



Student
Health & Counseling

A Division of Student Academic Affairs

Caring for Yourself & Your Colleagues

UCSF Student Guide

Rationale

Being in professional or graduate school can present significant challenges, regardless of your prior academic or life success. In addition to the classroom, laboratory and clinical experiences that comprise your program here, you may face stresses in your relationships or finances, or with issues related to becoming a professional in your chosen field. Sometimes the stresses of academics, career and other aspects of your life are hard to manage.

These stresses affect everyone, and every student has different methods of coping. Some methods, of course, are more effective than others. When the stresses become too much for your coping skills to handle, things can start to break down. It may be your physical health that shows the first signs. It may be your memory and concentration that start to lose their edge. You may become more easily irritated with things that are ultimately not that important. You may start to cope in less healthful ways (like drinking too much alcohol). Any student can run into difficulties.

The signs of too much stress can manifest differently in different people. Such signs typically are visible to you early on (if you look for them) and to your colleagues (who might show signs of their own). Early detection of stress-related problems usually allows for an easier, more straightforward solution. Being mindful of your responses to stress and taking steps toward preventing such problems from happening in the first place is even better.

Steps to Caring

The mission at the University of California, San Francisco entails both educating the nation's most promising students for careers in the health sciences and delivering the best possible health care. To fulfill that mission, members of the campus community must lead by example, demonstrating the ability to care not only for patients, but also for themselves and their colleagues.

Aspects of UCSF complicate achieving that goal, including the "commuter" aspects of campus life, the broad range of student ages and life experiences, and the health sciences' inherent focus on the importance of others' needs, which can reduce attention to the needs of the self.

As such, the campus community has taken significant steps toward creating a culture of caring at UCSF. This guide is part of that effort. The faculty and staff in your school have also received training about assisting students in need, and are available to help you with problems you may face while you're here.

This guide will help you care for yourself and your colleagues by providing:

- Basic tools for preventing stress-related problems
- Ways to recognize early signs of difficulties
- Resources available for care
- Ideas about how to help others

Prevention

Training for a career in the health sciences (as well as actually having that career) includes performance under varying degrees of stress. Students come to graduate training programs with a wide range of strengths and coping skills for managing stress. You may be well prepared to deal with stress or you may benefit from additional help in learning how to manage stress.

Although studies have shown that a certain degree of stress enables peak performance, studies have also shown that excessive stress has significant negative physical, cognitive and emotional consequences. (For examples of these, please see the table on page 4.) Even the best-prepared students can have problems caused or triggered by stress.

You can reduce your chance of having excessive stress with these steps:

- Know the stressors
- Balance your lifestyle
- Change the system

Know the Stressors

Types of Stressors for Students

- **Academic** – Fresh from past academic success and now faced with high expectations and outstanding peers in your classes, you may feel as if you are faltering (or even losing part of your identity as “top of the class”). Even if you’re doing well, you can still feel significant pressure to perform. The academic culture of professional and graduate schools, including UCSF, can often seem to reinforce competition, which can lead to undue stress.
- **Developmental** – Learning the responsibilities and the role of a health care professional frequently brings up problematic issues such as handling uncertainty, wielding authority and acting professionally.
- **Financial** - The rising fees for UCSF students and the cost of living in San Francisco both add to what may already be significant loan burdens from undergraduate study. In addition, you or others in your class may have additional financial obligations to children or family members.
- **Social / Relationships** – Stress can arise in developing new social connections (with colleagues, mentors, faculty, etc.) and managing changes in existing relationships. All new students must adjust to the unfamiliar social norms of their programs, schools, and the UCSF campus. Students relocating here encounter the added stresses of being in a diverse ethnic, social and cultural environment as well as separation from home, family and friends. Even local students may face disrupted social networks and need to adjust to new living situations.
- **Diversity** – UCSF celebrates the richness of diversity on campus, and diversity in itself is not a stressor. Nonetheless, ethnicity, race, culture, gender, age, health status, disability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity are all factors that can contribute to stress and influence how stress is shown.

Balance Your Lifestyle

Maintain a balanced and healthful lifestyle despite the many forces pulling you to devote yourself almost entirely to your studies. Make time for exercise, relaxation and fun. Millberry Union programs can be useful toward these ends, through relaxing group exercise (yoga, pilates), discounted massage services, Outdoors Unlimited weekend trips, and other activities.

Discuss coping techniques with your classmates, teachers and other students in order to increase the number of tools you have for managing stress. Let yourself connect with and learn from your colleagues.

Use resources like the SHCS website (<http://studenthealth.ucsf.edu/>) and well-being programs or seminars. You can also meet with a counselor to learn about stress reduction techniques.

Change the System

Identify and act upon stressors that are within your sphere of control.

Find ways in which you can limit the impact of stressors on you. For example, be aware of taking on too many responsibilities while you are in school, but don't entirely cut yourself off from activities that help reduce your stress level. Also, during certain times of the year, it may help to let your friends and family know that you're particularly busy, enabling them to either provide additional support for you or give you more space.

Identify and act upon stressors that are outside your sphere of control.

Bring systems issues creating undue stress to the attention of staff, faculty or Student Affairs Officers, so that change might be effected. Look for opportunities to change the culture of your school, program or organization so it reinforces healthy living.

TIPS FOR PREVENTION

Compete less, learn more

It took a lot of talent and work to get here. You may have come from an undergraduate program where information was a commodity to be hoarded, to distinguish you from your peers. Now you need to rethink competing. You need to consider the benefits of collaborating and working cooperatively – your peers are now valuable resources.

Statistically, the odds that you're competing with your new peers for the one final spot in the one place you desperately want to go next in your career are slim. From each program here, you will move on to a more specialized and unique position. From here, you differentiate.

As you move through this program with your colleagues, you can work together to make each other better than students who are similarly differentiating at other schools. Sharing knowledge and skills will make UCSF's students more expert and sought-after professionals.

Early Detection

Difficulties can manifest in five fundamental areas, affecting your work, relationships, thinking, feeling and physical well-being. Monitoring and assessing yourself in these areas can help to identify potential problems early on and enable you to prevent them from worsening.

Signs in any of the areas below may indicate a stress-related problem:

<p>Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining academic or work performance • Trouble finishing tasks • Poor attendance 	<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from social interaction • Increased defensiveness, sensitivity or over-reacting in discussions • Disruptive behavior • Inappropriate or odd behavior
<p>Cognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty comprehending • Poor concentration • Indecisiveness • Forgetfulness 	<p>Emotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevated or depressed mood • Negative outlook, hopelessness or suicidality • Irritability • Excessive worry or anxiety
<p style="text-align: center;">Physical Well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant loss or gain of weight • Obvious fatigue / sleeping in class • Deteriorating personal appearance • Increase in alcohol or drug use 	

A single sign from the table above indicates a need to assess your situation:

- *How long has this been going on?*
- *Do I have a good idea why it's happening?*
- *Have I tried to fix it, and has that helped?*

If the situation isn't changing for the better, and what you've been trying to do to cope hasn't yet addressed the problem, you should consider taking advantage of some of the resources UCSF makes available for students (see page 5).

Multiple signs from the table above or a long duration of a single sign indicate an increased probability that you would benefit from some help in finding a solution.

Some of the signs listed in the table may indicate mood disorders (such as depression), anxiety problems, substance abuse, emotional crisis, recent trauma or exposure to violence. Because these conditions or situations can be helped or treated, early identification is important.

TIPS FOR EARLY DETECTION

Timing matters	Keep in mind that holidays and exam periods are a common time for issues to surface on campus. Try to be more attuned to yourself and to colleagues during these times of increased stress.
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Resources for Care UCSF is committed to helping its students, faculty and staff, and provides many valuable resources toward that end. In addition, each school offers a number of resources for its students. (See below for a list of resources in your school.) It's important to realize that when you can't solve a problem yourself there are people who want to (and can) help you.

Basic Self Care Good self care practices are essential to handling stress. Good practices include:

- **Eat healthful foods.** Avoid high fat and high sugar foods.
- **Get regular exercise.** Maintaining physical fitness can make you more resilient to stress.
- **Avoid alcohol and illicit drug use.** Alcohol and illicit drugs, rather than relieving stress, can actually increase anxiety, depression and insomnia.
- **Limit caffeine and stimulants.** These actually cause anxiety and increase the stress response.
- **Have healthy sleep habits.** Keep regular hours and get at least 6 hours of sleep each night. Alcohol and caffeine both worsen insomnia.
- **Balance work and play.** Taking study breaks improves recall.

When you notice symptoms of stress in your life, try to:

- **Use relaxation exercises.** Meditation, deep breathing, visualization (of a soothing scene) or deep muscle relaxation (tensing and relaxing muscles). For details, see the SHCS website: <http://studenthealth.ucsf.edu/meditation>
- **Reward yourself.** Give yourself a small treat or escape for a little while.
- **Talk about it.** Friends, family and peers can be invaluable support.
- **Change your environment.** Take a walk. Take a bath. Play some music.

TIPS FOR CARING FOR COLLEAGUES

***Keep confidentiality
in mind***

It can be difficult to hear from any colleague that it seems some help might be needed, especially around issues related to academic or work performance, or mental health. People worry that word might spread and that they will be perceived as “weak” or defective. One-to-one, private conversations may better defuse worry or defensiveness. As much as possible, discuss confidential information with as few parties as you can.

Maintain some distance

In helping, be careful not to ask too many questions. For example, it may be helpful to know your colleague is having family difficulties, but you probably do not need know the difficulties in intricate detail.

Consider diversity

Ethnicity, race, culture, gender, age, health status, disability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity are all factors that can give rise to stress and influence how stress is shown. It may be helpful, when one or more of these factors seem to be causing or affecting stress, to suggest diversity-focused services, such as those listed in the ‘Other Sources of Help’ section on pages 5 and 6.

***Get a consultation
(for students)***

Call Student Health at 476-1281 and ask to speak with a nurse to discuss concerns about how to approach a student or if you are unsure about how to proceed with a student in need. The nurse will help you or refer you to another staff member as necessary. (Monday – Friday 8:00am to 4:45pm.)

***Know your resources
(for faculty & staff)***

Student Affairs Officers in your school can help you figure out how to best assist faculty and staff in your school. If you’re puzzled as to what (if anything) to do, arrange a meeting to talk it through.

Faculty and Staff Assistance Program staff can consult with you about the problem or speak directly with the staff or faculty in need. Call 476-8279 and ask to speak with a counselor.

Student Academic Affairs Resources

Student Affairs Officers are accustomed to talking with students about difficult issues and helping students find assistance. They are also familiar with the policies, procedures, and forms of assistance available. Program Administrators in Graduate Division are also available in cases of academic difficulty. They can help connect students with tutoring, advanced study/learning skills training or, when appropriate, a learning disability specialist.

Office of Student Life (OSL) The director and other staff members are available on an informal and confidential basis to assist students with problem resolution outside of the student's academic affiliation. Contact Director of OSL, Eric Koenig at 476-4318.

Office of Career and Professional Development serves the academic, professional and career development needs of UCSF students and graduate trainees. Phone: 476-4986.

Student Financial Services strives to simplify the complicated process of applying for financial aid and managing debt. Advisors are available for one-on-one counseling by appointment or for drop-in. Phone: 476-4181.

Services for International Students & Scholars supports international discovery, learning, and engagement in the health sciences by providing regulatory and transitional services for the UCSF community. Phone: 476-1773.

Disabled Student Services offers services to students with permanent and temporary disabilities. Run by the Office of Student Life, the Disabled Student Service's staff is available to assist students with disabilities in meeting their education challenges successfully. Phone: 476-4318.

Student Activity Center provides programs and resources for UCSF students in all professional schools and the graduate division. The Student Activity Center (SAC) hosts a weekly Student Enrichment Series (SES), bringing student life topics to the campus. Phone: 502-1484.

Campus Resources

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI) Resources Services of this office include conferences, presentations, training, consulting, mentoring, advocacy, referrals and informal advising. Phone: 502-5593.

Office of Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity/Diversity exists to foster and insure equal opportunity for all persons involved at UCSF, and to promote diversity through specific affirmative actions. Phone: 476-4752.

The Problem Resolution Center is committed to providing individuals with a safe, neutral process for the resolution of conflict. It is a resource for all individuals of the campus community for mediation and facilitating communication. Phone: 502-1082.

Office of Sexual Harassment Prevention and Resolution strives to create a campus community free of all forms of harassment, exploitation or intimidation, including sexual. It handles sexual harassment complaints and serves as a resource for questions about sexual harassment issues. Phone: 476-5186.

Osher Center for Integrative Medicine offers mindfulness-based stress reduction classes that are open to students. To register or for more information call Phone: 353-7700.

UC Police Department is committed to making UCSF a safe place to live, work, study, and visit. Emergency Phone: 9+911. Non-emergency Phone: 476-1414.