



Coffee with Caroline

Caroline Topham

How can I avoid/deal with stress?

Stress can be very uncomfortable but is also very important. and the right amount of stress helps us to perform at our best. Professional athletes talk about 'arousal levels' and find ways to achieve optimum 'arousal' in order to give their best performance; if arousal levels are too low they are not focused and energised to perform, too high and they become too stressed and crumble under the pressure.

Stress is a necessary part of life, we as human beings need it to push ourselves to achieve difficult things, but when stress levels become too high they have the opposite effect and can stop us from thinking clearly. Each of us also have our optimum state where we are most productive, for example, I prefer working to a deadline and find the time pressure very helpful to focus my thoughts and motivate me. Other people hate deadlines and find the time pressure stressful and very unhelpful.

So it helps to know yourself so you can manage your workload to meet your strengths. Think about your assessments so far this year, how did you feel about them? Did you prepare far in advance or did you leave it to the last minute? Did that work for you, or did it make you feel anxious? This will help you to avoid making the same mistakes twice.

When stress levels are so high that your usual stress relief techniques (good sleep, relaxing in front of the TV, exercising, praying, meditating, chatting with friends, whatever works for you) stop working and stress is stopping you from working and interacting with people as you normally would, then it's time to get help. If this happens my advice is to reach out to the people around you for support if you can. That might be family or friends, or fellow students or tutors, or it may be professional counsellors and wellbeing advisors (see below). Whoever it is, sharing your anxieties can really help you to find a way forward, and it's never too late to ask for support.

How can I make friends if I can't meet classmates in person?

This is a great question, and some of you may have better ideas than me! We are all learning fast when it comes to our online lives. To start with, I would recommend joining in with programme activities such as participating in your tutorial group discussions, joining in with activities during online teaching, and going to online social events such as those organised by the BiomedSoc. Joining societies is another great way to make friends, we have our own BiomedSoc and there are many other societies hosted by the Students Union for different sports, hobbies, faiths and more.

Outside of university, there are many opportunities for volunteering in your community and this can be a great way to get out of the house in a safe way too.

How can I catch up with things if I fall behind?

If you feel you are falling behind, the most important thing to do is to speak to someone at Uni, usually your personal tutor or me as your programme leader. and we also have Del, our Student Progression Administrator (SPA - see below) who is very helpful to talk to if you are struggling. Catching up with missed lectures is now possible as everything is recorded, and making time to watch these lectures and do any related activities is crucial to getting back on track. Visit each of your module sites on Blackboard and

identify any assessments you may have missed.

Every student will get another attempt at an assessment automatically, although marks are capped at 40%. If your reasons for falling behind are due to reasons outside of your control then you can use the Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMC - see below) system which allows you to apply for the opportunity to submit work at a later date without your marks being capped, so please use this if illness or other life circumstances have stopped you from completing assessments.

It's helpful to understand why you have fallen behind, if it's a short-term problem (e.g. short illness) then please use the PMC system to take the pressure off your current deadlines.

If something in your life has changed permanently that is preventing you from studying as much as you need to, then speak to us at the university and we can advise you on the best way forward.

How can I stay positive and motivated in such challenging times?

As human beings we thrive on variety and social contact and we get a sense of achievement from being out and about in the world. During the pandemic, it has been much harder for many of us to do this, and so staying motivated has been very difficult for lots of people. There is no magical fix for this, but there are three things which have helped me which I will share:

- **Keep your eye on the bigger picture** - what is your goal, what are you working towards? Keeping the end goal in mind can keep you on track.
- **Stay humble** - we all know people who have lost their jobs and health as a result of the pandemic. It helps me to remember that we are privileged to still be able to work and study during the pandemic.
- **Set daily goals** - I'm a big fan of setting small goals and chipping away at work a bit at a time, for example I'll do half an hour on one task and then go and make a coffee. I'll do another hour then reward myself with ten minutes of playing with the dog. If I finish this task by the end of the day then I will have some chocolate/ wine/ takeaway (insert treat of your choice) on Friday! Try the pomodoro technique to help you to focus for short bursts of time:

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-secrets-to-staying-productive-when-you-have-a-big-project>

Helpful links for wellbeing

Our Student Progression Administrator (SPA), Del:
See-Spa@salford.ac.uk

Wellbeing and Counselling at Salford:

<https://www.salford.ac.uk/askus/support/wellbeing-and-counselling>

Information about PMC process: <https://www.salford.ac.uk/askus/admin-essentials/personal-mitigating-circumstances>