

HOW TO: Have the perfect tailgate

6 tips for a successful tailgate

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For most sports fans, the party starts before the first game whistle. In the parking lot, laughter and cheering fill the air, the grill sizzles, kids throw footballs and rivalries have yet to emerge.

"My motto is everyone is on the same team in the parking lot," said Russ Stevenson, professional tailgater who is commonly called Tailgate Russ.

After organizing high school gatherings, block parties and Oktoberfest celebrations for 15 years, he realized he could transform his hobby into a business.

"I went to a Philadelphia Eagles game with 40 friends," he said. "As we were tailgating, I noticed what fun everyone was having. Right then I thought I could take this to another level."

Since that first gathering in 1999, Stevenson has organized

tailgates across the nation with anywhere from eight people to 2,000 people.

In 2003, he traveled to Miami to host a tailgate before the Philadelphia Eagles and Miami Dolphins game. He filled the parking lot with a full buffet, a live band, masseuses, an Elvis impersonator, a clown, a performer from Cirque du Soleil, trophies and prizes.

"This was my second road trip tailgate and my biggest and most successful tailgate to date," he said.

He titled the event the "World's Largest Tailgater" and added the name to his website, which landed him on the "Sharon Osborne Show" a year later.

The theme of the show was to persuade Sharon Osborne to watch the Super Bowl, Stevenson said.

The producer wanted to include tailgating, so the assistant producer typed "World's Largest Tailgater" into Google and

found Tailgating Russ.

"I had about four minutes in front of the camera where they were asking me about tailgating, what makes for a good tailgate and some of my favorite recipes," he said.

Although Elon students most likely do not have the same bank account as Sharon Osborne, students can still apply Stevenson's advice to their own parking lot festivities.

1 Pick a number

After tailgating with a wide range of people, Stevenson found there are perks to having a small group as well as a large gathering.

"Some of the best tailgates are on the smaller side," he said. "You get to spend time with all your friends and enjoy the tailgate."

According to Stevenson, events with 40 to 100 people are still fun, and he considers tailgates with 500 to 2,000 people "just one big party."



3 Arrive early

Leave yourself time to set up the grill and entertainment. Entertainment can include anything from portable iPod speakers to satellite TV dishes.

"You have your regulars that live for the tailgate and the game," Stevenson said. "They will arrive as early as the parking lots open, which is anywhere from four to six hours prior to kickoff."

Cornhole, ladder ball or a simple ball toss typically keeps the atmosphere lively and does not require much preparation. More elaborate tailgates may include a bounce house, limbo contest or live entertainment.

Either way, arriving early maintains a relaxed atmosphere because there will be no rush between grilling and the game, he said.

4 Don't leave out any ingredients

According to Stevenson, a successful tailgate has five necessary ingredients: good weather, lots of people, a variety of food, cold beverages and entertainment.

Even a college student on a tight budget can include the basics

Food, beverages, music and fold-up chairs are relatively inexpensive, he said. Food can include pre-made sandwiches, store-bought cookies and chips. Make sure to have a lot of drinking water on hand too.

"If you have a decent day, your friends, food and a beverage you have a great tailgate," Stevenson said.

5 Dress for success

Tailgate attire typically consists of casual clothing. Sandals, shorts and a team jersey are appropriate for any pre-game event.

When he attends tailgates at Southern schools, he said he finds it comical when the girls wear sundresses and the boys dress in ties.

"You don't really see that before NFL games, but anything is acceptable as long as you're comfortable," he said.

To spice things up, you can organize a themed tailgate and have a best costume contest.

"Let your imagination run wild," he said.



6 Be prepared

If only it were possible to control the weather. In order to solve any weather related issues, you need to "bring a pop-up tent," he said. "The tent will keep the food dry and the grill going."

According to Stevenson, all tailgating related problems are solvable.

For great tailgate recipes, visit <http://www.tailgateruss.com/>

How slow can you go?

Steps to take to calm down your life and de-stress

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A certain degree of stress is healthy.

We learn and grow by immersing ourselves in our passions and accepting challenges. But when you try to take on too much, the consequences take a toll on your work ethic, social life and health.

So between piles of homework and endless extracurricular and social opportunities, how can you make sure you make time to take care of yourself?

Don't underestimate the importance of sleep.

Rich Landesberg, Associate professor of communications, said he's constantly reminding his students to eat, sleep and breathe.

"You'll see students falling asleep in class or not engaging, and you know something else is going on," he said. "They're up late because they're so involved and trying to study and grades are slipping."

Only you know how much sleep you need each night, but make sure to get it.

Sleep increases memory retention and staying up all night cramming for a test isn't going to get you a good grade.

Stress affects your physical well-being.

"Stress presents itself in the body before it does in your emotions," said Bruce Nelson, head of counseling services at Ellington Health Center. Nelson said it weakens our immune systems and increases irritability and anxiety.

What's the point of over-committing yourself when you don't even feel up to doing your favorite activities? Landesberg's main advice to students who struggle with balance: "Listen to your body."

Take time to stop and smell the flowers.

"If you try to run up a mountain, you won't get to the top," Nelson said. "Pace yourself. You need nurturing along the way to get to the top."

Find activities that you enjoy that don't involve excessive striving or achieving. Simply stopping for coffee with a friend or just taking a walk around campus can help you regroup.

Some of the best creative moments happen when you aren't pushing yourself at all.

Participate in community service.

It feels good to help other people. Nelson recommends community service since it lets you experience a different

role and take a break from your everyday life.

Know yourself.

Know how much you can realistically handle. With all the opportunities Elon offers, it can be tempting to take all of them.

"Be in the power to say no," Nelson said. "Don't say yes to everything, and don't think you have to. Pause to self-reflect; say, 'I'll get back to you.' Trust your capacity to set limits."

Committing yourself to a few things that you love will feel better than trying to cram every available activity into your schedule.

Landesberg said the main health advice he gives his Elon 101 students is simple: You can't do everything, and you certainly can't do everything during your first week.

"Nature tells you when to pull back because you're tired or overpromised," he said.

Get support.

It's important to have supportive, nurturing relationships, not emotionally draining ones. And be easy and kind to yourself — respecting your own personal needs will get you further than pushing yourself past your limit.

