

# Feeling the Blues

## Between classes, work and socializing, the stress of college can really get to some people

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If you can't seem to dig yourself out of the dumps you've been in all week, you're not alone. Students everywhere are feeling the effects of hard nights of studying and stressful social situations.

Mental Illness Awareness Week occurred Oct. 6-12. While it is not a heavily publicized awareness week, more people than expected need to understand these problems.

One in five Americans suffers from some form of mental health problem. Even though only 40 percent seek to receive help, 80 percent of those who do overcome their challenges.

A large number of people first experience stress systems that develop into mental illness during college, between the ages of 18 and 24. However, most people who experience these problems do not receive help until they are well into their thirties.

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This needless suffering can occur for a variety of reasons. Many people don't seek help until their problems are extremely severe. People can be afraid of the stigma they will experience if they admit to having emotional difficulties. Also, medical doctors often find nothing physically wrong with people, not realizing the severity of the problem or that it is psychological and refer them to a psychiatrist.

Cheryl Schirillo, who works with Recovery Inc., a nonprofit mental health organization, said that stigmas should not be attached to these illnesses because many of them are genetic. Everyone has stress and occasional problems sleeping, but for people with genetic problems, additional symptoms can be triggered.

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Drugs and counseling can be beneficial to them, but they help the most if people address the situation at its earliest stages.

Schirillo said that people with genetic problems react to certain situations differently. For example, if they had a lot of work to do and then found out that they had another project, they might become extremely upset and irrationally drop out of school. Or, they can become socially isolated and stop going to class and eventually have to drop out.

Schirillo said that the ages between 18 and 24 are

when these problems can get out of hand, so college students need to be very aware of them. Manic-depressive illness, schizophrenia, and panic attacks typically begin to occur during the college years.

Panic attacks — floods of physical and emotional sensations of fright, without apparent cause — happen to about one to two percent of the population. Panic attacks can result from genetics, stress, or drug use. Symptoms include a pounding heart, a choking feeling, nausea, numbness, and fear of losing control; a person feels like he is having a heart attack. sufferers should not try to fight it off, but should give themselves a simple task like counting backwards from 100 by three's. This action will focus their attention on something else until the attack subsides.

Nurses report a substantial increase in students in the emergency room suffering from panic attacks during exam weeks.

A person does not have to be having a panic attack to be feeling the effects of stress, however. Stress symptoms include trouble sleeping, an upset stomach, fast heart rate, poor concentration, hunched shoulders, headaches, fatigue, irritability, cold sweat, and clenched jaw, and are very frequent among college students.

Depression is also a common occurrence among college students. Depression is an illness, and it affects the whole body, including the brain. Symptoms can include changes in appetite and sleep patterns, lack of energy, low self-esteem, and thoughts of death or suicide. However, depression is treatable, and health care providers at the University Counseling Center or off campus are well-equipped to help students.

Recovery Inc. is an organization that offers free, self-help support groups to students in the Winston-Salem area. Recovery helps people learn practical ways to manage stress and to overcome the symptoms that accompany many mental illnesses. People at the group talk about how they have reacted under certain circumstances, and they help people think about their situations differently.

Schirillo said Recovery is a good option because sometimes students are more comfortable going off campus to receive help. Jan Bowman is in charge of the local chapter of Recovery, and she can be reached at 699-8708.

Rose Van Sickle, the president of Recovery, suffered from panic attacks for almost 10 years before she found help through Recovery. "This is not a group of people sitting around moaning about their problems," she said. "These are people who are working harder than they ever thought possible to overcome the negative thoughts and feelings that have taken over their lives." The Recovery method, developed by a Chicago psychiatrist, has been used since 1937.

Schirillo emphasized that people's stress does not have to develop into debilitating problems if one looks for help early on. She said that treating emotional problems is like getting a physical; if problems are detected soon enough, they can be treated. She said that the way people look at emotional problems is changing, and the stigmas can be erased. "Young people are more open-minded. You guys are the ones that can change people's attitudes," she said.

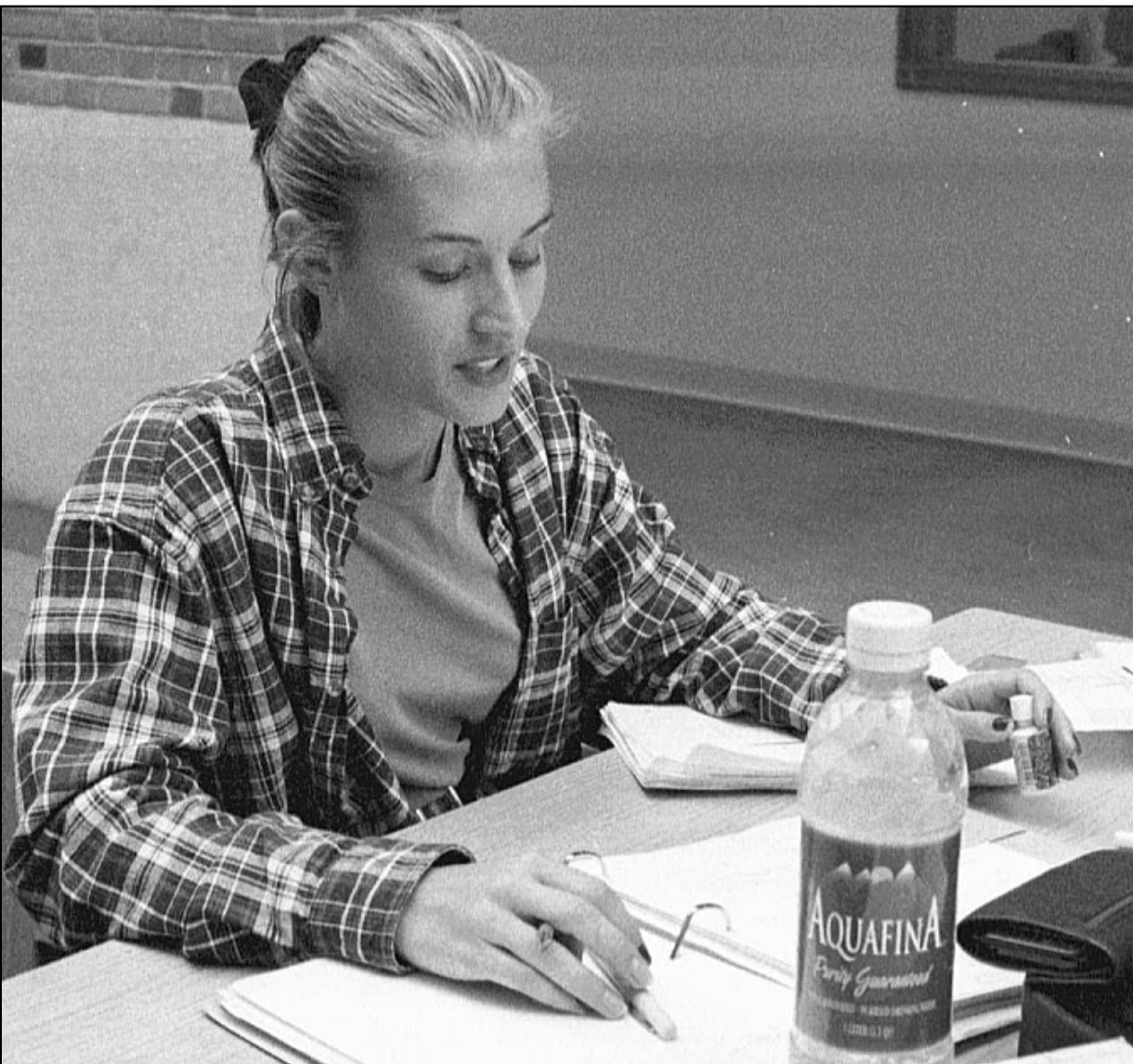
### Signs of Depression

#### Minor Depression

- ◆ overeating or poor appetite
- ◆ difficulty sleeping, or wanting to sleep all the time
- ◆ lack of energy
- ◆ difficulty concentrating
- ◆ chronic low self-esteem, pessimism or sadness

#### Major Depression

- ◆ not enjoying usual activities
- ◆ significant weight fluctuation
- ◆ feelings of worthlessness
- ◆ feelings of hopelessness
- ◆ contemplation of suicide
- ◆ overwhelming sadness
- ◆ frightening physical symptoms



LeeAnn Hodges

Senior Chris Bergren tries to concentrate in the Z. Smith Reynolds Library during midterm week. On any given night the library is packed with students laboring over class work.



LeeAnn Hodges

Students partake in rituals of studying in the atrium of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library.