

Tips for Handling Stress of Finals

Students who feel stressed out or depressed during finals week may be putting too much pressure on themselves, according to a psychologist at Cal State Northridge. Sandra Harris, a clinical psychologist at CSUN's counseling office who has written a pamphlet on student stress, said new and returning students are the most frequent sufferers of anxiety during testing time, often because they may have difficulty adjusting to the new demands on their lives.

"They're trying to balance the demands of teachers, employers, spouses and relationships," Harris said. "It's very difficult to balance all of these." In most cases, Harris said, final exams cause anxiety and depression. With anxiety, students may experience nervousness, lack of sleep, irritability, loss of appetite, or overeating. These can usually be treated by the students themselves, she added.

First, Harris said, anxious students may need to realize that they are putting excessive pressure on themselves in order to try to satisfy others, such as their partners, parents or teachers. What they should do, Harris said, is the best they can under their circumstances – taking into considerations the demands of their jobs and their relationships.

Students must also do "anything they enjoy that is relaxing to them to ease stress during finals time," Harris said. This may include taking a walk, listening to music or hopping into a refreshing shower. However, students should avoid activities that can hamper studying, such as using drugs and alcohol. Harris also suggested avoiding activities that consume too much study time such as going to the movies.

Finally, students need to step outside college life and see the big picture, including their own flexibility. "Look for ways to reduce the external stresses in one's life," Harris mentioned. A student, for example, could take an incomplete and finish a class in the summer, ask an employer if a task could be done at a time other than during finals or hire someone to help with housework.

If these techniques fail to reduce anxiety, students should consider a trip to their college counseling center, Harris said. This is particularly true if the student is feeling depressed during finals. Harris said it is not uncommon for students to feel "that it's hopeless, that they can't accomplish their goals, can't meet others' expectations."

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