Office of Human Resources, Benefits Department

University of Pittsburgh

Wellness 101: Managing Stress during the Academic Season

2025 Bridging Benefits Educational Series

Presented by the Benefits Department

Sept. 25, 2025, Noon – 1 p.m.

**Please be aware that the plans outlined in these presentations are subject to change. The information provided is accurate as of the date of this presentation and is intended for general guidance only. Any future modifications or updates to benefits will be communicated as they occur.*

Presenters

For Benefits Customer Support following the presentation:
Submit a question or comment
Phone: 833-852-2210 (Phone Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm)

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Health Plan Representative:

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Agenda

- Understanding Stress
- Recognizing Stress
- Stress Management Techniques
- Benefits, Time Off & Resources
  - Voluntary Benefits
  - Time Off/Flexible Work Arrangements
  - Wellness for Life Program
  - Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Guided Mindfulness Exercise
- Q&A
- Wrap & Up

Icebreaker

- Poll Question!

How would you describe your current stress level today?

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Understanding Stress

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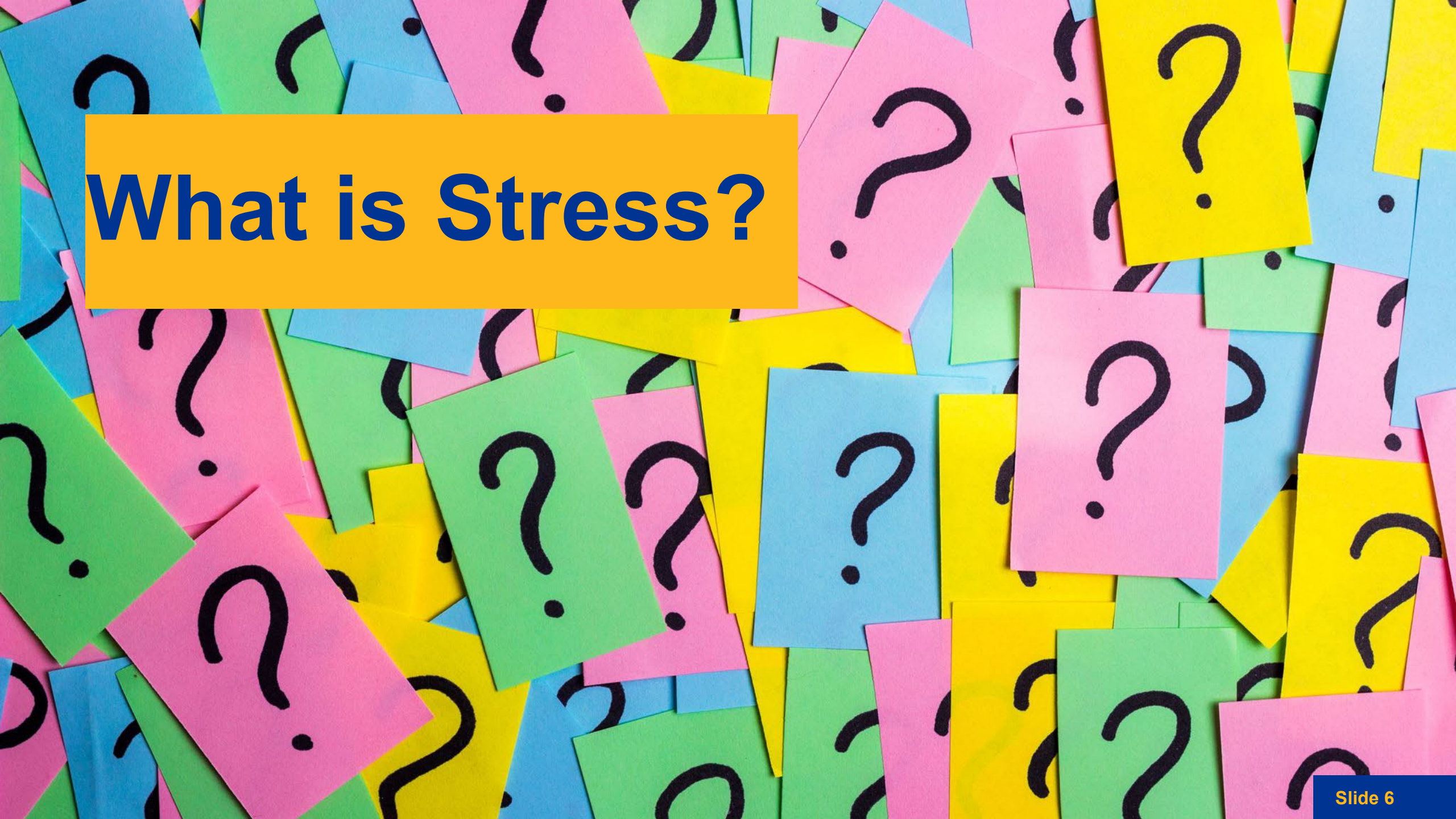

What is Stress?

What is Stress?

Stress:

Our mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions to any perceived demands or threats.

Stressors:

"*n.* any event, force, or condition that results in physical or emotional stress. Stressors may be internal or external forces that require adjustment or coping strategies on the part of the affected individual."

Acute vs. Chronic Stress

Acute Stress

- Short-term and immediate
- Intense but brief
- Triggered by sudden challenges
- Activates fight or flight
- Increases heart rate, blood pressure and alertness

Chronic Stress

- Long-term and persistent
- Lower intensity, but constant
- Triggered by unresolved issues, or constant exposure to stressors
- Wears down body and mind
- Can lead to burnout

Common Workplace Stressors

Demanding job

High workload, unrealistic expectations

Interpersonal Conflict

Differences in workstyles and expectations

No control

Lack of control over tasks or decisions

High pressure

Peaks of stress around semester starts, finals and admission cycles

Departmental politics

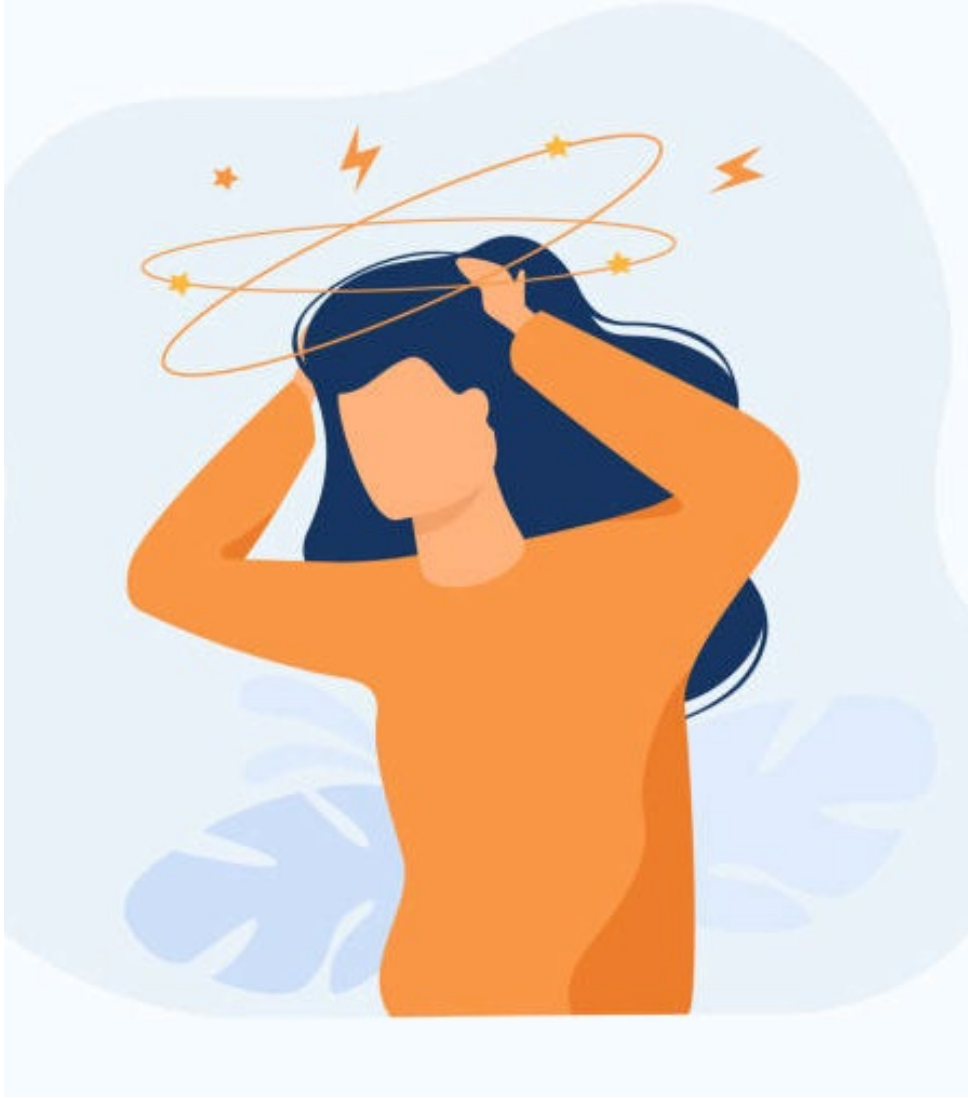
Conflicts over priorities, leadership or resource allocation

Overwork

Inadequate staffing or resources

Common Stressors in Everyday Life

- Relationships
- Childcare or eldercare demands
- Financial worries (bills, budgeting, unexpected expenses)
- Balancing multiple roles (e.g., employee, parent, student)
- Information overload from news or social media
- Health concerns (Physical or Mental)
- Overcommitment
- Legal matters
- Major life decisions



Recognizing Stress

Behavioral and emotional indicators

Impact on productivity, relationships and health

Role of self-awareness and peer support

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What does stress look like?

- Stress looks different for everyone, and everyone deals with stress differently.
- How can it manifest?
  - Emotionally
  - Physically
  - Behaviorally
  - Cognitively

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Emotional Symptoms of Stress

- Stress can manifest emotionally in many forms

Feeling overwhelmed	Low self-esteem and depression	Having difficulty relaxing and easing your mind
Avoiding others	Becoming easily frustrated, agitated, or moody	Change in eating habits

Physical Symptoms of Stress

Headaches

Changes in sleep

Sweating

Fatigue or low energy

Rapid Heartbeat

Upset Stomach

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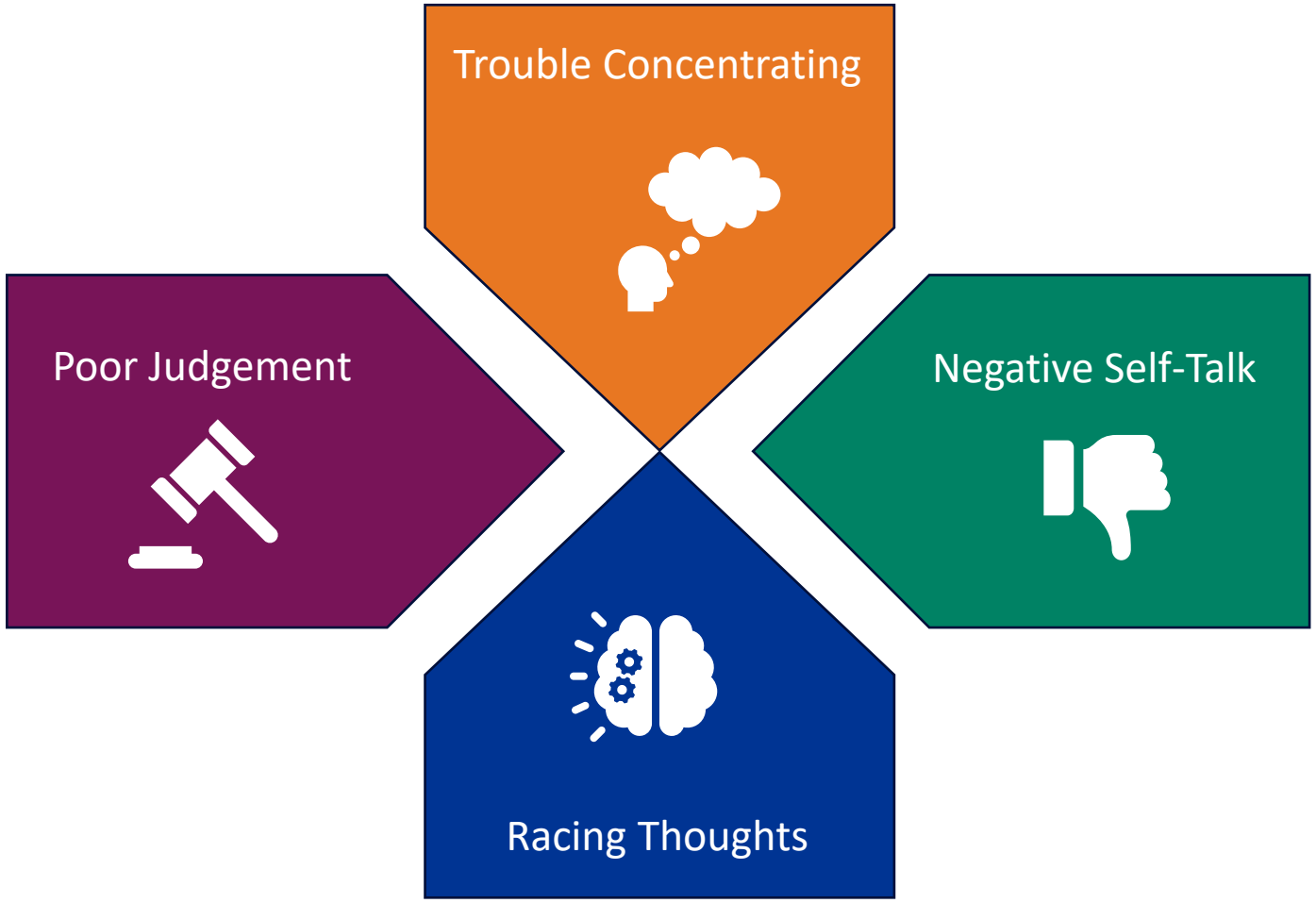
Cognitive Symptoms of Stress



Behavioral Symptoms of Stress

- Procrastination or Avoidance
- Nervous Habits (nail biting, pacing)
- Overeating or Undereating
- Withdrawal from Social Activities
- Changes in Work or School Performance
- Increased use of Alcohol or Substances

Impact of Stress on Performance & Relationships

Performance

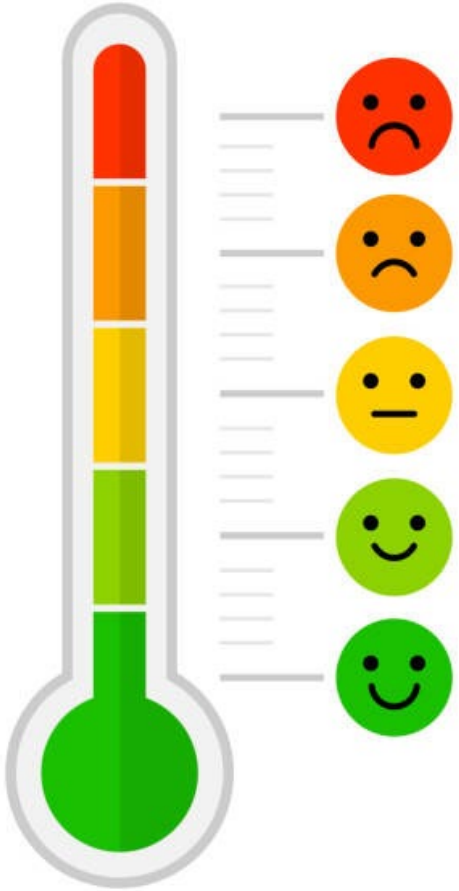
- Reduced concentration and focus
- Increased errors and missed deadlines
- Lower productivity and motivation
- Difficulty making decisions
- Burnout and absenteeism

Relationships

- Irritability and tension with coworkers
- Breakdown in communication
- Withdrawal from team collaboration
- Loss of trust and morale
- Conflict escalation or passive aggression

Importance of Recognizing Stress

- **Prevents burnout**: Early awareness helps you take action before stress becomes overwhelming.
- **Protects health**: Chronic stress is linked to heart disease, anxiety, and weakened immunity.
- **Improves performance**: Recognizing stress allows for timely adjustments that boost focus and productivity.
- **Strengthens relationships**: Awareness reduces emotional reactivity and improves communication.
- **Supports mental well-being**: Identifying stress opens the door to healthier coping strategies.



Stress Management Techniques

Cognitive, Physical, Lifestyle & Organizational strategies

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Stress Management Techniques

COGNITIVE

PHYSICAL

LIFESTYLE & ORGANIZATIONAL

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Cognitive Techniques

- **Reframing NegativeThoughts:** Changing how we interpret stressors
- Practicing **Mindfulness** and **Meditation** as tools to calm the mind
- Using **Grounding Techniques**
  - E.g., 5-4-3-2-1 sensory check

A UPMC Health Coach will guide us in practicing mindfulness in a bit!

Physical Techniques

- **Movement:** Short walks, exercise can reduce cortisol (your body's stress hormone).

Breath Focus	Exercise	Muscle Relaxation
Box Breathing – Tracing a box with your arm while inhaling for 4 counts, exhaling for 4 counts and repeating until a box is drawn.	• Walking • Running • Stretching • Yoga • Cardio • Dancing	**Progressive Muscle Relaxation –** Tense and release muscle groups one at a time, from toes to head. Helps identify and release hidden tension.

Lifestyle and Organizational Strategies

- **Time Management**: Prioritization, checklists, delegation, breaks, calendar blocking
- **Boundary Setting:** (e.g., disconnecting after work hours)
- **Digital Detoxing:** Turning off notifications for a few hours or unplugging for a weekend
- **Seek Support:** Talk to a trusted colleague, manager, or mental health professional.
- **Utilizing available resources and benefits:**
  - Voluntary Benefits
  - Taking Time Off
  - Wellness for Life Program
  - Employee Assistance Program: Life Solutions
  - Health Coaches if enrolled in the UPMC Medical Plan
  - And more!

Voluntary Benefits

Care.com, Pitt Perks and the Employee Emergency Fund

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Care.com

Eligibility for Care.com is limited to full-time, regular:

- Staff
- Faculty
- Librarians
- Research Associates
- Postdoctoral Associates*

What Is It? Care.com offers a network of providers and options to assist with needs such as after-school care, caring for a child who is home sick, caring for children while you are working from home, caring for aging parents, and more.

Backup Care 10 available backup care days per program year for child and adult care, specifically for work related work purposes

Premium Membership Unlimited access to Care.com's online network

- Search and view profiles of local caregivers
  - Communicate with and receive applications from local caregivers
  - Request background checks
  - Post jobs
- Receive Tuition discounts on tutoring and local/national childcare centers

Care Talks Exclusive events from expert speakers offering advice and Guidance to help you better care for yourself and your family

Register for Care Talks today
care.com/yourbenefits

Individuals who have a Job Type of Certificate are not eligible.

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PittPerks

DISCOUNT PROGRAMS

Categories

- Apparel & Beauty
- Automotive
- Cruises
- Education
- Entertainment
- Family and Dependent Care
- Financial Services
- Food & Drinks
- Gifts & Flowers
- **Health & Gyms & Health Clubs**
- **Wellness**
- Home & Garden
- Hotels
- Limited Time Offer
- **Mental Health**
- Movie Tickets
- Pets
- Phone & Internet
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Rental Cars
- Sporting Events
- Sports and Outdoors
- Sustainability
- Technology & Electronics
- Theme Parks & Attractions
- Travel

Mindfulness.com headspace Talkspace

betterhelp PlushCare FocusCalm

COPE NOTES DAILY MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT loop earplugs HUSK GYM NETWORK VOUS VITAMIN

VOLUNTARY BENEFITS

Available Year-Round

- Group Home and Automobile Insurance
  - Features online quotes and comparisons between MetLife and Travelers
- Pet Insurance
  - Offered through ASPCA
- Identity Theft
  - Offered through Allstate

Subject to Plan-Year

- MetLife Supplemental Medical Coverage
  - Hospital Indemnity
- MetLife Legal Services

Employee Emergency Fund

The Employee Emergency Fund provides financial support of up to $1,500 to eligible Pitt employees across all five campuses

Employees eligible under this policy include full-time and part-time, active:

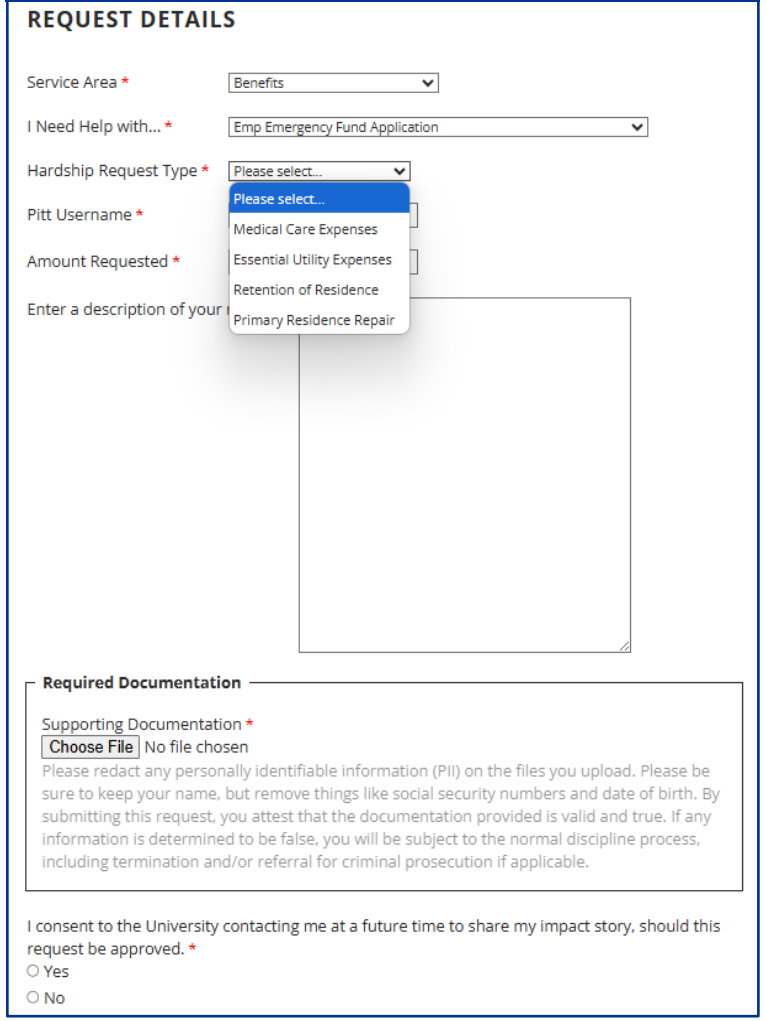
- Executive
- Staff
- Faculty
- Research associates
- Postdoctoral associates

Note: union-eligible employees should check their collective bargaining agreement

COVERED HARDSHIPS

- Essential Utility Expenses
  - → water, gas, electricity
- Medical Care Expenses
  - → Over/past-due medical care expenses for the employee or their eligible dependents
- Primary Residence Repair
  - → Damages making residence unlivable or excess of insurance
- Retention of Residence
  - → Payments necessary to prevent eviction or foreclosure

Applications are submitted online.
Visit: **hr.pitt.edu/EEFapplication** to access



EXTERNAL FINANCIAL AND SUPPORT RESOURCES

If your circumstances require assistance beyond the Employee Emergency Fund program you may be able to find additional or alternative resources through organizations outside of the University of Pittsburgh.

- United Way of Pennsylvania (2-1-1)
- NeighborWorks Western Pennsylvania
- PA Department of Health and Human Services

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Time Off

Paid Time Off, Volunteer/Professional Development Days and Flexible Work Arrangements

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Time Off – Staff Members

For questions on Time Off, please contact HR Client Services (formerly Shared Services)
Phone: 412-624-7000
Fax: 412-624-8063
Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm
Contact OHR

- **Vacation Time**
- **Sick Time**
- **Personal Time**
  - Time needed that does not qualify for sick or vacation time
  - Religious holiday or other event that is not identified by the University as an approved holiday
  - Caring for pets (vet visit, ill pet, etc.); caring for dependents is covered under the sick time policy
  - Volunteer and professional development activities beyond the provided 7.5 hours per month
  - Self-care, such as a physical fitness or wellness class, that does not fall under the sick time policy
- **Volunteer & Professional Development Time**
  - University staff are eligible for **paid time off each month**
  - Use time for:
    - **Volunteer activities** in the community
    - **Professional development** during regular work hours
    - Review the Volunteer and Professional Development Time guidelines.

For Faculty Time Off, please contact the Office of the **Provost.**
Phone: 412-624-4222

For Postdoctoral Associate and Postdoctoral Scholar Time Off, please contact the Office of Academic Career Development **OACD.**
Phone: 412-648-8486

Flexible Work Arrangements - Staff

- Employees may initiate a Flexible Work Arrangement (FWA) request by contacting their supervisor
- Supervisors must discuss available flexible work options with the employee
- Considerations include:
  - Unit's operational needs
  - Input from the RC Head
  - Guidelines, checklists, and forms from OHR
- Health-related flexible work requests should be directed to **Disability Resources & Services (DRS)**
  - These fall outside this policy and follow DRS-specific guidance

Additional information on FWA can be found here: https://www.hr.pitt.edu/news/flexible-work-arrangements-renewals-and-reminders

Wellness for Life Program

Departmental Wellness, Mindset Matters Mini-Series, Active & Fit Program and Health Coaches

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Departmental Wellness

Cost: FREE!

For questions or to schedule, please contact Ashley Boykin at BeWell@pitt.edu.

Academic Leaders and Department Heads can schedule wellness services for their employees. Categories of services include:

ON THE GO'S

On the Go is a program developed to bring quick and effective activities to employees such as: stress management, physical activity, and nutrition. These can be done in person or virtually upon request. The time for each activity is 15-20 minutes but can be tailored to the amount of time you have available.

This option is great to offer during staff meetings or a full day of training to break up the flow.

STOP BY BOOTHS

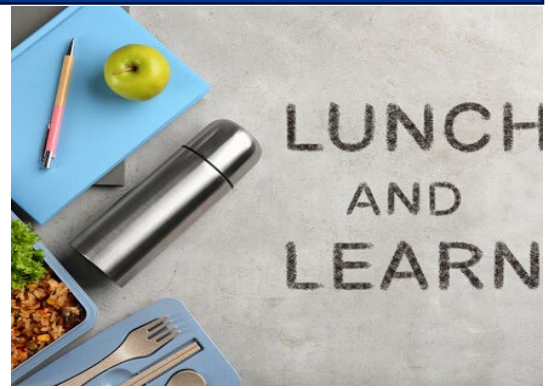
The on-site health coach will be at a table with information on a variety of wellness topics such as: stress, physical activity, tobacco cessation, hypertension, lower back pain, and healthy holiday eating. The table should be placed near high traffic areas such as employee cafeterias, lunchrooms, or lounges. Each session includes an interactive activity and a Coach on Call educational piece with follow up. Times are usually scheduled in two-hour blocks.

This option would be great to offer if there is a certain day of the week when most of your team will be in the office.

MYHEALTH KITCHEN

Looking for new recipe ideas that are quick, easy, and help achieve your health and wellness goals? Welcome to the MyHealth Kitchen where participants can learn in real time how to accomplish healthy, nutritional-based foods in the comfort of their home. Each demonstration will range from 20-30 minutes highlighting different aspects of nutrition that is inclusive to all.

Only offered virtually.



PRESENTATIONS (LUNCH & LEARNS)

Educational sessions offered in a wide variety of topics. Each session can range in length from 30-45 minutes.

Sessions can be offered in person or virtually.

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Benefits of Departmental Wellness

- Better concentration, focus, and creativity
- Reduced absenteeism
- Higher energy levels
- Improved productivity
- Happier work environment

Mindset Matters Mini-Series

"Your day is pretty much formed by how you spend your first hour. Check your thoughts, attitude, and heart."
- John Tesh

- New Mini-Series offering relaxing morning starts
- You don't need a vacation to feel refreshed—small wins can shift your mood and mindset.
- **Sessions:** Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays | **Sept. 3 – Oct. 24, 2025** | **8:30–8:50 a.m.**
- Enjoy journal prompts or relaxing music to begin your day from a centered place.
- Join Pitt's Wellness for Life: **20-minute virtual mini-series** to slow down, reflect, and recharge.
  - ►Use this Teams link to join any session in the series.
- Add this series to your calendar: Outlook | iCal | Google Calendar

Additional information available on: https://www.hr.pitt.edu/news/new-mindset-matters-wellness-mini-series-offers-relaxing-morning-starts

Active & Fit Program

- For UPMC Health Plan Participants
- Provides access to a wide range of national fitness centers and on-demand fitness videos for just $28 a month.

Learn More:

Scan the QR Code > Login > Wellness > Health and Wellness Discounts

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Heinz Chapel Chair Yoga – Oct. 9

- **Pittsburgh Campus Faculty & Staff** Take a mid-day break to reduce workday stress—because your wellness matters!

- **Join us one Thursday per month** at **Heinz Chapel** from **12:15–12:45 PM** No registration needed. Free to attend. Led by a Health Coach with practical, everyday stress-reduction techniques.

- 🗓️ **Mini Series Dates & Topics**
  - **Oct. 9 – Chair Yoga**
  - Nov. 13 – Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Dec. 11 – Meditation

Additional information can be found on our OHR Website here: https://www.hr.pitt.edu/news/stress-management-mini-series-returns-heinz-chapel

Health Coaching Services at Pitt

- One-on-one coaching to define and achieve health goals
- Free for faculty and staff with UPMC Health Plan
- Available onsite, by phone, and online
- Support for weight management, physical activity, healthy eating, stress reduction, and quitting smoking
- Onsite coaching for departments during work breaks

Employee Assistance Program

Life Solutions

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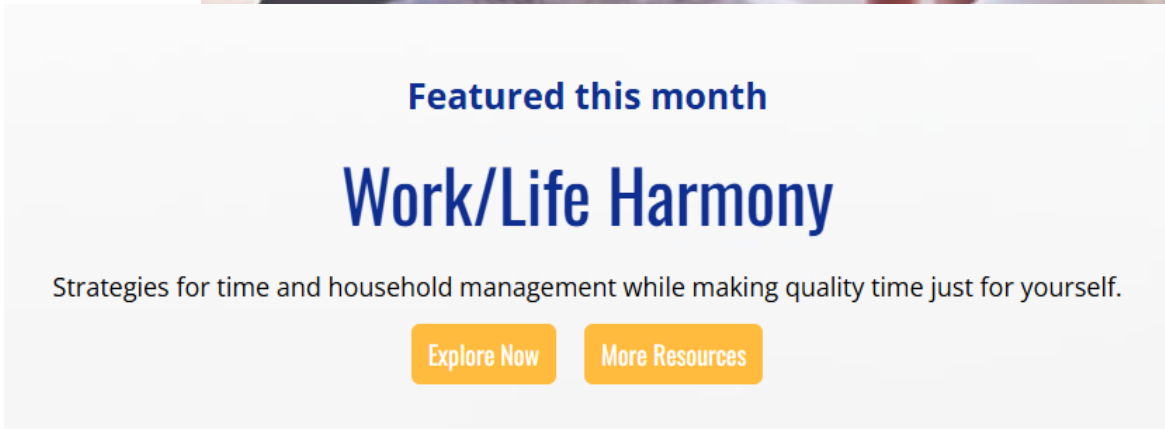
Life Solutions

- **LifeSolutions** is the University of Pittsburgh's Faculty and Staff Assistance Program that provides a broad range of services to assist University employees and their household members to balance work and the stresses of daily life.
- LifeSolutions offers personalized care services, 24-hour support, online resources and tools, and more, all at no cost to you. LifeSolutions services include:
  - Personalized Work Life Referrals
  - Online Work Life Resources
  - Crisis 24/7 Contact Information
  - Counseling and Coaching Services
  - Disability and Family Medical Leave Outreach

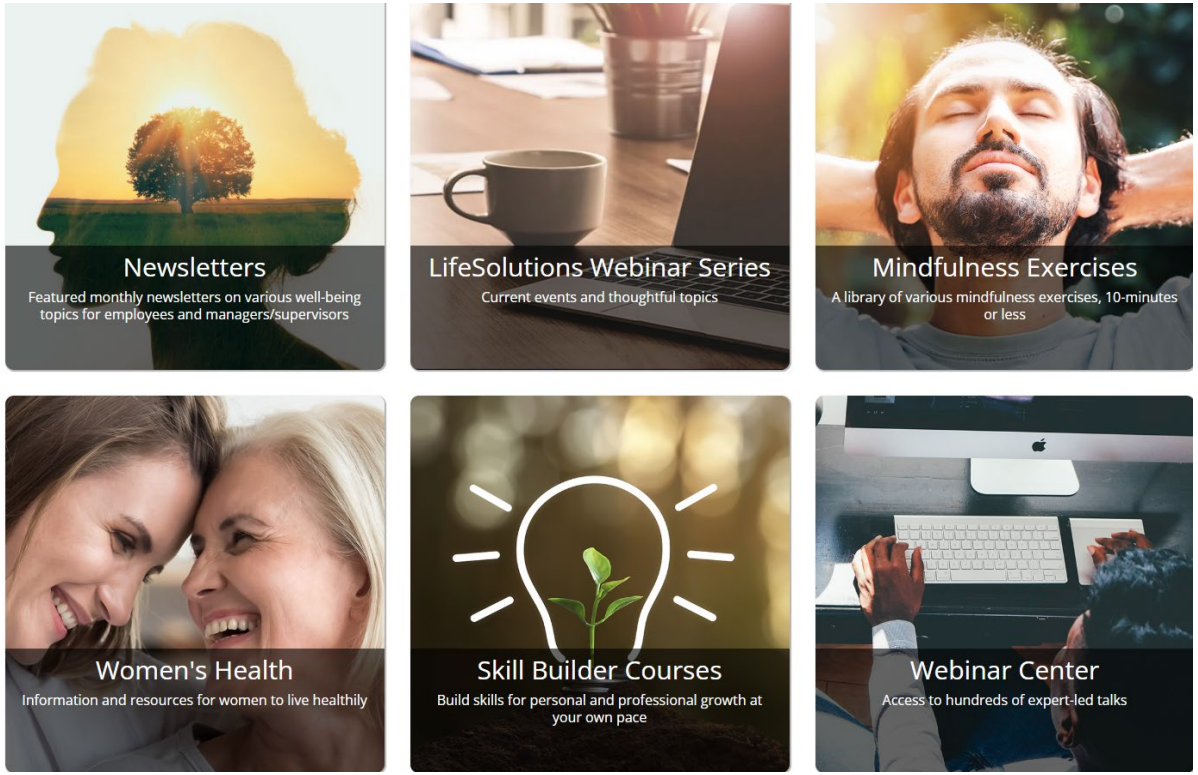


Additional information is available on: https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/work-life-balance/lifesolutions

Life Solutions Webinars

NOTE: If you are prompted to log in for an article, enter the company code **PITT**

- Variety of Topics available:
  - Achieving Harmony: How to Maintain a Healthy Work-Life Balance
  - Appreciating Drama
  - Reclaiming Your Joy
  - Do You Speak "Teen"?
  - Minimizing Worry to Maximize Your Life
  - It's Not Selfish, It's Self-Care
  - Workplace Etiquette 101
  - Three S's of Stress Management
  - Financial Wellness
- And many more!



https://workpartners.personaladvantage.com/workpartners/content/lifesolutions-webinar-series.html

Guided Mindfulness Exercise

Led by UPMC Health Coach Alyssa Minnis

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Questions?

Bridging Benefits

Upcoming Sessions!

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Event Calendar

4th Quarter FY 24-25

April 24, 2025: Financial Wellness Benefits & Resources

May 22, 2025: Preparing for the New Plan Year (Post-Open Enrollment)

June 26, 2025: Planning for Parenthood

1st Quarter FY 25-26

July 24, 2025: Retirement Savings Vesting & the Accelerated Plan

August 21, 2025: Understanding Student Health Insurance

September 2025: Back to School - Wellness and Stress Management

2nd Quarter FY 25-26

October 2025: Flexible Spending Accounts & Claiming with Confidence

November 2025: Retirement Ready: Steps Towards Retirement

December 2025: Perks of Working at Pitt

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Next Steps:

- ❑ **Register for an upcoming session if interested!**
  - https://www.hr.pitt.edu/bridging-benefits
- ❑ **Follow Us on Social Media**
- ❑ **Keep an Eye Out for Future Sessions!**

Resources & Contacts

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Resources & Contact Information

Department:	Topic:	Where to Learn More:
Benefits Department Phone: 833-852-2210	Benefit Eligibility	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/benefits
	Child & Family Care	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/work-life-balance/child-and-family-care
	PittPerks	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/work-life-balance/pittperks
	Employee Emergency Fund	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/work-life-balance/employee-emergency-fund
	Wellness for Life	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/work-life-balance/wellness-for-life
	Life Solutions	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/work-life-balance/lifesolutions
	UPMC Health Coaches *(Free for UPMC Health Plan Participants)*	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/work-life-balance/wellness-life/health-coaching-pitt
	Financial & Legal Resources	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/work-life-balance/financial-and-legal-resources
HR Client Services	Time Off (Staff)	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/benefits/time-off
	Volunteer and Professional Development Time (Staff)	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/benefits/time/volunteer-and-professional-development-time-guidelines
	Flexible Work Arrangements	https://www.hr.pitt.edu/news/flexible-work-arrangements-renewals-and-reminders

Online inquiries can be submitted at: https://www.hr.pitt.edu/contact-ohr or you can call us at M-F 833-852-2210

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Office of Human Resources Benefits Department

https://www.hr.pitt.edu/current-employees/benefits

Contact us at 833-852-2210 or online at https://www.hr.pitt.edu/contact-ohr