

# TWU Counseling Center

## Eliminate Stress From Your Environment!

If your living and working environments are badly organized then they can be a major source of stress. If your environment is well organized and pleasant, then it can help to reduce stress and increase productivity. Remember though that while it may be important for people under stress to have a calm environment, others may enjoy the raised levels of arousal associated with the 'buzz' of a busy office. While the points listed may each contribute only in a small way to creating a more pleasant environment, taken together they can have a significant effect in reducing stress:

### Lighting

Bad lighting can cause eye strain and increase fatigue. Fluorescent lighting can also be tiring. What you may not appreciate is that the quality of light may also be important. Most people are happiest in bright sunshine - this may cause release of chemicals in the body that bring a feeling of emotional well-being. Artificial light, which typically comprises only a few wavelengths of light, does not seem to have the same effect on mood that sunlight has. Try experimenting with working by a window or using full spectrum bulbs in your desk lamp. You will probably find that this improves the quality of your working environment.

### Decoration and tidiness

If your environment at work or home is dirty, uncomfortable or neglected, then this can cause stress. Similarly if your living or working area is untidy and chaotic, then this can be distracting. It is important, however, not to be dogmatic about tidiness: while it is very difficult to successfully co-ordinate many tasks in an untidy work area, it is perfectly possible to work on one task successfully. The recent trend of 'clear desk' thinking arrogantly ignores one of the most important lessons about human beings: that people work in different ways.

### Noise

In a working environment a high level of background noise can severely impair your ability to concentrate. Ringing phones disturb not only the person to whom the call is directed, but also other people in the same area. Background noise during the day can cause irritability, tension and headaches.

In a home environment, unwanted noise can be even more stressful and irritating as it intrudes on private space. Where noise comes from neighbors or someone sharing the house, it may be effective to try a pleasantly assertive approach. Ask that music is turned down or your roommate go to a different location to talk on the phone.

### Information Overload

Technology often makes life easier, but a drawback is that we are bombarded with interruptions and information. Reduce the amount of trivia to which you give your attention. Schedule several set times during the day dedicated to checking email and responding to phone calls. A technology break will allow you to concentrate more fully on the task at hand while still being responsive and accessible.

### Relationships at Work and Home

Our network of people can be a source of great support or great stress. At work, build as many positive, cooperative, and respectful relationships as you can, particularly with your boss. Understand others' problems and help others understand yours. Teach your boss and colleagues to respect your priorities and workload. Similar strategies work at home to ease housework distribution, etc. If conflict arises, work to address it directly. This can become easier and a joint problem solving session by focusing on your reaction to the situation, expressing empathy to the other party, and requesting a time to talk together about what new strategy would work for both of you.

### A Relaxation Space

All of us need a place to unwind, even if only for a few minutes. Find a place in nature, at work, and at home where you can close your eyes and breath deeply, go for a walk, or simply have some time to yourself to do what feels best for you. Use that space several times a day. Having lunch outside of the office may also be an oasis in an otherwise hectic day.