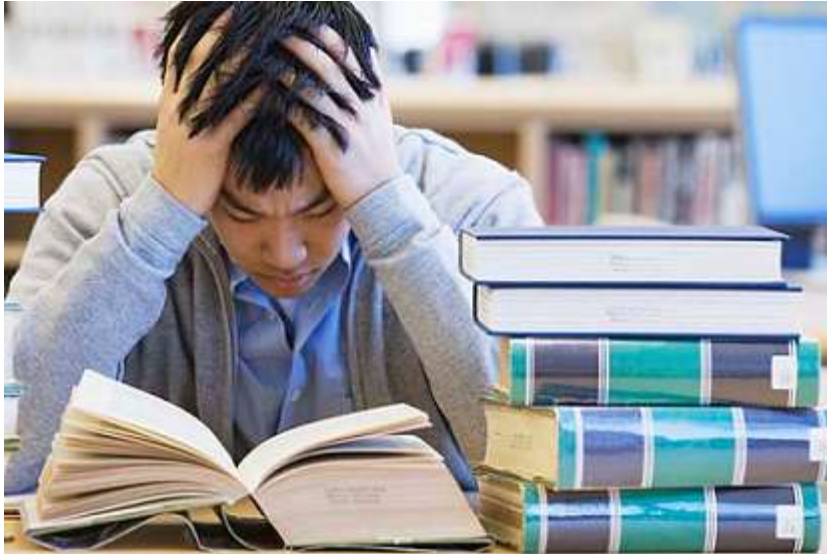


5 Tips for Navigating the Stress and Anxiety in College



College is an exciting time for many young adults. It's a time of newfound freedom, opportunity to expand one's social network, develop new friendships, engage intellectually and consider one's future career paths. However, it can be a challenging and stressful time for many. For many, it is the first time they are not living at home where there is a built-in support network. First time college students also have to learn to navigate a cadre of new demands, set their own schedules, find effective routines, and balance a variety of demands in order to succeed. This transition can be difficult for many to adjust.

It is no wonder then that a recent survey conducted by the [American College Health Association](#), found 25.9% and 31.9% of college students reported anxiety and stress over the past twelve months. Approximately 16.9% reported experiencing depression and 63.2% felt very lonely. Despite these figures, there are many ways to navigate these demands effectively. Here are five tips:

Set realistic expectations. It is important to set realistic expectations for each week, month, semester. A high school student who is used to getting A's may face obstacles and challenges that are new. Someone who is used to having extensive friendship networks may struggle to meet new people. Reflect on what went right and what didn't go so well. Use objective evidence such as grades, feedback from instructors, observations from those who know you whenever possible.

If you are at a loss for what to do, solicit feedback and guidance from peers, family, or counselors.

Recognize signs and symptoms. While temporary feelings of stress and anxiety are common for many college students, when the symptoms persist and start to affect your ability to function, get out of the room, socialize with friends, attend class, focus and study, and complete assignments, it's time to seek out additional support.

- Procrastination and avoidance
- Changes in sleep habits
- Changes in eating habits
- Physical symptoms
- Social isolation
- Loss of pleasure
- Harmful/unhealthy coping behaviors (e.g. use of alcohol and drugs, excessive use of games/social media)

Seek out resources. College counseling centers are available to meet with students. They are familiar with common problems that students deal with. Services are usually short term but many have extensive referral resources to providers in nearby areas. Keep in mind that due to the overwhelming need, there can be long waitlists to see a counselor. The good news is that many centers have text lines or a hotlines and regular workshops for students.

In addition, there are many online resources that are tailored for college students readily available online. The [Jed foundation](#) houses a number of these resources including [Uline.org](#), [halfopus.com](#) Students can directly access a trained counselor through many sites.

Practice self-care. Self-care activities can help buffer the effects of stressors. These activities include consuming nutritious, balanced meals, exercise on a regular basis, and getting sufficient sleep.

Learn healthy coping skills. Everyone can learn to deal with stressors and anxiety in a healthier manner. While these coping skills may not result in an elimination of distress, they will help you to feel more able to tolerate and move past challenging and stressful situations. These skills include:

- Learn how to self-soothe
- Learn to meditate
- Embrace challenges
- Take note of micro-successes daily
- Break down tasks into more manageable components
- Learn to combat negative self-talk
- Check in with support network regularly.