



Adjustment to Life's Changes

It can be a difficult time. Suddenly, perhaps for the first time in your life, you're moving away from everything familiar to you – family, friends, home, community – and beginning to make your way as a young adult entirely surrounded by strangers, in a new setting. You may feel that everything is on the line: your ability to succeed at college-level work, to build adult relationships, and to adapt to a lot of change all at once.

According to a recent UCLA study, more than 30 percent of college freshmen reported feeling overwhelmed a great deal of the time during the beginning of college, and Johns Hopkins University reported that more than 40 percent of a recent freshman class sought help from the student counseling center. So understand that if you're feeling pressure and stress, you're not alone.

Helping Yourself

Many college students have minor problems adjusting to their new environment. Here are a few ideas that can help you manage your feelings of pressure and stress:

- Better plan your use of time. Make time every day to prioritize your work. Prioritizing can give you a sense of control over what you must do, and a sense that you can do it.
- Plan your work and sleep schedules. Too many students defer doing important classwork until late at night, work through much of the night, and start each new day exhausted. Constant fatigue can be a critical trigger for depression. Seven or eight hours of sleep a night is important to your well-being.
- Join an extracurricular activity. Sports, theatre, Greek life, the student newspaper – whatever interests you – can bring opportunities to meet people interested in the same things you are, and it provides a welcome change from classwork.
- Make a friend. Sometimes this may be a roommate or someone you meet in class or in the cafeteria. Friendships can help make a strange place feel more friendly and comfortable.
- Try relaxation methods. These include meditation, deep breathing, warm baths, long walks, exercise – whatever you enjoy that lessens your feelings of stress or discomfort.
- Take time for yourself each day. Make this special time – even if it's only 15 minutes by yourself – a period where you think about your feelings and dreams. Focusing on yourself can be energizing and gives a feeling of purposefulness and control over life.

Getting Help

Sometimes these changes and adjustments can trigger depression. If the above techniques do not appear to be working, don't hesitate to seek professional help. If your feelings of constant stress become feelings of sadness that go on for weeks and months, you may be experiencing more than just difficulty adjusting to life's changes. Seek assistance from the university counseling service, student health center, your doctor, or a mental health professional.

This Finding Hope and Help fact sheet is a publication of NMHA's **Campaign for America's Mental Health**. The Campaign promotes mental health and raises awareness that mental illnesses are real, common and treatable through national and community outreach.

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