Maintaining Balance: Tools and Tips for a Stress-Free Graduate Degree

Meghan Cohen
Coordinator, Center for Health and Wellbeing
0121 Eppley Recreation Center
mcohen@health.umd.edu
Objectives

- What is wellness?
- How are UMD students doing?
- Stress
- Sleep
- Time Management
- Campus Resources
Wellness

Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more successful existence. We never arrive at a point where there is no room for improvement. The traditional wellness model has six dimensions: physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, social, and occupational.
6 Dimensions of Wellness

- Physical
  - Physical wellness emphasizes the importance of cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, strength, a healthy diet, and responsible use of alcohol. It discourages the use of tobacco and other drugs.

- Social
  - Social wellness encourages good, strong relationships with other people. Social wellness is having a feeling of connectedness with one's community and family and participating in activities that support one another.
Emotional

- Emotional wellness emphasizes an awareness and acceptance of one's feelings. It also includes how one feels about themselves, the ability to control one's feelings, and to express one's feelings.

Intellectual

- Intellectual wellness encourages one to participate in mentally stimulating and creative activities. Improving intellectual wellness can happen in and out of the classroom. It is the ability to think clearly, reason objectively, and to make responsible decisions.
- **Spiritual**
  - Spiritual wellness is the hub of the wellness wheel. Spiritual wellness is more than prayer and believing in a higher being. Spiritual wellness involves seeking and having a meaning and purpose in life, as well as participating in activities that are consistent with one's beliefs and values.

- **Occupational**
  - The occupational dimension emphasizes having personal satisfaction and enrichment in one's life through work. It includes choosing a occupation that you truly enjoy, is consistent with your personal values, interests, and beliefs and is rewarding.
UMD Students

- 93.2% of students say they are in good, very good, or excellent health!

- Would you say you are in good, very good, or excellent health?
Physical Activity

- **30.4%** described their weight as slightly or very overweight
  - **48.8%** of students are trying to lose weight
- **American College of Sports Medicine recommends:**
  - **150 minutes of moderate-intensity cardio/aerobic activity each week**
    - Only **22.7%** of students meet this
    - Majority do only 1 day
  - **2-3 days of strength/resistance training each week**
    - Only **33.2%** of students meet this
    - Majority do 0 days
Nutrition

- Students reported usually eating the following number of servings of fruits and vegetables per day:
  - 0 servings per day: 5.4%
  - 1-2 per day: 59.5%
  - 3-4 per day: 29.0%
  - 5 or more per day: 6.0%
Stress & Anxiety

- At some point in the last 12 months
  - 85.6% of students felt overwhelmed by all they had to do
  - 49.5% felt overwhelming anxiety
  - 81.1% felt exhausted (not from physical activity)
  - 10% were diagnosed with an anxiety disorder
    - 1.4% not treated
- Students rated their overall level of stress they experienced in the last 12 months
  - 42.7% experienced more than average stress
  - 8.4% experienced tremendous stress
Sleep

- On how many of the past 7 days did you get enough sleep so that you felt rested when you woke up in the morning?
  - 0 days – 7.2%
  - 1-4 days – 65.6%
  - 5-6 days – 22.7%
  - 7 days – 4.5%

- 16.4% said sleepiness during the day is a big or very big problem
- 22.7% said sleepiness during the day is more than a little problem
How does WELLNESS affect your academic performance?

Is there a connection?
Academic Performance

- **11.9%** of students received a lower exam grade due to sleep difficulties
  - 3.8% of students received a lower course grade
  - 0.5% received an incomplete/dropped
  - 1.2% experienced a significant disruption in their thesis
- **18.7%** received a lower exam grade due to stress
  - 7.2% received a lower course grade
  - 0.7% received an incomplete/dropped
  - 2.0% experienced a significant disruption in their thesis
Stress

- Stress is how we *perceive* stressors such as pressures, conflicts, and frustrations. It is the physical and emotional wear on our bodies, resulting from real – or imagined – problems.
  - Eustress – good stress
  - Distress – bad stress
Stress Symptoms

- Aches and pains
- Sweating
- Inability to sleep or sleeping too much
- Inability to eat or eating too much
- Skin disorders
- Mental and emotional “blanks”
- Accidents and/or mistakes
Personality Plays a Part

- Type A vs. Type B
  - Type A people tend to be success oriented, driven, have little patience for people, and rarely stop to enjoy the moment.
  - Some of these traits may be internalized, causing harmful physical wear and tear. Type A’s experience greater stress and have higher incidence of heart disease than Type B’s.
  - It’s possible to be a successful Type B. Work efficiently, live intelligently, but stop to enjoy your accomplishments!
Personality Plays a Part

- Hardiness – a stress-resistant personality
  - Commitment- choosing to be an active participant in life
  - Control – setting goals in line with your values, using effective time management principles
  - Attitude – recognizing the influence of mind over matter, choosing to think positive thoughts.
  - Perspective – keeping life in perspective and not sweating the small stuff. Patience and tolerance are key.
  - Relationships – developing caring relationships at home, work, and your community at large.
Coping with Stress

- Deep Breathing
- Guided Imagery
- Systematic Rationalization
- Other options
Biofeedback

Biofeedback is a treatment technique in which people are trained to improve their health by using signals from their own bodies.

Heart Rate Variability

- Subtle beat-to-beat changes in your heart rate – shows how stress and other emotions are affecting your nervous system
Deep Breathing

- One of the simplest and most effective ways to reduce stress in the moment!
Guided Imagery

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bojD9XoJZA
Systematic Rationalization

Controllable

Important

Unimportant

Uncontrollable
Other Options

- Massage
- Acupuncture
- Meditation
- Positive self-talk
- Exercise
Sleep Cycle

1. Interim between consciousness and sleep
   - Move to Stage 2 after 5-15 mins

2. Heart rate slows, brain does less complicated tasks

3. After another 15 mins, move into non-REM sleep, the Delta stage

4. Body temperature & BP decreases

5. REM
   - Increase in eye movement, heart rate, breathing, BP & temperature
   - Move into REM sleep approx 90 mins after first feeling sleepy

BP = Blood Pressure
Facts about Sleep

• Most people need 7-8 hours of sleep per night
• Lack of sleep is directly linked to poor health
  • Concentration, alertness, performance
• Sleep debt is cumulative
  • Performance continues to worsen the longer you go without sleep
• Partial vs. complete sleep deprivation
  • Sleep deprivation has the same effects on driving as .10 BAC
A Six-Step Plan for Better Sleep

1. Recognize the importance of sleep.
   - MAKE THE COMMITMENT
2. Adopt a healthy lifestyle
3. Maintain good sleep habits
4. Create the optimal sleep environment
5. Eliminate things that prevent sleep
6. Seek help for persistent sleep problems
A Six-Step Plan for Better Sleep

- Adopt a healthy lifestyle
  - Exercise regularly (but not right before bed time!)
  - Maintain a healthy diet
  - Avoid alcohol and nicotine
- Maintain good sleep habits
  - Keep a regular sleep schedule
  - Develop a pre-sleep routine
  - DON’T STUDY IN BED!
  - Avoid frequent/long naps
  - If you can’t sleep, get out of bed
A Six-Step Plan for Better Sleep

- Create the optimal sleep environment
  - Control bedroom noise
  - Block out light
  - Keep it cool and well-ventilated
  - Hide the clock
  - Make your bed comfortable
- Things that prevent sleep
  - Caffeine
  - Alcohol and nicotine
  - Fluids
  - Foods that give you heartburn
A Six-Step Plan for Better Sleep

- Seek help for persistent sleep problems
  - Can’t fall asleep
  - Can’t stay awake
  - Can’t get up in the morning
  - Do strange things in my sleep
  - Can’t sleep because of my partner
Time Management

- Effective time management can prevent or eliminate a lot of stress from your life!

“I’d like to schedule a time-management seminar on my calendar...as soon as I can find time to buy a calendar!”
Tips for Time Management

• Invest in a planner!
• Make a list, prioritize it, and check things off as you get them done. Review the list from time to time – use systematic rationalization.
• What is the best use of my time RIGHT NOW?
• Be willing to sacrifice “perfection” to get things done.
• Learn to say “no” to demands that don’t benefit you.
• Whenever possible, delegate.
Tips for Time Management

• Don’t waste time on minor decisions.
• Arrange study time to keep distractions to a minimum.
• Be realistic about what you can accomplish during a given period.
• Find out when you have the most energy, or are the most alert and focused for study. Use times of less energy for leisure or a nap!
Create a Master Schedule

- Create once a semester
- First fill in required activities – class, labs, meetings
- Other regular activities – GA hours, commuting time, sports team
- SLEEPING AND EATING
- The rest of the time is open
  - You will always know when you’re free for studying, exercise, or social activities
Campus Resources

- Center for Health and Wellbeing
  - Relaxation Training
  - Wellness Counseling
  - Group Meditation (Tuesdays 6pm)
  - Relaxation Zone
- Health Center
  - Group Meditation (Wednesdays 12pm & 5pm, Thursdays 5pm)
  - Individual Meditation
  - Massage
  - Accupuncture
  - Mental Health – short-term individual/group psychotherapy
Campus Resources

- Counseling Center
  - individual, group, and couples counseling/psychotherapy
  - help for both personal/social issues and educational/vocational concerns
- Walk-In Hours for:
  - students of color
  - lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students
  - students seeking to choose a major
  - student veterans
  - student athletes (coming soon)
- psychological, personality, and career interest testing
- off-campus referrals
Center for Health and Wellbeing

- Meghan Cohen, Coordinator
  - http://www.health.umd.edu/chwb
  - 301-314-1493
  - mcohen@health.umd.edu
  - chwb@health.umd.edu
If it’s important to you, you’ll find a way. If not, you’ll find an excuse.