



# HELPS

Health Enhancement for Lifelong Professional Students

## Overachiever Syndrome: Healthy or Not?

The overachiever syndrome — pushing yourself to continually achieve — can be both good and bad for your health and your sense of well-being. Learn how to recognize the healthy and not-so-healthy aspects of overachievement and regain your balance if it has tipped over to the unhealthy side.

education is a wonderfully enriching experience, but it's also stressful, especially if you're inclined to be an overachiever," says Maria Pascucci, president and founder of Campus Calm, an online forum for students to discuss grades, stress and personal wellbeing. "You cannot avoid stress, but you can learn to manage it before it manages you."

"Pursuing higher

### Clarify Your Personal Values and Boundaries

It's important for students to pinpoint the triggers and mindsets that fuel academic stress, author Maria Pascucci advises. "You can't find answers until you ask yourself good questions. Consider answering the following questions for yourself, and remember that there are no wrong answers."

- I believe being educated means \_\_\_\_.
- I believe learning should be \_\_\_\_.
- I will never sacrifice \_\_\_\_ while pursuing a higher education.
- I believe grades measure \_\_\_\_\_. However, no letter grade could possibly measure \_\_\_\_\_.
- I believe an education is key to \_\_\_\_\_.
- I believe I am in charge of how I spend my time in school when I choose \_\_\_\_\_.
- I believe I am in charge of how I spend my personal time when I choose \_\_\_\_\_.
- My happiness and ability to define success reside within \_\_\_\_\_.

### Look at Your Choices

"It is healthy to strive for excellence," Pascucci notes. "It is healthy to work hard and be proud of your commitment to reach your goals. But health and balance are also choices. It is not healthy to choose to sacrifice your health and well-being to achieve success. What does success mean? Does being happy and healthy make you successful?"

"It is not healthy to tie your self-worth to your academic achievements or failures," Pascucci cautions. "It is not healthy to hold your résumé as your sole measure of self-worth. If you were asked to define who you are with or without your successes or failures, what would you say?"

### Performance Isn't Everything

Take the time to develop a sense of identity that is separate from your achievements and your failures," advises Pascucci. "If your whole self-worth isn't dependent on your performance in life, it will be far less scary to try new things. Whether you have a GED or a PhD, finding the courage to take risks, making mistakes and

learning from them are keys to a happy, successful and purposeful life."

### Learn to Draw the Line

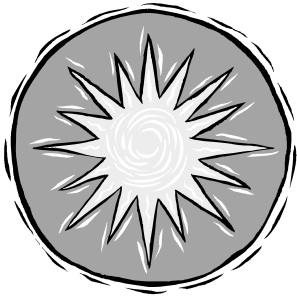
Pascucci graduated summa cum laude from college in 2001. "I also graduated with anxiety-induced health problems," she says. "That was my wake-up call to slow down and reassess my life."

For her forthcoming book, *Campus Calm University: The college student's 10-step blueprint to stop stressing and create a happy, purposeful life*, Pascucci interviewed Courtney E. Martin, Campus Calm's body image expert and author of *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters*. Pascucci asked "Where is the line between being a high achiever academically and an overachiever? Do you think the line becomes

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*The Health Enhancement for Lifelong Professional Students program can assist when you're not sure where to turn. HELPS is available for you 24/7: 813-870-0184*



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## *Overachievement—What's Healthy, What's Not*

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crossed the moment we begin sacrificing our health to get perfect grades?”

Martin told Pascucci: “I think the answer lies in joy. We have to learn how to pay attention to the emotional experiences of our academics. When are you engaged and excited, frustrated in that great, growth-producing way? That’s high achievement. When are you tired, burnt out, frustrated in that tattered, growth-stunting way? That’s overachievement. Health is heightened when you’re in the flow state, and lowered when you’re dragging yourself through the mud.”

### **Real-World Advice**

Pascucci offers these practical tips for those who are driven to overachieve:

***Avoid catastrophic thinking*** and correct it with rational thoughts.

You’ve either done it or heard others go through this type of worst-case thinking in utter panic. “I got a C on my quiz, I’m not going to graduate with honors, I’m not going to find a good job, I’m not going to be successful, I’m going to live with my parents forever and eat Ramen noodles in the basement.” Sound familiar? Stop!

***Listen to your body’s cues.*** “I was recently working way too hard and

stressing out,” says Pascucci. “I had trouble sleeping, my skin broke out and I wanted to punch a wall. How’s that for some campus calm? So I slowed down, made sure I made enough time to sleep eight hours that week. I loaded up on nutrient-rich foods, herbal teas and juices. I definitely felt better within days, and my skin cleared up too!”

### ***Develop resilience.***

Read books like *The Resiliency Advantage* and *The Power of Failure*.

### ***Practice gratitude.***

From one high achiever to another, good health is an achievement to be *very* proud of. ■

## *Resources*

- Campus Calm [www.campuscalm.com](http://www.campuscalm.com)
- Siebert, Al, PhD and Mary Karr. MS. *The Adult Student’s Guide to Survival & Success Sixth Edition*. Practical Psychology Press, 2008.
- Active Minds on Campus [www.activemindsoncampus.org](http://www.activemindsoncampus.org)
- Alfie Kohn [www.alfiekohn.org](http://www.alfiekohn.org)
- Forget Perfect [www.forgetperfect.com](http://www.forgetperfect.com)
- Happiness Makeover [www.happinessmakeover.com](http://www.happinessmakeover.com)

*Source: Maria Pascucci, author of the upcoming book *Campus Calm University: The college student’s 10-step blueprint to stop stressing and create a happy, purposeful life*. [www.campuscalm.com/book](http://www.campuscalm.com/book) ■*

## *Stay Safe in Cyberspace: Tips for Using Social Networking Sites*

Be safe online: NextAdvisor.com has put together two resources addressing identity theft concerns for users of two of the most popular social networking sites in the U.S.. Some of the basic ideas can easily translate for use on any social networking site.

The MySpace Identity Theft Protection Guide and the Facebook Identity Theft Protection Guide are both easily read online and definitely worth looking over if you or someone you know is a regular on those (or any) social networking sites. Find both at [www.nextadvisor.com](http://www.nextadvisor.com). ■