

DEALING WITH STRESS

Being stressed usually means we're tense about something that's happening in our lives. Some stress can be a good thing as it can help us get motivated to get things done. However, too much over a long period of time can be unhelpful and even lead to serious problems for some.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Young or old, stress is a normal part of daily life. It's a natural physical and mental response that is designed to help you cope effectively with emergencies. Among other things, stress makes your body produce chemicals that raise your heart rate and blood pressure and increase mental focus. This helps you to perform well in a challenging situation over a short period of time.

The problems from stress happen when stress is regular and doesn't let up. The chemicals the body releases can build up and cause changes that damage your physical and mental health.

SOME WARNING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Emotional Changes

feeling angry or irritable, easily frustrated
feeling restless, unable to relax
feeling overwhelmed
feeling alone and isolated
feeling low, depressed

Changes in Thoughts

poor judgement
seeing only negative things
constant worrying
racing, negative thoughts
memory problems
trouble concentrating

Physical Changes

frequent colds
stomach aches and/or headaches
chest pain, rapid heartbeat
constipation or diarrhoea
sweating a lot
dizziness, nausea

Behavioural Changes

problems sleeping
eating too much or too little
procrastinating, neglecting responsibilities,
using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax
isolating yourself from others

WHAT CAUSES A TEEN TO FEEL STRESSED?

There are many causes for stress and they are unique to each person. Here are few common stressors for teenagers:

- Crammed schedules, heavy workload and exams with no time to relax.
- High expectations to do well; feeling the need to meet expectations to do as well as friends or siblings.
- Relationship problems: arguments with parents, breaking up with your partner or falling out with friends.
- Moving schools and learning how to get on with other students.
- Being bullied or being exposed to violence and injury.

Anything that causes you to feel stress!

CONSEQUENCES OF LONG-TERM STRESS

Research has demonstrated that long-term stress can lead to serious physical and psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety and possible thoughts of suicide. So, find a way that works for YOU to de-stress!

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

1. Have a good support system. Open communication and having a supportive relationship with a partner, friends, teachers, parents or other important people in your life helps us cope with stress. If there is a stress in a relationship, talk to a counsellor or someone who can help you to work things out.

2. Practise relaxation exercises. Exercises that slow your breathing and relax your muscles can help with stress. Slow breathing (three seconds in, three seconds out) for five minutes can be a useful short-term coping strategy for when you're feeling stressed. Relaxing your muscles might help with aches and pains, fatigue, headaches and difficulty breathing. Try sitting in a comfortable and quiet room, then tense each group of muscles for 10 seconds and relax them for 10 seconds.

3. Think positive. Your sense of control, attitude and outlook in life greatly influences your ability to cope with stress. Have confidence in your ability to influence events and embrace challenges with a sense of humour. See setbacks and problems as temporary and solvable.

4. Keep things balanced. Strike a balance in your day between work and doing the things that you enjoy. This might mean learning to say 'no' more often so that you don't take on new things that will add to your to-do list, or your stress levels.

SOURCES. This fact sheet is based on the following websites: <http://www.reachout.com>, <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>, http://helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm

5. Have realistic expectations. Don't over-schedule. Sometimes we try bite off more than we can chew and we get upset when things don't as well as expected. Be realistic with how much you can achieve given your time and resources. We're only human!

6. Take time out. Take some time out of your schedule to do something relaxing or you enjoy, such as going out with friends, listening to music, painting, writing or watching a movie.

7. Do some exercise. Physical activities such as swimming, walking, yoga, cycling, dancing or going to the gym can help reduce the tension in your muscles and your mind. Try to do some exercise every day, even if it's just walking around the block.

8. Monitor stress levels. Familiarise yourself with the warning signs. Make a note of all symptoms of stress you recognise in yourself. If you feel you can't control your stress, it's time to seek help!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Further reading: http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/stress.html
- Stress tests: <http://www.lundrigan.org/connections/test.html>,
- Stress relief and relaxation exercises: http://helpguide.org/mental/quick_stress_relief.htm ,
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_relief_meditation_yoga_relaxation.htm

WHO TO GO TO FOR SUPPORT

- Speak to a trusted adult: teacher, head of year, family member.
- **The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong**
24 hours operating suicide hotline: 23982222
- **Kely Support Group**
2/F East Wing, 12 Borrett Road, Central, Hong Kong
Tel: 2521 6890, Fax: 2521 6853
Email: contact@kely.org
Website: <http://www.kely.org/en/index.html>
- **Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (Cantonese Speakers)**
6/F, 54 Bedford Road, Tai Kok Tsui, Kowloon
Youthline: 27778899
Tel: 2395 0161, 2395 0161
Email : sgt@hkfyg.org.hk
Website: <http://www.hkfyg.org.hk/eng/index.html>