

# **College Stress: Excitement, Anxiety, and Effective Solutions**

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Leaving home for college marks one of your life's most exhilarating yet stressful chapters. The anticipation of significant change and the need to rapidly acquire new skills demand that you hit the ground running. Amidst the whirlwind of unfamiliar experiences, you may oscillate between excitement and anxiety, questioning your readiness for the challenges ahead and, inevitably, feeling stressed.

Stress is a natural response when evaluating whether the demands of a situation surpass your internal and external resources. As you embark on your college journey, the extent of your resources and the actual demands remain unknown. Beyond academic concerns, you grapple with uncertainties about forging new connections, managing time between academic and social pursuits, and questioning your self-discipline.

The commencement of the semester initiates a series of ongoing evaluations requiring constant assessment, decision-making, and adjustment. Unlike before, you lack immediate parental support, which traditionally serves as a cornerstone of your support system.

The presence of stress, with its psychological, emotional, and physical symptoms, can hinder your ability to leverage the resources needed to meet the challenges of this new chapter. However, you can effectively manage and even reduce your stress. Worry often contributes to stress but can be replaced with proactive problem-solving once you identify the underlying concerns. Cognitive distortions, such as unfounded "what if..." thoughts, can be challenged and replaced with neutral or positive perspectives.

Suppose your worry is related to a controllable issue, like struggling in a chemistry class due to a perceived lack of aptitude. Identifying fear of failure and low self-efficacy as the source enables you to apply problem-solving techniques. Possible solutions may include:

- Getting a tutor.
- Practicing cognitive therapy to overcome negative self-talk.
- Finding additional resources.
- Adjusting study habits.

Transitioning from worry to problem-solving fosters a sense of reduced stress, increased hopefulness, and greater confidence. Beyond these cognitive approaches, physical relaxation techniques are crucial in stress management. Breathing exercises, guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, exercise, music, and creative endeavors can contribute to overall well-being.

Stress encompasses emotional, psychological, and even spiritual dimensions. Cognitive therapy can address emotional and psychological contributors, challenging automatic assessments and promoting alternative, less stressful perspectives.

During heightened stress, individuals may rigidly adhere to established courses of action, limiting their openness to alternative resources like prayer and support systems. Slowing down, rethinking, and regrouping become crucial for approaching stress management in a comprehensive way that integrates physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects.

