

STRESS AND ANXIETY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Project Overview

This infographic is brought to you by psychology students at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. It provides a summary of the research they found on stress and anxiety in college students, which is especially pertinent given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Their mission is to provide information that may help cope with the challenges posed by stress and anxiety.

Cal Poly
SLO

Collaborative effort by Olga Baryshnikova, Brennan Dunn, Luis Lopez, Amy Yang, and faculty advisor Dr. Laura Cacciamani.



What factors increase the risk for stress and anxiety?

Adverse life events are a common risk factor for stress and anxiety among college students. These range from combat duty and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to sexual assault.

Between **55% and 69%** of students have experienced at least one adverse event prior to entering college²⁵.



Racial and ethnic identity is also a risk factor. At Cal Poly SLO, minority groups comprise less than half of the student population²³. Minority students might experience more stress because of their **perceived invisibility** both on and off campus, and due to racial tensions²⁷.

Feeling a **lack of belonging** may increase stress and anxiety. International students further face the stress of **acculturation**, or the process of adapting to a host culture³. **Subliminal racism and language barriers** also contribute to stress¹⁰.



How can stress and anxiety affect your health?

Stress and anxiety can increase the likelihood of depression and may lead to **reduced help-seeking behavior**¹⁷.

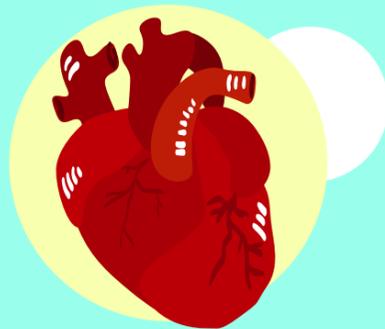
They correlate with **lower exercise consistency** and **increased drug use**. Poor health habits can in turn increase the **risk of chronic diseases**, such as liver cancer²⁰, coronary heart disease²², and lung cancer¹³.



What else can excess stress and anxiety lead to?

Long-term effects also include negative life outcomes such as academic underachievement and drug dependence³¹. Stress specifically about work is also linked with **reduced academic success**³².

Stress and anxiety endanger self-esteem and self-efficacy. The transition from high school to college in particular is associated with impaired self-confidence⁴. **Lower self-esteem** can in turn impact students' abilities to make good decisions about school and work²⁹.



Takeaway:

Stress and anxiety can impact multiple areas of your life and, if unaddressed, may increase the likelihood of negative life outcomes.

What interventions have proven to be effective?

Mindfulness practices generally help reduce stress and anxiety in college students¹. Just 4 sessions of **mindfulness meditation** can reduce anxiety and help you adapt better to stress⁹. Mindfulness-centered **hatha yoga** can reduce stress and anxiety in just 3 sessions⁷. Even **online mindfulness programs** can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression^{18, 24} for up to 6 months!



Just ONE 90-minute **Bikram yoga** session can lower anxiety and perceived stress²⁸. Yoga can decrease anxiety in students even the day after, even if there's an exam! It can be accompanied by feelings of relaxation, improved concentration, self confidence, efficiency, attentiveness, and less irritability¹⁹.



Increases in "non-judging" behavior following mindfulness practices -- allowing yourself to think and feel without criticizing yourself⁵ -- might explain these lower levels of stress and anxiety²⁴.



Vigorous exercise is linked with lower levels of stress and can protect against mental health problems when you're under a lot of stress¹⁴. Most students who take **exercise classes** believe that they help both forget about stressors and cope with them².

Takeaway:

Mindfulness practices, yoga, and exercise can reduce stress and anxiety and even help keep them low during stressful periods of time.

What are the benefits of conducting interventions in academic settings?

Interventions implemented at schools and universities are incredibly beneficial to students. They give faculty and health professionals the chance to help students in a timely and effective manner, while avoiding the barriers that might keep students from using outside mental health services^{5, 12}.

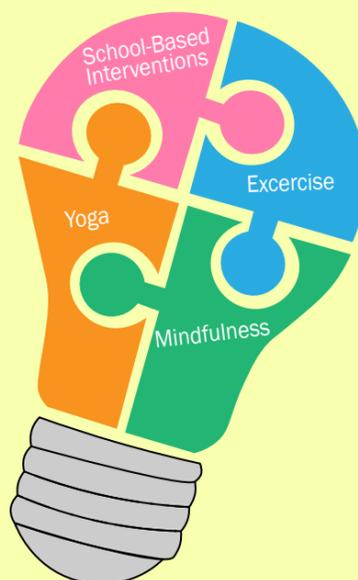


Students typically don't have to worry about paying for services or transportation. Since students are accustomed to learning on campus, they may be more focused and willing to learn in that setting.

Finally, **the stigma around mental health is reduced** when it is addressed in an academic setting¹².

What can you do?

- Find the self-care practices that work for you, and use them!
- Make time for mindfulness, yoga, and/or general exercise when possible.
- Recognize that everyone deals with stress and anxiety to some degree. You are not alone.
- Seek help when you need it



Resources:

- Headspace (app)
- Calm (app)
- Mindful in Minutes (podcast)
- Guided meditations (Youtube search)
- Youper (app)
- Insight Timer (app)
- Happify.com

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