

Dealing with Stress in Grad School

Most Berkeley students have a lot of stress, but grad students have some unique concerns. Many find that the relationship with their advisor is a major source of stress and anxiety. Differing expectations and hierarchical power dynamics can make it hard to focus on work. Since grad students tend to be older and more independent, finances can be difficult. They may also have family members that demand just as much time and energy as school does. These issues make it all the more important for grad students to manage their stress in healthy and effective ways.

Make yourself a priority.

- Your physical and mental health is very important, and also affects the quality of your work. This means that self-care should be as high a priority as schoolwork. Make sure you get enough sleep, eat healthy at least 3 times a day, and get some physical activity at least 3 times a week.
- Take some time out for yourself every day and every week. This can range from minutes to hours, depending on your schedule, but it should be something that *you* enjoy. Time spent on fun and relaxing activities isn't "wasted"; it's an important component of a healthy lifestyle!

Take control of your life.

- Many Berkeley students suffer from the pressure of perfectionism. Try making conscious, realistic decisions about which projects need 100% effort and which just need to get done. Otherwise, the decision will be made for you when you run out of time the night before a deadline. By prioritizing your work, you can control spending the most time and energy on the most important projects.
- Learn how to say "no" to tasks and activities that don't fit with your academic and personal goals. Decide what your own priorities are, and act accordingly.

Avoid procrastination through time management.

- Vaguely-defined, long-term projects in grad school put you at risk for procrastination. As a first step, break the project down into small, manageable portions. These portions give you something concrete to work on, and help you to make progress. It may also help to set deadlines for yourself if there aren't any external ones.
- Having a good plan is also an important way to ensure productivity. Keep a prioritized to-do list, and plan a schedule around it. This is especially important if your time is flexible, for instance when you're writing your thesis. However, don't fall into the trap of planning paralysis, where you procrastinate by planning instead of doing.

Look for social support.

- Your peers can often provide empathy and emotional support. They're also a great resource for practical tips in dealing with your work. Try talking to students farther along in your program for help with upcoming challenges (e.g. quals, thesis writing). Some professors can also be helpful, but you may feel more comfortable talking with one who isn't directly involved with your work.
- Your friends and family can provide a link back to the "real world" outside your office or lab. Even if most of your friends are also colleagues, try not to talk about work too much. Make time to have fun with your friends and family, and keep your stress low!



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For a stress management appointment, call (510) 642-2000.