

# Mental Notes

A Monthly Newsletter

Volume I, Issue 5, May 2007

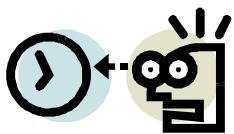
## Anxiety and Stress: Coping with Life's Challenges

by Adrian Péré

Recent events in the local and national news have called attention to the short-term and long-term effects of trauma, and the importance of the availability of mental health services on college campuses and in society in general. Clearly, the tragic events at Virginia Tech have effected people well-beyond those immediately impacted in that community. Many of us are still trying to cope with Katrina-related stressors some 20+ months after the storm. Since stress is a part of our daily lives, it is important that we understand stress, assess our levels of stress, and evaluate the efficacy of our coping mechanisms.

### What is Stress?

Whether caused by daily demands, busy schedules, normal life events, or national or world tragedies, stress is a part of life. In fact, stress can be good for us in that it can provide that extra boost we need to complete tasks and accomplish goals. Excessive stress, however, can be counterproductive and have a negative impact on our mental and physical health.



### Too Much of a "Good Thing"?

There is a relatively fine line between optimal and excessive stress. Concern about an upcoming exam can motivate us to study harder. Excessive worry, however, can paralyze us making it impossible for us to think clearly and perform at our best. Long-term stressors (e.g. prolonged illness, relationship problems) or traumatic events (e.g., Hurricane Katrina, the Virginia Tech shootings) can produce "stress overload" and debilitating anxiety.

### Signs of Stress Overload

People who are experiencing stress overload may notice some of the following signs:



- anxiety or panic attacks
- irritability and moodiness
- stomach problems, headaches, or even chest pain
- problems sleeping
- drinking too much, smoking, overeating, or doing drugs
- sadness or depression

### Coping Skills

Everyone reacts to stress differently, so it is important that we become aware of how our bodies typically function and take note of any significant changes. Regardless of the levels and symptoms of stress we experience, there are things we can all do to address it and manage it. Some possi-

ble preventions and interventions include:

- realistic scheduling
- setting realistic expectations of yourself and others
- solving little problems first
- getting enough sleep
- incorporating relaxing activities in your daily routine
- treating your body well with a good diet and exercise
- monitoring and changing negative thought patterns



### When it Becomes Too Much

Of course, there are times when stress becomes so great that we need some extra assistance. The good news is that help is available. UNO Counseling Services is here to help you. Strict confidentiality is maintained with all of our clients. While our focus is on short-term therapy and career counseling, we are also available to help you find the help you need should other services be necessary.

### COUPLES COUNSELING

UNO Counseling Services offers couples counseling and can help you achieve a more satisfying relationship. Call 504-280-6683 for an appointment.

