Helping Stress with Activity & Sport

What Do You Mean by Stress?

Stress here refers to a range of negative feelings which we all suffer from time to time, but to which some people are more prone. These can range from depression (with symptoms of sadness, listlessness and hopeless thoughts) to anxiety (with feelings of dread, physical discomfort and possibly panic). It also includes the feelings of irritability and having too much to do which can often accompany being a student at this present demanding time. We do not include severe depression with suicidal thoughts or extreme anxiety with severe panic attacks which may require a different approach.

How Can Exercise and Activity Help?

The benefit of exercise for improving physical health have been long known. However more recently marked psychological benefits have been noted. These are due to a variety of possible causes.

- Altered chemistry - exercise stimulates production of endorphins and opiates which create a sense of well-being.
- Improvement in heart and lung function - leading to increased availability of oxygen for muscular and nervous functions.
- Distraction - giving sustained attention to one area over a long time can lead to boredom, exhaustion and negative thoughts. Exercise - especially that involved in learning or exercising a skill - diverts attention elsewhere, leading to a lessening of negative preoccupation.
- Emotional expression - society places many constraints on the feelings that we may display - and in doing so may contribute to a feeling of emotional stuckness. Normally in a sporting context a wider display of emotion - whether of frustration or of camaraderie - is allowed.
- Changed sense of self - physical activity allows us to set ourself in a different context - to enjoy physicality; to accept our limitations and to take different risks - which contribute to a more flexible, and therefore healthier, world view.

What Stops People Taking Enough Exercise if it is so Good for Them?

- Time pressure - if you have a busy study timetable it can seem too self-indulgent.
- Inertia - most forms of exercise require some minimal preparation and this can be an effort.
- Cost – many forms of exercise require an admission fee which can serve as a discouragement.
- Anxiety - some gyms etc. can be pretty daunting to walk into for the first time.
- Dislike of competitiveness - many people associate exercise with competitive sport - maybe they have had unpleasant experiences at school - and so never explore non-competitive exercise.
- Self-consciousness - people may fear others might disparage them in some way. This can be increased if they are depressed or anxious.
So What Can I Do?

The Counselling Service and Sports Centre has worked together to offer a programme that overcomes these disadvantages. For example if you are feeling inert, you can just go for a massage. If you feel the setting is intimidating you can be shown around the facilities to find out what is available and which sports welcome non-competitive involvement and are best for those feeling shy. Reduced fees are available for students referred by the Counselling Service. There are many options open which are listed overleaf. For maximum benefit you might want to consider:

- Regular exercise - two or three 30 minute sessions a week.
- Some team or pair exercise - to help motivation and increase companionship.
- Complementary Exercise - exercise should match your stage of fitness and your mood. Someone with high blood pressure should not start with squash nor should someone negatively introspective spend long periods in solitary fitness training.

Sports Centre

The Sports Centre can offer a whole range of different activities that can help you:

- Aerobic classes (held most days)
- Yoga classes (Hatha Yoga helps you to relax the mind and body and escape from everyday life. Learning to meditate can cut down on mental chatter and help to find some internal quiet and sense of inner balance.)
- Pilates (a non-impact exercise which focuses on posture, breathing and core stability. It involves strengthening and stretching the entire body),
- Work out in the gym - a one-on-one training service can be given for those who are unsure or overwhelmed by the equipment.
- Personal programmes can be designed especially for you so that you can get want you want from exercise.
- Come and play Badminton or Table tennis with a friend.
- Come down and shoot some basketballs.
- Go for a brisk walk in pleasant surroundings, this will help to re-circulate some of the stress hormones in your body
- Have a massage with Pulse Sports Therapy Services to help relieve muscular tension.
- We are looking to offer other alternative therapies such as Indian head massage, aromatherapy and reflexology. Please just ask the Sports Centre.
- We can also advise on which college sports clubs offer non-competitive sports opportunities.

How to Find the Sports Centre

The Sports Centre is right at the other end of the Campus from the Counselling Service, so you can start your exercise programme just by walking between the two!

Go down from Founders to the other Halls of Residence. Walk down between Butler and Tuke (with Tuke on your right). Turn right in front of Runnymede Halls and follow the path which will lead to the Sports Centre.