

TEEN STRESS

TIPS ON MANAGING DAILY STRESS



MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL
SOCIETY ALLIANCE

TEEN STRESS

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the body's natural reaction to changes and challenges. We experience stress when we play sports, when there are deadlines to meet, when we get sick, during tough exams at school, or when there is relationship stress with family or friends. Stress is a natural and important part of life, but too much of it can be overwhelming and even damaging to our health.

We all react to stress in different ways. Although stress can help us be more alert and prepared when we need to be, it can also cause emotional and physical distress. When under a lot of stress, we might experience feelings such as frustration, sadness, anger, and nervousness. Physical reactions like fast heartbeat, sweating, headaches, or stomachaches can occur as well.

WHERE DOES STRESS COME FROM?

High school students list the following reasons for stress:

- Parents
- Younger siblings
- Problems with friends
- Romantic relationships
- Amount of school work and grades
- Intense competition in sports and extracurricular activities
- Family's social or financial instability
- Personal safety and other private issues

CAUSES OF TEEN STRESS

As a teenager, there is a lot to be stressed about. At school, there are heavy homework loads, tests that require lots of studying, college applications, and sometimes even changing schools. Stressful issues at home can include parents' expectations, loss of loved ones, and dealing with siblings.

Teens must also face bodily changes during puberty, peer pressure, and changes in relationships. With so much going on, it's easy to get overwhelmed. When stress builds up and isn't dealt with in a healthy way, it can diminish a person's energy, compromise the immune system, and lead to anxiety problems. To avoid these issues, it's important to deal with stress in positive ways.

UNHEALTHY COPING HABITS

It is important to avoid using negative coping habits such as:

- Alcohol and drugs. These can become very addictive and add more stress in the long run. Avoid caffeine and products high in sugar, too. They negatively affect thinking, cause jitters and restlessness, and can cause a rapid decrease in energy when they wear off.
- Irregular eating habits. Both overeating and under-eating are hard on the body.
- Withdrawing from friends and family. It's important to be able to talk to others.
- Spending too much time on the computer or watching TV. Excessive amounts of these kinds of stimulation can keep your mind from getting the rest it needs. Social media can also be a source of stress.
- Procrastination. Putting things off can lead to intense periods of stress and reduce the quality of your work.
- Angry outbursts. Verbal or physical violence should never be an option when dealing with stress.

WE ALL EXPERIENCE STRESS

Here are some easy, healthy ways to help relieve stress:

- Ask for help — you don't have to face everything on your own. Talk to people you trust and look for good listeners. You can discuss what stresses you out, or just benefit from good conversation.
- Breathe deeply. This simple act can lower your anxiety level.
- Eat three healthy, balanced meals a day. The body needs good fuel to deal with stress.
- Get plenty of sleep. It helps to be well rested and recharged.
- Make time to relax. Take a break from a tough task to do something you enjoy. Walking outside, listening to music, practicing yoga, and playing with a pet are a few good options. You will be able to work more effectively after a short, relaxing break.
- Exercise regularly; even just 15 minutes a day can help, but more is always better.
- Break tasks down into small steps so they are less overwhelming.

If stress is a serious issue, and it seems like there is too much to handle, consider:

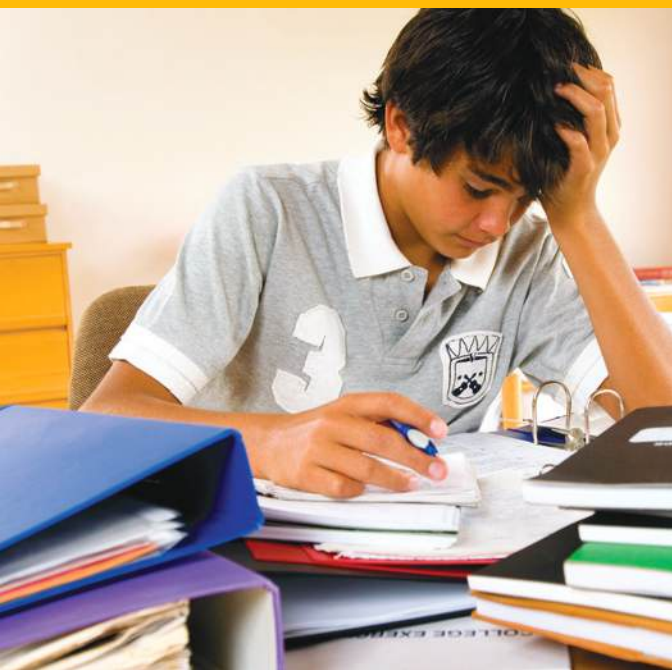
- Cutting out some extra activities from your schedule
- Keeping a stress journal to organize your thoughts
- Talking to a school guidance counselor
- Talking to a therapist

NOT ALL STRESS IS BAD

If you enjoy certain challenging activities, you can experience positive stress when you do them. However, be sure to give your body time to recover so it can continue to manage daily stress.

TIPS FOR STAYING ON TOP OF STRESS

- Take care of your body. Regular exercise, a healthy diet, and enough rest and sleep will prepare your body for daily stress.
- Think positively and don't dwell on things that get you down.
- Focus on your achievements.
- Tackle one task at a time. Don't attempt too much at once.
- Prioritize assignments in order of importance or urgency.
- Keep a reasonable schedule and don't try to do too much.
- Plan ahead and set up a reasonable timetable. Add time for breaks and rests in between tasks.
- Try not to worry about things you can't control, or that might not even happen.
- Forgive yourself and others. Guilt and grudges increase stress.
- Make time for the things you enjoy.



REMEMBER

- Stress is normal.
- Do the best you can and try not to compare yourself to others. Everyone is unique and has something special to share.
- Surround yourself with positive people who make you feel good.
- Life is always changing and full of ups and downs. What is stressful today may not be important tomorrow.



***“EVERY NIGHT,
REFLECT ON YOUR
DAY AND DECIDE
WHAT WAS WORTH
DOING AND CUT
OUT THE UNNEEDED
AND STRESSFUL.
THEN (TOMORROW)
SPEND MORE TIME
ON WHAT IS
WORTHWHILE AND
NECESSARY.”***

— SEAN, AGE 17

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SUPPORT

For more information on how to deal with stress, visit the following sites:

- *For Teens*
www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/helping_teenagers_with_stress
- *For General Stress Management*
www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm
- *For Parents Seeking Help for Their Children*
www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/where_to_find_help_for_your_child
- *For Eating Disorders and Disordered Eating*
www.medainc.org

If stress becomes overwhelming, the following 24/7 hotlines are available:

- *Samariteens (Teen-to-Teen support)*
1-800-252-TEEN (8336)
- *Suicide Prevention Hotlines*
1-800-SUICIDE
1-877-870-4673
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

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