

Technical Manual

A College Student's Guide to Mental Wellbeing

How nutrition, activity, stress, and time impact undergraduate college students' mental health and well being.



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Manual Guide

Using the Manual

This manual is designed to explore the multifaceted impacts of various lifestyle factors on the mental health of college students, including nutrition, exercise and activity, stress management, and time management. Each section addresses critical aspects that influence students' well-being and provides practical solutions to overcome common challenges.

This comprehensive resource aims to empower college students to adopt healthier habits and manage their mental health proactively, ultimately fostering success and well-being during their academic journey.

Who is this for?

This manual is written for college students seeking to prioritize their mental health while navigating the challenges of higher education. It is specifically targeted toward students who may feel overwhelmed by academic pressures, social responsibilities, and the transition to greater independence.

College life can be an exciting yet stressful time, and this manual provides practical guidance for maintaining mental well-being through balanced nutrition, regular exercise, effective stress management, and time management strategies. It serves as a resource to support healthier habits and a more fulfilling experience throughout the college journey.

Chapter 1

Mental Health In College Students

Components



Background

*Mental Health In
College Students*



Statistics

*Prevalence of
Mental Health In
College Students*

Mental Health

Background

Mental health challenges are increasingly common among college students, who often face significant academic, social, and financial pressures. The transition to college can bring new independence but also feelings of isolation, anxiety, and stress. Factors such as workload, fear of failure, and difficulty balancing responsibilities contribute to rising rates of depression, anxiety, and burnout. Additionally, stigma around seeking help may prevent students from accessing necessary resources.

Statistics

60%

Of college students meet the criteria for at least one mental health problem.

1,100

Of US college students aged 18-24 have died from suicide In the past year.

24,000

Of US college students aged 18-24 have attempted suicide In the past year.

Suicide is a leading cause of death among college students in the United States. These statistics highlight the critical need for accessible mental health resources and proactive support systems within college environments to address this pressing issue.

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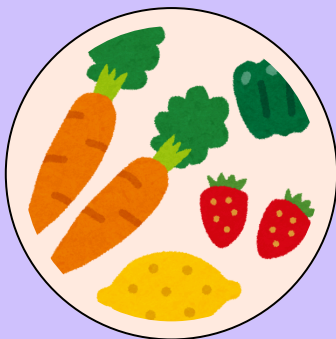
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Chapter 2

Nutrition and its Impact on the Mental Well Being of College Students

Components



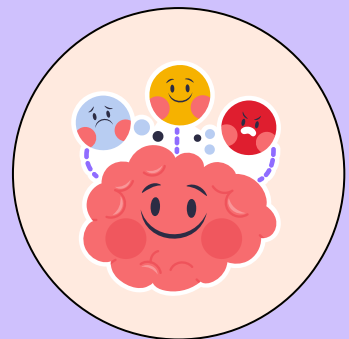
Nutrition

*Importance of a
Balanced Diet*



Helpful Tips

*Budgeting and
Timing Tips*

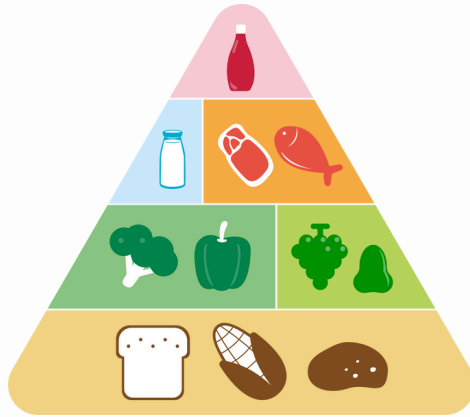


Mindful Nutrition

*Impact on
Mental Health*

Nutrition

Introduction to Nutrition for College Students



For college students, nutrition plays a crucial role in supporting both mental and physical well-being. A **balanced diet** provides **essential nutrients** needed to maintain energy levels, improve focus, and stabilize mood, all of which are critical for academic success and overall quality of life. However, many students face challenges including limited time for meal preparation, tight budgets, and restricted food options on campus, which can lead to unhealthy habits.

Understanding the impact of dietary choices and developing strategies to overcome these barriers is essential for academic and personal success.

Balanced Diet

The Importance of a Balanced Diet

A balanced diet is vital for providing macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, fats) and micronutrients (vitamins, minerals) essential for brain health and cognitive function.



Carbohydrates provide immediate energy and can be ingested through whole grains, legumes, and starchy vegetables.



Proteins support long-term energy and muscle recovery, and they can be ingested through meats, beans, nuts, and low-fat dairy.



Fats help our body absorb vitamins A, D, and E. Healthy fats can be ingested through avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil. Avoid saturated fats from fried foods.



Hydration is crucial and has significant impacts on stress, memory, concentration, reaction time, and mood. Drink at least 8 cups of water a day.

Incorporating diverse food groups helps maintain a balanced diet for optimal mental and physical performance.

Nutritional Deficiencies

Impact on Mental Health

Nutritional deficiencies can have profound effects on mental health, influencing mood, cognitive function, and overall psychological well-being.

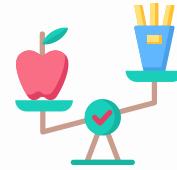
- **Vitamin B** (B6, B9, B12) deficiencies are linked to depression, fatigue, and poor brain function.
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acid** and **Vitamin D** deficiencies are correlated with mood disorders such as depression and anxiety, as omega-3s are critical for brain structure and neurotransmitter signaling.
- **Iron** deficiency can lead to fatigue, brain fog, and symptoms of depression.
- **Magnesium** deficiency is associated with heightened stress and worsened symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- **Zinc** and **Antioxidants** deficiency is tied to depression and impaired cognition, given its role in neurogenesis and synaptic transmission.
- **Amino Acids** deficiencies can impair serotonin production, contributing to depression and anxiety.

Addressing these deficiencies through a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats, or with targeted supplementation, can support mental health and improve resilience against psychological challenges in students.



Mindful Nutrition

Eating Mindfully



- Mindful eating involves paying attention to food choices and eating with intention and awareness.
- By recognizing hunger and fullness cues, students can better control portions and avoid overeating.
- Strategies to reduce emotional eating—such as identifying triggers and finding non-food-related ways to cope with stress—can help students avoid patterns like binge eating or eating out of boredom.
- Practicing mindful eating can create a healthier relationship with food, enhance enjoyment of meals, and improve overall satisfaction and well-being.

Impact of Hydration

Recognizing the difference between thirst and hunger is crucial for maintaining optimal health and managing eating habit. Drinking water can help curb cravings and reduce perceived hunger, potentially aiding in weight management.

37%

Of individuals **confuse hydration with hunger**, eating when they are actually dehydrated.

75%

Of individuals in the United States are **chronically dehydrated**.

Common Challenges

Healthy Eating on a Budget

Healthy eating can be budget-friendly with strategic planning.

- Students can **save on groceries** by buying in bulk, choosing frozen or canned produce, and selecting store brands.
- **Meal prepping**, or preparing meals at home ahead of time, offers control over ingredients and saves money.
- Utilizing campus **meal plans** can aid in providing a large resource to get foods, allowing students the opportunity to make balanced choices.

Healthy Eating on a Tight Schedule

College schedules can be busy, making it hard for students to eat healthy meals. Planning and preparing meals in advance helps students ensure nutritious options are available and incorporated into their diet. Helpful ways to incorporate nutritious foods include:

- **Portable nutritious snacks** like fruit, yogurt, nuts, and whole-grain crackers provide steady energy.
- Choosing **healthier alternatives** to junk food can help manage cravings and maintain focus.
- Having **pre-made meals** or **quick recipes** during stressful times, like exams, supports nourishment and energy.

How to Help

Building Sustainable Eating Habits for Long-Term Health

Developing **sustainable eating habits** in college sets the foundation for lifelong health:

- Setting **realistic dietary goals**, focusing on progress over perfection, and avoiding calorie obsession can make healthy eating a natural part of daily life.
- Recognizing and addressing **obstacles**—such as social events, peer pressure, and stress—helps students stay committed to their goals.
- A personal **nutrition plan** that aligns with individual preferences and lifestyle fosters consistency, making healthy eating feel achievable and rewarding over the long term.

Available Resources and Tools for Continued Support

There are many resources available to help college students make nutritious choices:

- **Mobile apps** for meal planning, grocery shopping, and tracking nutrition can simplify healthy eating.
- **Online resources** such as social media posts or nutrition websites offer recipes and tips tailored to college lifestyles.
- **Campus resources** offer nutrition counseling and wellness workshops for personalized guidance, helping students maintain a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle.

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Chapter 3

Exercise & Activity for College Students to improve Mental Health

Components



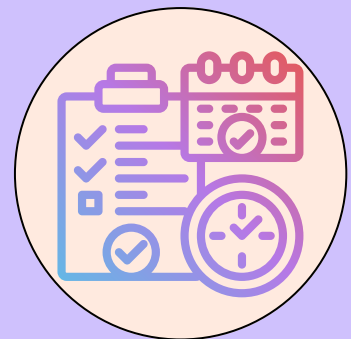
Benefits

*How exercise
benefits Mental
Health*



Exercise

*Types of
Exercise*



Time Management

*How to make
time for
exercise*

Background

Exercise and physical activity play a crucial role in promoting mental health, especially for college students who often face unique challenges. College life can be stressful, with academic pressures, social adjustments, and the struggle to balance multiple responsibilities. These factors can lead to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout. Engaging in regular physical activity has been shown to provide numerous mental health benefits that can help students navigate these challenges more effectively.

Statistics

- Regular physical activity is linked to a 26% reduction in the likelihood of experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety among students
- Even short bursts of exercise, such as 20 minutes of intense activity, can immediately improve concentration and mood, helping students stay focused during study sessions

Exercising Benefits

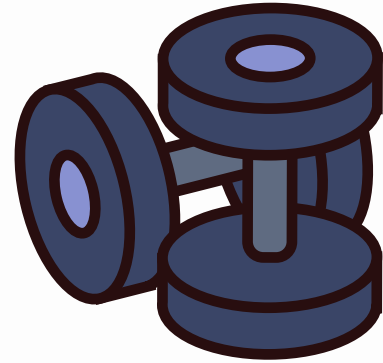
- **Reduces stress & anxiety**
 - Lowers cortisol levels (stress hormone).
 - Releases endorphins, natural mood lifter
- **Improves mood**
 - Combats feelings of depression due to release of serotonin and dopamine
- **Enhances Cognitive Function**
 - Boosts concentration, memory, and cognitive flexibility
- **Promotes Better Sleep**
 - Regulates sleep patterns.
 - Improves sleep quality, leading to better emotional stability.
- **Increases Self-Esteem and Confidence**
 - Boosts self-worth by achieving fitness goals.
 - Promotes a positive body image and sense of accomplishment.
- **Provides Social Connection**
 - Facilitates interaction through group workouts, sports, and fitness classes.
 - Reduces feelings of loneliness through social support.
- **Enhances Emotional Regulation**
 - Helps manage emotions effectively.
 - Provides an outlet for releasing pent-up energy or frustration.



Types of Exercise

- **Cardiovascular Exercises**

- Running or jogging
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Walking or hiking



- **Strength Training**

- Weightlifting
- Bodyweight exercises (push-ups, squats, planks)
- Resistance band workouts

- **Yoga and Pilates**

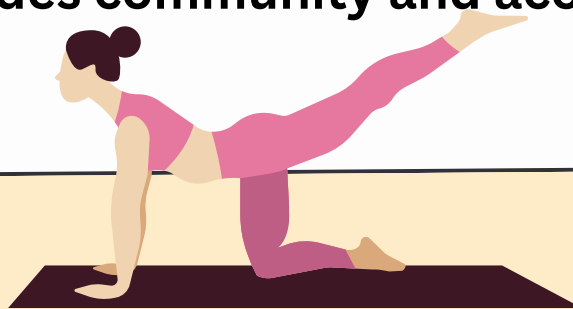
- Improves flexibility and mindfulness
- Enhances relaxation and stress management

- **Team Sports**

- Soccer, basketball, volleyball, etc.
- Promotes social interaction and teamwork

- **Group Fitness Classes**

- Aerobics, spin classes, or boot camps
- Provides community and accountability



It's time to exercise!



- **Create a Schedule**
 - Use a planner to block out time for classes, studying, and workouts.
 - Exercise at the same time each day.
- **Start with Short Workouts**
 - Incorporate 15-30 minute sessions to fit into busy days.
 - Gradually increase workout duration as your schedule allows.
- **Use Breaks Wisely**
 - Take short activity breaks between study sessions (e.g., stretching or quick walks).
 - Combine exercise with socializing by joining a fitness class or workout group.
- **Combine Exercise with Social Activities**
 - Plan workout sessions with friends for mutual accountability and support.
 - Join intramural sports or campus fitness events.

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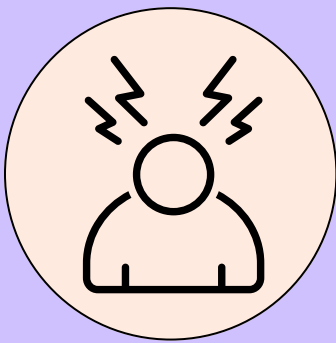
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Chapter 4

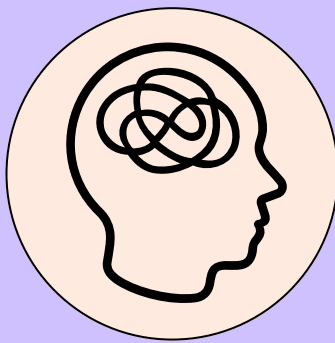
Stress Management and It's Impact On Mental Health

Components



Causes of stress

*Looking how
common stress
is and how its
caused*



Effects of Stress

*How stress
impacts the
lives of
students*



Stress Management

*How to
manage stress
in college*

What is stress?

Introduction to Stress Among college students



For college students managing stress is vital for both mental and physical health.

Effective **stress management** has a variety of benefits like better focus, energy and overall health which can help improve academic performance and overall well-being. Students are often faced with a variety of challenges unique to college students which can exacerbate stress. Recognizing how to address and manage these stressors is crucial for mental health and academic well-being.

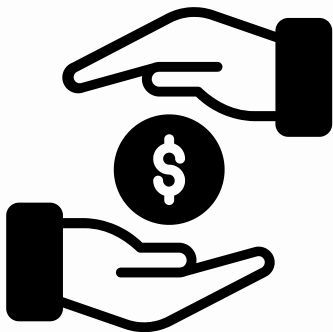
Prominence and Influence

Statistics

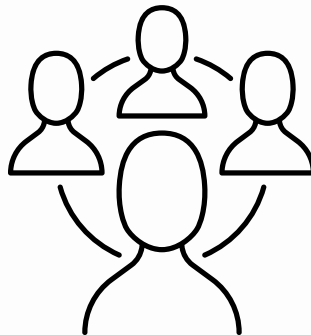
Stress is extremely prominent among college students due to a variety of factors such as academic pressures, financial stress, and personal life stressors. These can all negatively impact mental health if not managed properly.

- Over 60%** Of college students claimed to experience stress **daily**
- Over 45%** Of college students claimed to experience **“More than average”** stress daily
- Only 9%** Of college students reported experiencing **“little to no stress”**⁵

What Influences Stress?



It is reported that around **59%** of college students experience stress related to the affordability of college and future financial impacts.⁴



College students are at an increased risk for stressors related interpersonal and relationship issues.⁴

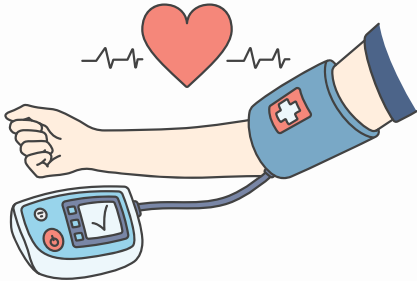


around **87%** of students reported feeling stress due to an overbearing workload and pressure to succeed. due to deadlines and work-life balance.⁴

Impacts

Stress, Health, and Academics

Physical Health

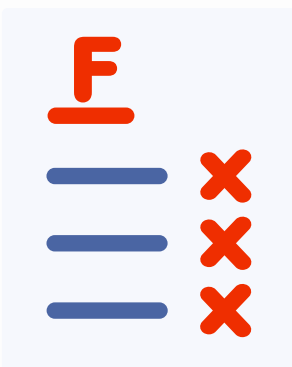


Stress can cause physical effects that can impact mental health. These include things like increased blood pressure, artery issues, and brain changes due to depression and anxiety. This can also come from poor diet and lack of exercise due to stress.⁴

Sleep



Stress can lead to poor and less sleep. This can lead to mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and burnout.³



Academic Performance

Increased stress can negatively affect academic performance due to decreased focus, motivation, and other factors such as increased absences.⁶

Tips and Tricks

Have Fun



Spending your free time doing something you enjoy or connect with family and friends can be beneficial to destress.²

Exercise

Spending time outside and exercising even for a little bit is shown to lower cortisol which is the hormone related to stress.¹



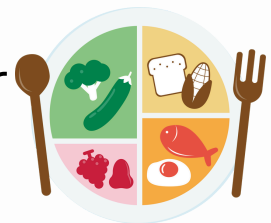
Self-Care



Spend time doing things for yourself and things you enjoy. This and getting adequate sleep can significantly decrease stress.²

Healthy Diet

It may be hard to find time to eat a nutritious meal. Try to have fun cooking or meal prepping to destress and look after your health.¹⁰



Other Resources

- Using apps or a calendar to track deadlines can help to plan to study and reduce stress around deadlines.
- Many college campuses have an on-campus wellness or health center, some even offering counseling.
- Some campuses have recreational fields or facilities where students can exercise to relieve stress. It is recommended to get at least 30 minutes of exercise daily.²
- Many campuses offer different wellness seminars and activities that teach students how to address and manage their stress.⁵



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Chapter 5

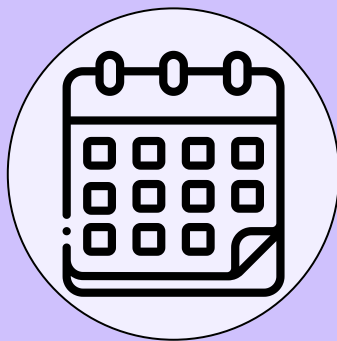
Time Management and Academics: Finding Strategies to Prevent and Relieve Stress

Components



Budgeting Time

*Using time
management to
relieve stress*



Making a Calendar

*Keeping track of
the important
things*



Finding a Balance

*Discovering
what works
best*

Time Management

Introduction to Time Management for College Students



Time management is a skill that college students must master in order to balance academic responsibilities with personal life. The first step is to set clear goals, both short-term and long-term, which helps to stay focused and organized. Prioritizing tasks is equally important. Creating a schedule using planners or digital calendars ensures that you don't miss deadlines and can allocate enough time for assignments, exams, and personal commitments. Breaking larger tasks into smaller, manageable steps can help students from feeling overwhelmed and can make progress feel more achievable.

Combating Academic Stress



Talk to Your Professor

- Talking to your professor can provide **clarity** on confusing topics, **course expectations**, or upcoming assignments
- Knowing all of the information about a course helps in reducing anxiety about falling behind
- Establishing a positive relationship with your professor also allows for open **communication** when you're struggling
- Professors and or other staff members may be able to both emotional **support** and practical **solutions** to academic challenges

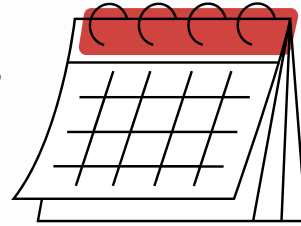
Create Study Groups

- Study groups can help create a **collaborative environment** where you can share ideas, clarify difficult concepts, and hold each other accountable
- Study groups can also act as a source of **motivation**, because working with others often encourages a consistent study routine
- The social aspect of study groups can reduce feelings of isolation, especially during high intensity study sessions or exam periods
- By discussing materials with peers, students may also come across different **helpful perspectives** and study methods



Time Management Strategies

Making a Calendar



- A calendar helps you **visually organize** your commitments, from assignment deadlines and exam dates to personal events and study sessions
- By mapping out these key dates in advance, you can better **prioritize** tasks and avoid last-minute scrambling
- Digital calendars, such as Google Calendar, allow you to easily add, modify, and view your schedule, while also offering the convenience of color-coding different activities

Setting Reminders

- Setting reminders on your calendar or through apps like your phone's built-in alarm system or task management apps is important
- Reminders ensure you don't forget important tasks, whether it's completing a reading assignment, studying for a quiz, or submitting a paper
- You can set them at **strategic intervals** such as a reminder a day before an exam, an hour before a study session, or 10 minutes before an assignment deadline

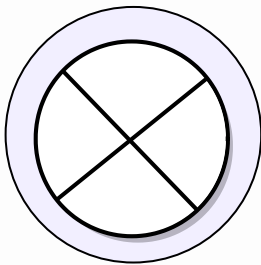
REMINDERS

Time Management Techniques



The Pomodoro Technique

This technique involves breaking work in 25 minute intervals and taking a 5 minute break after each interval. After four of these intervals the individual should take a longer break (15-30 minutes).



The Eisenhower Matrix

This tool helps to prioritize tasks into the four categories, urgent and important, not urgent but important, urgent but not important, not urgent and not important.



The Two-Minute Rule

This technique recommends that if a task can be done in two minutes or less it should be done immediately.



Time Blocking

This technique involves setting aside certain blocks of time for different tasks or activities. This helps to focus on one thing at a time and increase efficiency.

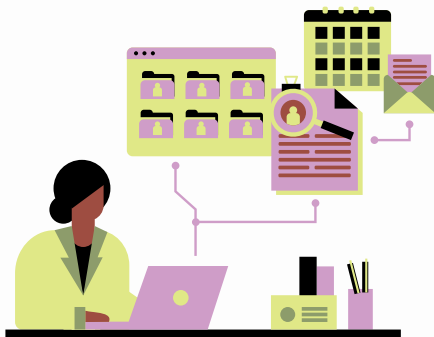
Further Implementation

Staying Accountable

- Set clear and achievable goals
- Set reminders and alerts
- Share your goals with others
- Track your progress
- Join a study group
- Use a timer
- Reward yourself for meeting deadlines
- Review your goals and adjust them as needed



Resources



Websites and Blogs: College Info Geek, Todoist Blog, Trello Blog, The Productivist

Apps and Tools: Google Calendar, Trello, Forest, RescueTime, Focus Booster, Habitica

Podcasts On Time Management: The Productivity Show, The Tim Ferris Show

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Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1

Mental health issues are prevalent among college students, driven by academic, social, and financial pressures, resulting in isolation, anxiety, and stress.

High depression and burnout rates, along with stigma, impede help-seeking. Approximately 60% of students have a mental health condition, with about 1,100 students aged 18-24 dying by suicide annually in the U.S. and nearly 24,000 attempting it. These statistics underscore the urgent need for proactive mental health support in colleges.

Chapter 2

Nutrition plays a vital role in the mental and physical well-being of college students, enhancing energy, focus, and resilience. A balanced diet with essential nutrients and proper hydration supports academic and personal success. Despite challenges like tight budgets, busy schedules, and limited food options, students can adopt practical strategies such as meal planning, buying in bulk, and prioritizing nutrient-rich foods. Mindful eating, which links dietary choices to mental health, helps manage stress and mood.

Building sustainable habits and utilizing resources like apps and campus support can empower students to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 3

Exercise offers significant mental health benefits for college students, helping to reduce stress and improve mood. Different types of exercise cater to various needs: cardio activities like running boost energy and mood, strength training builds confidence, and mind-body exercises like yoga reduce stress while enhancing emotional regulation. To fit exercise into busy schedules, students can prioritize short sessions, use study breaks for quick workouts, or combine active commuting with fitness. Campus resources like gyms and group fitness classes also make staying active more convenient.

Chapter 4

Stress has a variety of impacts that are further exacerbated by the college lifestyle. Poor stress management among college students can lead to a variety of downfalls regarding both mental and physical health and wellbeing. This chapter discussed the prevalence and implications of stress among college students. In addition, it addressed both general and on campus ways to help learn stress management and useful strategies. With these tips and resources hopefully the impact of stress on college students' mental health could be minimized.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 5

Effective time management is a very important aspect of mental wellbeing for college students. To manage time effectively students need to set clear goals. Some of these goals include academic goals, like breaking down assignments and preparing for exams. This also includes personal goals to ensure a healthy work-life balance. Making a schedule is another important strategy, which can be made easier using a planner or digital tools to track deadlines, class times, and personal activities. Other strategies such as group work, communication with professors, and using various scientifically based techniques are key to using time management as a tool for better mental wellbeing.