



I Am Stressed With My Study! Help!! by Dr. Henry Khiat, UniSIM

Physiological stress (such as insomnia, loss of appetite, headache, neck and shoulder pain, high blood pressure, palpitation, chronic fatigue, stomach ache or ulcer etc.) can arise during your study activities. Physiological stress may be caused by the presence of your negative learning emotions and thoughts. And such stress can affect your study negatively. To deal with study stress that is related to negative learning emotions and thoughts, you may try the steps below.

- a) Clear your mind first with simple relaxation methods such as controlled breathing, physical exercise, watching a movie, reading a book etc. A relaxed mind, temporarily devoid of negative emotions and thoughts, is important for rational and effective appraisal of the source of your stress.

- b) Reframe your mind by believing that:
 - Negative thoughts are useless and counterproductive to effective learning.
 - The current situation is not as bad as you perceived it to be and can be improved.
 - You have the confidence, resilience and commitment to improve the current situation.
 - Your thoughts are strong enough to control your emotions that are created by the situation.

- c) If you are feeling a number of negative emotions, find out what the primary emotion is.

- d) A primary emotion is the first emotion that is formed in a learning situation and it activates other emotions, known as secondary emotions. Eradicating the primary emotion is sufficient enough to remove the subsequent secondary emotions caused. However, it might not be easy to distinguish your primary emotion from secondary emotions. If you cannot identify your primary emotion, deal with the emotion that you feel most strongly.

- e) Understand and analyze the reasons behind the primary or strongest emotion. List down the reasons in terms of i) importance to the formation of the primary or strongest emotion and ii) solvability in terms of removing it. Possible reasons can be:
 - ✓ You may be not confident of performing the task up to your or tutors' expectations.
 - ✓ You may be afraid of failure if you do the task.
 - ✓ You may be disinterested in the task you are embarking.
 - ✓ You may be frustrated with the difficulty of the task or the huge amount of the work needed in the task.
 - ✓ You may be depressed or preoccupied with work or family issues.
 - ✓ You may be angry with your tutors, classmates or the school system for some reasons.
 - ✓ You may be anxious as you feel that you are running out of time in studying.



TEACHING & LEARNING CENTRE

- f) List down your thoughts how the present situation can be improved.
- g) Modify your goals accordingly by tackling the most important and solvable reasons given.
- h) Change your study schedule accordingly in relation to the changed goals. Be realistic by scaling down on original goals or sacrificing family and social time for study time temporarily.

For example, I may be feeling worried (primary emotion) because the deadline to hand up my TMA is in one week's time and I have not started work on it. I am also feeling angry (secondary emotion) as I feel that it is the demands of my work that prevent me from working on my TMA and also I had been procrastinating. Basically I need to deal with my primary emotion of worry by finishing my assignment on time. To tackle this, I can try to take a day's leave from work in 2 days' time and devote all my time, without distraction, in the library, on doing the TMA since I should have cleared my work backlog by then.

- i) Monitor and re-examine your learning emotions and thoughts after one week of study to gauge if your primary or strongest emotion and negative thoughts are removed or reduced.
- j) Identify the positive emotions and thoughts that may possibly arise from the new learning experience.
- k) Sustain the strength of the identified positive emotions and thoughts through identifying and maintaining the study activities that produce them.

However, if the process of reappraisal with action does not improve your situation, seek external assistance immediately. They can be your family members, close friends, tutors or an academic counsellor. They can provide you with the necessary social support and advices in handling your current situation.

If you have effective ways to deal with study stress, just drop me an email at henrykhiat@unisim.edu.sg. I can update this article with your experience so that everyone in UniSIM can benefit from it.

References

- Downing, S. (2011). *On course: strategies for creating success in college and in life*. Boston: Wadsworth.
- Gardner, J.N., Jewler, A.J. & Barefoot, B.O. (2011). *Your college experience: strategies for success*. Boston: Bedford.
- Gross, J.J. (2007). *Handbook of emotional regulation*. London: Guilford Press.
- Jacobs, L. F. and Hyman, J. S. (2010). *The secrets of college success*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pauks, W. & Owens R.J.Q (2011). *How to study in college*. Boston: Wadsworth.
- Pilippot, P. & Feldman, R.S. (2004). *The regulation of emotions*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Van Blerkom, D. L. (2009). *College study skills: Becoming a strategic learner*. Boston: Wadsworth.