



Teens + Stress

A Survival Guide

PATIENT EDUCATION

Do important stuff first!

It's all
about
balance

MAKE TIME
FOR FUN

Let it go
Exercise

Laugh

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Are You Stressed?

Feeling like there are too many pressures and demands on you? Overwhelmed by school and other activities? Feeling like things are out of control? Having trouble getting enough sleep? Eating too much junk food or skipping meals? Wish you had more time to relax?

You're not alone.

All teens experience stress (and so do adults!). In fact, teens may be more susceptible to stress overload because of the pressures faced on the road to becoming adults.

Parents, school and work — and even friends — can add stress to your life.

While some stress is good (**life would be boring without it**) and can motivate you to achieve your goals, if stressful situations pile up one after another, your mind and body have no chance to recover.

Stress doesn't have to take over your life.

Although you can't avoid stress completely, you can learn to deal with it more effectively.

FAST FACTS

- ⑥ Stress is a natural part of life
- ⑥ Stress isn't "all in your head"
- ⑥ You can't avoid stress, but you can learn ways to deal with it
- ⑥ How you choose to handle stress can make a big difference in how you feel

"Sometimes I get so stressed I think I'm losing it"

The Science of Stress

Stress is the way your mind and body react to an event.

Often called the "flight-or-fight" response, the stress response occurs automatically when you feel pressured, challenged or threatened.

At the first sign of something stressful, your brain kicks into action. Hormones surge to give you a burst of energy. These hormones can help focus concentration, speed reaction time and increase strength and agility.

Your body gears up to react. Your heart rate and blood pressure increase as more blood is pumped through your body, prepping you to do what's required to adapt and survive.

This is called your stress response. The problem is that most everyday stress isn't solved by fighting or fleeing. So all this extra energy, tension and hormones can build up and leave you feeling...

Stressed Out

If Stress is Normal, When Does Being “Stressed Out” Become Too Much?

Everyone responds to stress differently.

Maybe you are naturally laid back and don't let much get to you. Maybe you react to the slightest hint of stress.

Either way, if you are able to identify what stresses you out (stressors) and the signs that signal you are hitting your stress limit, you can focus on strategies for taking charge of stress and turning it into a positive force in your life – before stress becomes overwhelming.

If you feel overwhelmed

by stress on a daily basis, or if you turn to negative coping strategies such as drug or alcohol use, cutting, skipping school, eating disorders, fighting, or running away, stress has taken over your life.

You need to make changes to get it back!

Where's your stress coming from?



- ☐ parents
- ☐ drama with friends
- ☐ school/grades
- ☐ fitting in
- ☐ weight/your look
- ☐ money/juggling work and school
- ☐ trying to be perfect
- ☐ trying to please others
- ☐ getting into college
- ☐ sports or other activities
- ☐ your body's changes
- ☐ thinking about the future

my top three stressors

1.

2.

3.



Two critical questions

For each stressor, ask yourself:

- Is this a short-term issue that will eventually go away, or is it a long-term problem I need to deal with?
- Is there anything I can do to control this issue, or should I just focus on controlling my response to it?

Answering these questions can help you develop a plan to reduce the stress in your life.

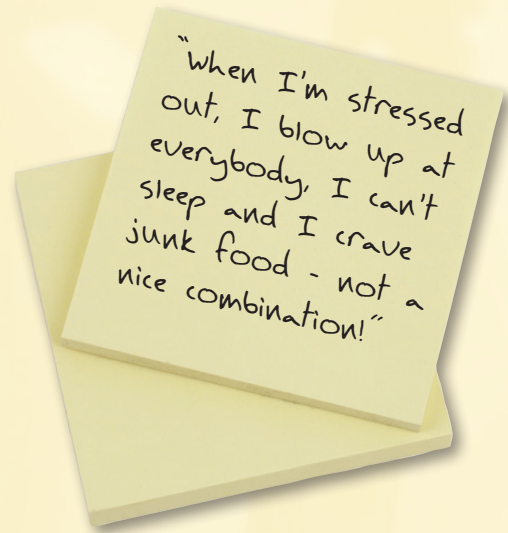


Are you "stressed out?"

Experiencing any of these signs of stress?

If so, your body may be telling you that you need to make some changes in your life — and learn ways to cope with stress.

- ☐ feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ mood swings/getting upset easily
- ☐ changes in appetite
- ☐ having problems sleeping
- ☐ worrying a lot
- ☐ avoiding things you are supposed to be doing (or used to enjoy)
- ☐ feeling trapped or powerless
- ☐ heart racing or feeling nervous
- ☐ headaches
- ☐ fatigue
- ☐ stomachaches



If you checked any one of these boxes, you are probably experiencing some stress...if you checked several, you are

STRESSED OUT!!!

Identify what's causing your stress and make a plan to take control of what you can...and let go of what you can't.

- ☐ feeling unhappy or depressed for more than a few days
- ☐ isolating yourself from friends and family
- ☐ binge eating or restricting food
- ☐ using tobacco to cope
- ☐ cutting
- ☐ turning to drugs or alcohol to escape



If you checked any boxes in the shaded area, you are at risk for serious health problems. Talk to your parents, doctor or other trusted adult about what's going on in your life.

My top three signs
that let me know
I'm stressed out:

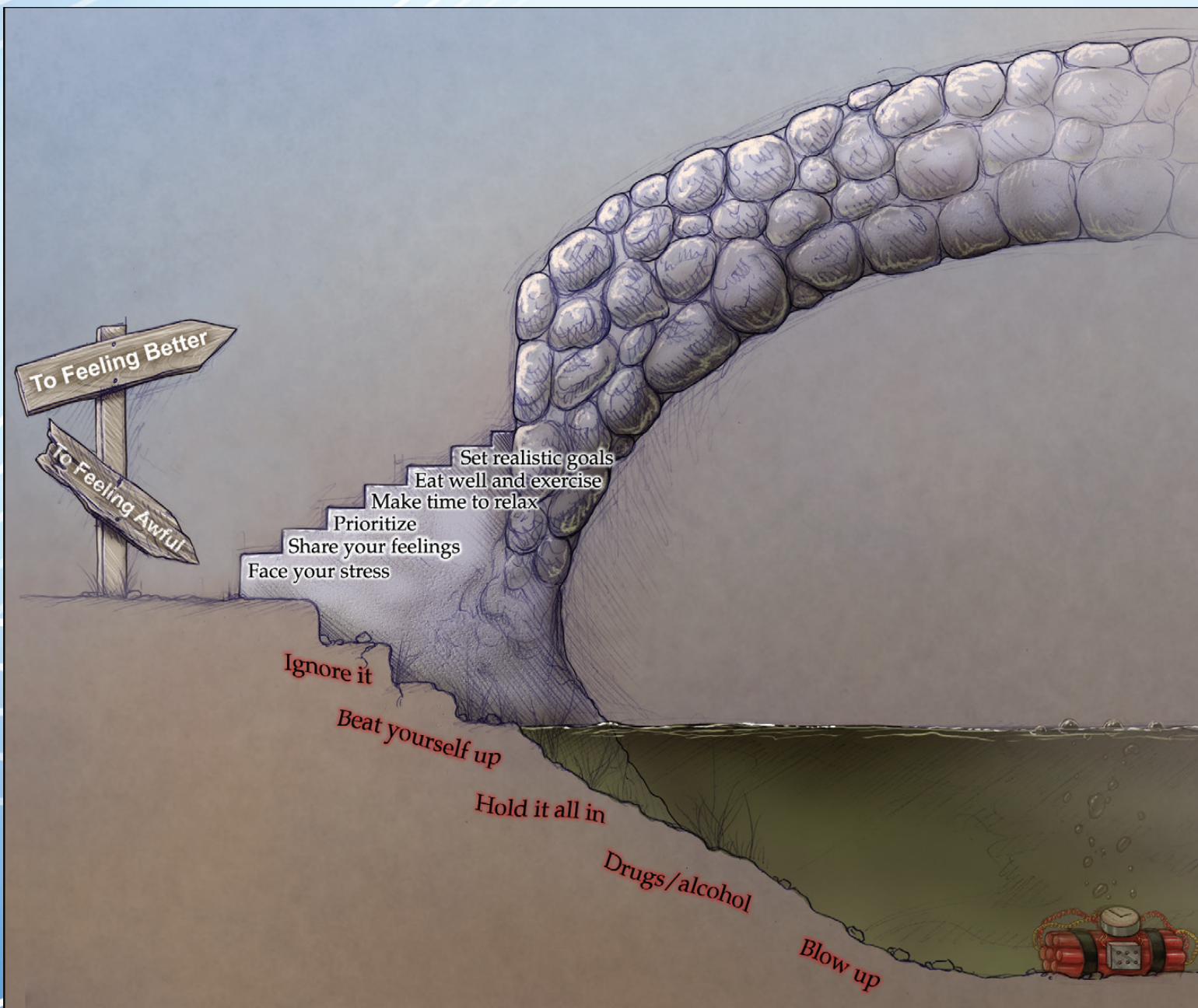
1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Okay, I Know I'm Stressed. What Can I Do About It?

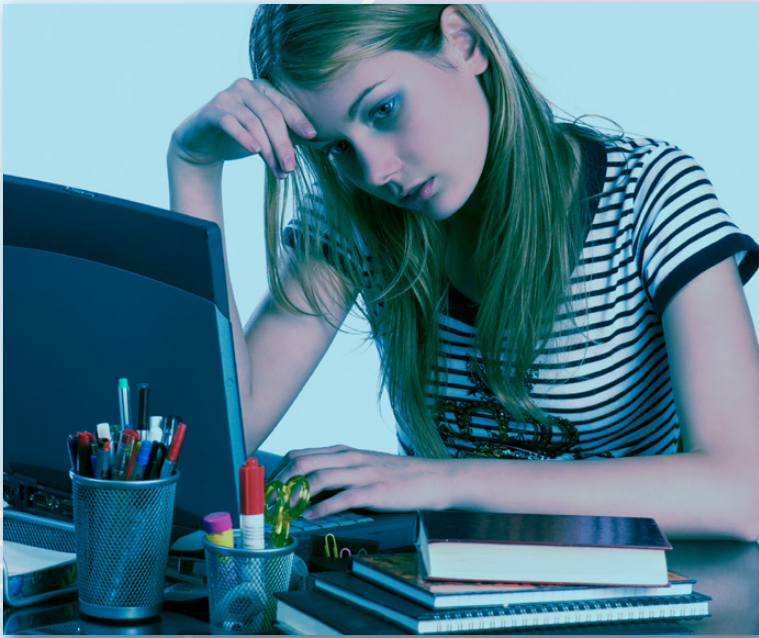
Face it. You are going to have to deal with stress your whole life. How you choose to cope when it hits can make a big difference in how you feel down the road.



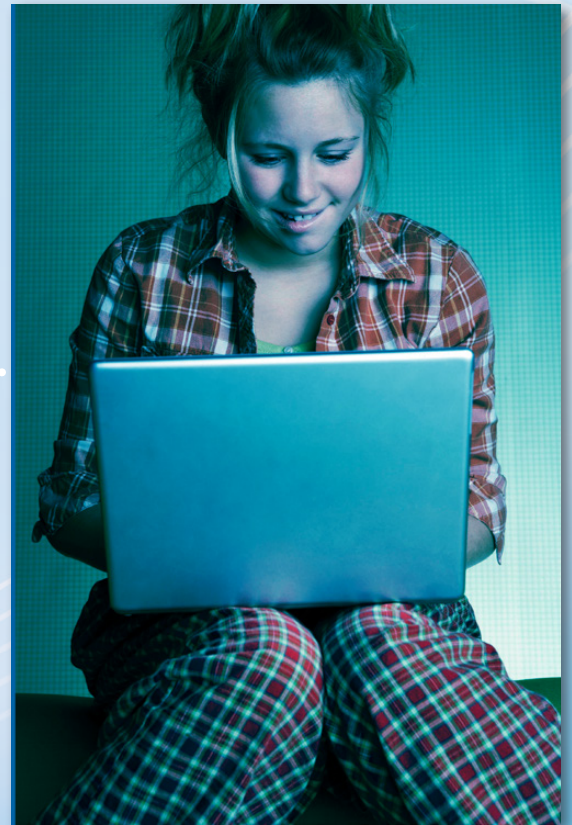
Face your stress

Take a real look at where your stress is coming from. Identify your stressors and what you can control — and what you can't.

For the most part, if you can control where your stress is coming from, you can make positive changes to deal with it. If your stress is beyond your control, look for ways to adapt to whatever's bringing you down.



Friend 1: I'm never going to find enough time to finish my report due Friday.



Friend 2: :-(\ Let's skip the movie tonite! I need to work on my report too.

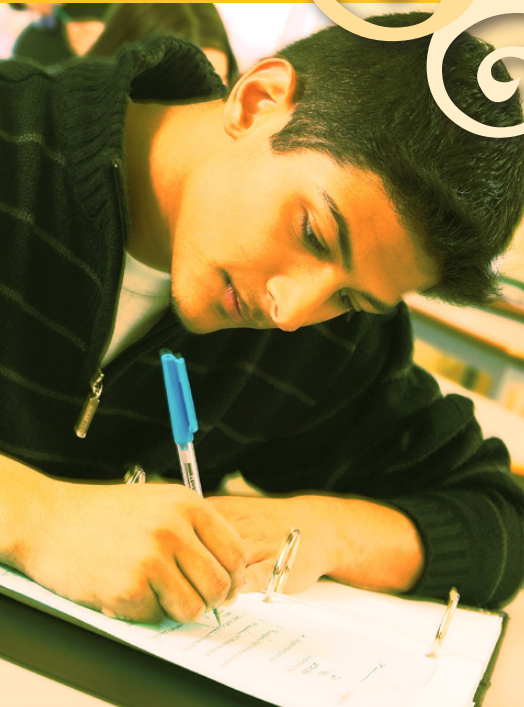


Prioritize your priorities

Teens often feel overwhelmed by all the demands that are made on their time.

If you feel pressured just thinking about all the stuff you have to do, it's time to prioritize.

By deciding what's really important, you can better choose how to spend your time and energy — and you can let go of those things that don't make the cut.



Big tasks = Big payoff in stress relief

- ⦿ Resist the urge to do the small things first
- ⦿ Put your energy into important tasks to avoid procrastination

Break it down

When you have a big task to do, you can easily feel overwhelmed. Try taking a large task, like writing a research paper, and break it into smaller steps.

For example:

1. Gather research on your topic
2. Write your intro paragraph
3. Make an outline of your main points
4. Write a paragraph (or two) on each point
5. Write your conclusion

NO

Learn to say "no"

It can be hard to say no to friends, employers, even parents. But saying yes to everything comes at a price — more stress!

Saying no can be good for you. By saying no, you can spend quality time on the things you've already said yes to.

My top priorities

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

If there's time, I'll:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Stuff I should do:

1.

2.

3.

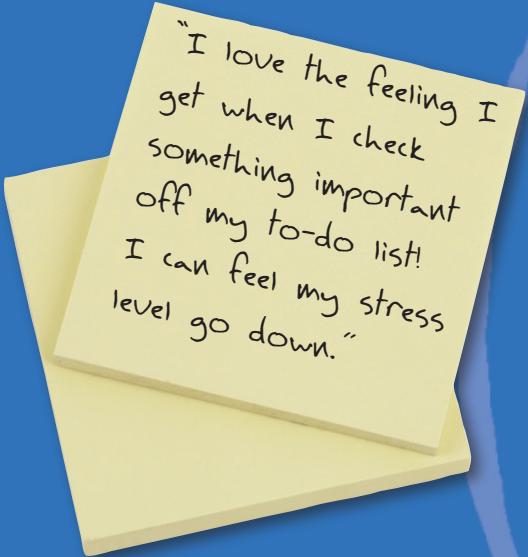
4.

5.

Controlling the clock

Time management is key to keeping stress under control. Try these tips to ensure that you can make time for your priorities.

- > Write your commitments on a calendar.
- > Make daily and weekly to-do lists.
- > To track progress, check items off your lists as you go.
- > If your days seem too packed, change your priorities.
- > Plan ahead, and give yourself enough time to accomplish the essentials.
- > Do important tasks first to get them out of the way. Don't procrastinate.
- > Whenever possible, give your full attention to whatever you're doing at the moment.
- > Stretch big projects over several days.
- > Avoid e-mail, phone calls, IMs and text messages when you need to focus on a task.
- > Give yourself downtime to relax.



"I love the feeling I get when I check something important off my to-do list! I can feel my stress level go down."



laugh
relax
be
positive

Learn positive coping strategies

Keep your perspective

It's common for teens to set unrealistically high expectations for themselves and those around them, constantly pushing themselves or others to be their absolute best. Of course it's impossible to live up to unrealistic expectations, and striving to do so increases stress and takes away from enjoying realistic, everyday achievements.

Remind yourself that while you want to set priorities, manage your time well, and achieve your goals, you don't have to do everything perfectly.

- **Adjust** your goals and expectations.
- **Avoid** right vs. wrong thinking. Remember, there is usually more than one way to do a job/task.
- **Try** not to view things as worse than they actually are. This uses energy that could be spent productively.

It's admirable to work hard, but it's also important to relax and hang out with friends. It's important to study, but it's also good to goof off on occasion. Earning good grades is a great goal, but setting your sights on straight A's may backfire.

Be realistic. Enjoy your achievements and do your best.

Negative self-talk:

I've never done it before.

Positive spin:

It's an opportunity to try something new.

Think positively

Are you an optimist?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If you checked ☒ **Yes**, you may be able to cope better with stress than you think.

Positive thinking can have a big impact on your life.

When you think "I can do this," "I feel good," or other upbeat thoughts, that's positive thinking — also called positive self-talk. *Positive self-talk* can help you feel happy, confident or satisfied, which can help you handle stress.

On the other hand, when you say to yourself, "I feel terrible," "I can't do anything," or other bleak thoughts, that's negative self-talk. *Negative self-talk* can make you mad, sad or worried, which can up your stress level.

Turn negative thoughts around.

*Start by following one simple rule: **Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else.***

If you catch yourself thinking negative thoughts, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.

Negative self-talk:

I can't do this.

Positive spin:

I'll give it a try.

Humor helps

Laughter is an “inner upper.” Really. Laughter causes the release of endorphins in your brain. Endorphins are natural substances that help you feel less stressed.



"Hanging out with friends is one of the best ways I de-stress. Fitting downtime into my schedule isn't always easy, but it's worth it!"

Relax

When you're stressed, even thinking about relaxing can be hard.

But finding ways to feel more calm and balanced can help you deal with stress in positive ways.

Practice some tried-and-true relaxation techniques, or come up with a technique of your own.

Music. Relax by listening to your favorite playlist.


Enjoy the outdoors. Sit outside on a nice day or go for a walk. Focus your thoughts on something that's not stressing you out.

Read. Take a break to get comfortable and read a good book or flip through a magazine.

Stretch. Do simple stretching exercises to release tension -- slowly rotate your head to stretch your neck, or stand and gently stretch your arms and legs. Think of something enjoyable as you stretch.

Yoga. Take a yoga break. Yoga typically combines gentle breathing exercises with precise movements. Yoga may help you relax and manage stress.

Find a quiet place and focus on whatever moves you.



"My iPod™ keeps me sane! I have a different playlist for every mood. My music can pick me up, calm me down or help me focus."



Relaxed breathing

How to do it

- > **Inhale.** With your mouth closed and shoulders relaxed, inhale as slowly and deeply as you can while you count to six. When you breathe in, your abdomen should expand.
- > **Hold.** Keep the air in your lungs as you slowly count to four.
- > **Exhale.** Release the air through your mouth as you slowly count to six.
- > **Repeat.** Do the whole thing three to five times.

Relaxed breathing works best if you do it twice a day, every day, and whenever you feel stressed.

Guided imagery

How to do it

Think of an image, a feeling or an aroma that's soothing. It can be anything that suits you: a favorite place, a beautiful scene, the smell of food you like.

Use your thoughts and senses to focus on that image or sensation. Make it as vivid as you can.

Guided imagery can start your body's relaxation response when you're stressed or overwhelmed.

Relaxed breathing and guided imagery techniques are commonly used by Olympic and professional athletes.

- > Golfers and basketball players often use relaxed breathing before a putt or free throw.
- > Other athletes use guided imagery to imagine skiing a perfect run, hitting a home run, or swimming a best time. This can boost confidence and ease anxiety.

Take care of your body

How well you take care of your body can have a major impact on your stress level — for better or worse.

Eat healthy and move your body every day

It's true. Eating a healthy, balanced diet and getting regular exercise can make a huge difference in how you feel...and how you handle stress.

EAT

- > Don't skip meals
- > Choose lean, low-fat or nonfat foods
- > Avoid fried foods
- > Eat lots of fruits and vegetables
- > Eat whole-grain bread, cereal, pasta and rice
- > Get enough calcium — choose skim milk, low-fat yogurt or low-fat cheeses
- > If you don't eat animal products, read up on how to get the nutrients you need

MOVE

- > Exercise at least 30 minutes a day, at least five days a week
- > Mix it up...walk, swim, bike, dance, play Frisbee™, shoot baskets, skate
- > Fit fun and easy activities into your day: take a walk during lunch with friends; park your car at the back of the lot; take the stairs
- > Talk to your doctor about starting an exercise program if you're not already physically active



Limit fast foods and “junk” foods to **occasional treats, not every day snacks.**

Limit energy drinks and “designer” coffee drinks. **The caffeine, sugar, fat and empty calories can add to feelings to anxiety and stress.**



Regular exercise has many benefits:

It can reduce stress by helping you maintain a healthy weight, feel more energetic, and have a positive outlook on life.

Regular exercise releases stress-busting endorphins and lowers your body's production of stress hormones.

Get a good night's sleep

Getting a good night's sleep isn't always easy, especially for teenagers. Changes in your body clock, a jam-packed schedule and a 24/7 lifestyle can combine to undermine healthy sleep.

But, the price you pay for ditching sleep can be pretty high. Healthy sleep is vital to your well-being, as important as food and water. It helps you think, feel and look better, as well as perform better in school and sports. And it only makes sense that your stress level will go down if you work sleep into your schedule.

Most teenagers need between 8½ and 9½ hours of sleep each night to feel rested.

Tips for good sleep

- > **Stay away from** pop, sugar and big meals two to three hours before you go to bed.
- > **Skip the caffeine** two to three hours before bedtime.
- > **Exercise.** Daily exercise will help you sleep (do it at least two hours before bedtime).
- > **Clear your mind.** Several hours before bedtime, write down things that are on your mind or tasks you need to do.
- > **Make a bedtime routine.** Doing the same things each night before you go to bed will give your body the signal that it's time to sleep.
- > **After 9 p.m., focus on calming activities.** Avoid video games and violent or scary TV shows, movies or books.
- > **Don't nap during the day.** Naps do more to mess up your sleep cycle than they do to help you catch up on sleep.



Do you drink or smoke when you're stressed?

You may think these strategies help you de-stress...but consider the health risks:



Under the influence of alcohol, you are more likely to be injured or get in an accident. And you are more likely to engage in unsafe behaviors that may lead to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, fights, long-term drinking problems and failure at school.

Binge drinking — having four or more drinks in a row — can make you drunk very quickly,

which can lead to
alcohol poisoning
and even death

due to choking on vomit or breathing problems.

Smoking damages nearly every organ in the body. And, as if that's not enough, smoking gives you bad breath, makes your clothes and hair smell, and turns your teeth yellow. Smoking can leave you with a chronic cough and less energy for the activities you enjoy.

If you smoke,
STOP
IF YOU DON'T
SMOKE,
don't start



Make a Plan to De-stress

You know what's causing stress in your life. And it's up to you to decide how you'll deal with it.

Think about what's worked for you in the past and what hasn't.

Think you know the best way to de-stress?

Take a look at these common strategies for dealing with stressful situations... what would you do?

The Situation

You are not satisfied unless you get an A on every assignment.

The strategy. You study tons in order to get great grades on every test and assignment. You stay up all night cramming for tests.

Why it won't work. You may be able to get good grades, but your stress level may become a major problem. Low to moderate levels of anxiety can motivate you to work hard, but high levels of anxiety and worry can cause big problems emotionally and physically. Stressing out about grades can make it hard to concentrate and get a good night's sleep, which can hurt your academic performance in the long run.

You're better off... Putting limits on your studying and the work that you do. You can start slow by setting a goal to cut back on the amount of time you spend studying.

At first you may feel anxious about failing if you cut back. But pay attention to what happens. Prioritize your studying — by doing what you need to do in a shorter amount of time, you may find that your grades don't suffer and your stress goes down. With practice, it will become easier to let go of obsessing about the time you spend studying. Even if you don't always get 100%, you learn that you can live without being perfect. A definite de-stressor!

The Situation

You compare your look to others and don't feel like you measure up – you constantly feel like you have to compete with your friends

The strategy. Vow to get up extra early so you can work out. Skip breakfast to save on calories. Bug your parents to buy you designer clothes and shoes so you can fit in.

Why it won't work. Losing sleep saps your energy and so does skipping meals. Designer clothes may make you feel good for a while, but styles change fast!

You're better off... not obsessing about all the ways you wish you were different. Get into the habit of focusing on what's positive about you. Your friendly attitude. Your sense of humor. Don't skip breakfast, but do say no to that extra pop or bag of chips. And plan to make exercise a regular part of your life — it can be a great stress reliever, but it can't take the place of a good night's sleep.

"Dealing with even one major stressor makes me feel so much more in control of things."

How do you deal with stress?

Write down your stressors and your plan to cope.

EXAMPLE

My stressor: assignments piling up

Right now I will...work on the assignments I have due this week

My long-term goal is to...use a planner to keep track of my assignments and schedule enough time to complete them.

My stressor:

Right now I will...

My long-term goal is to...

My stressor:

Right now I will...

My long-term goal is to...

My stressor:

Right now I will...

My long-term goal is to...

De-stress strategies

learn relaxation techniques

Break big projects down into smaller tasks.

Let your parents know how stressed out you are.

Don't get down on yourself. Keep your thoughts from turning negative.

Avoid caffeine, which can increase feelings of anxiety and stress.

Don't be afraid to say no once in a while.



Don't be afraid to say yes once in a while. **Don't isolate yourself from people you love because you have too much to do.** Taking a break for friends and family will help your relationships and help you relax.

Build a support network

family, friends, teachers, etc.
Turn to them for help or just to vent.

Make lists of things you need to do. Once you write it down, you can stop worrying you'll forget something important.

Don't obsess about the ways you wish you were different – **focus on what you like about yourself.**

Stay away from drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

Take care of your body ...
exercise regularly and eat healthy.

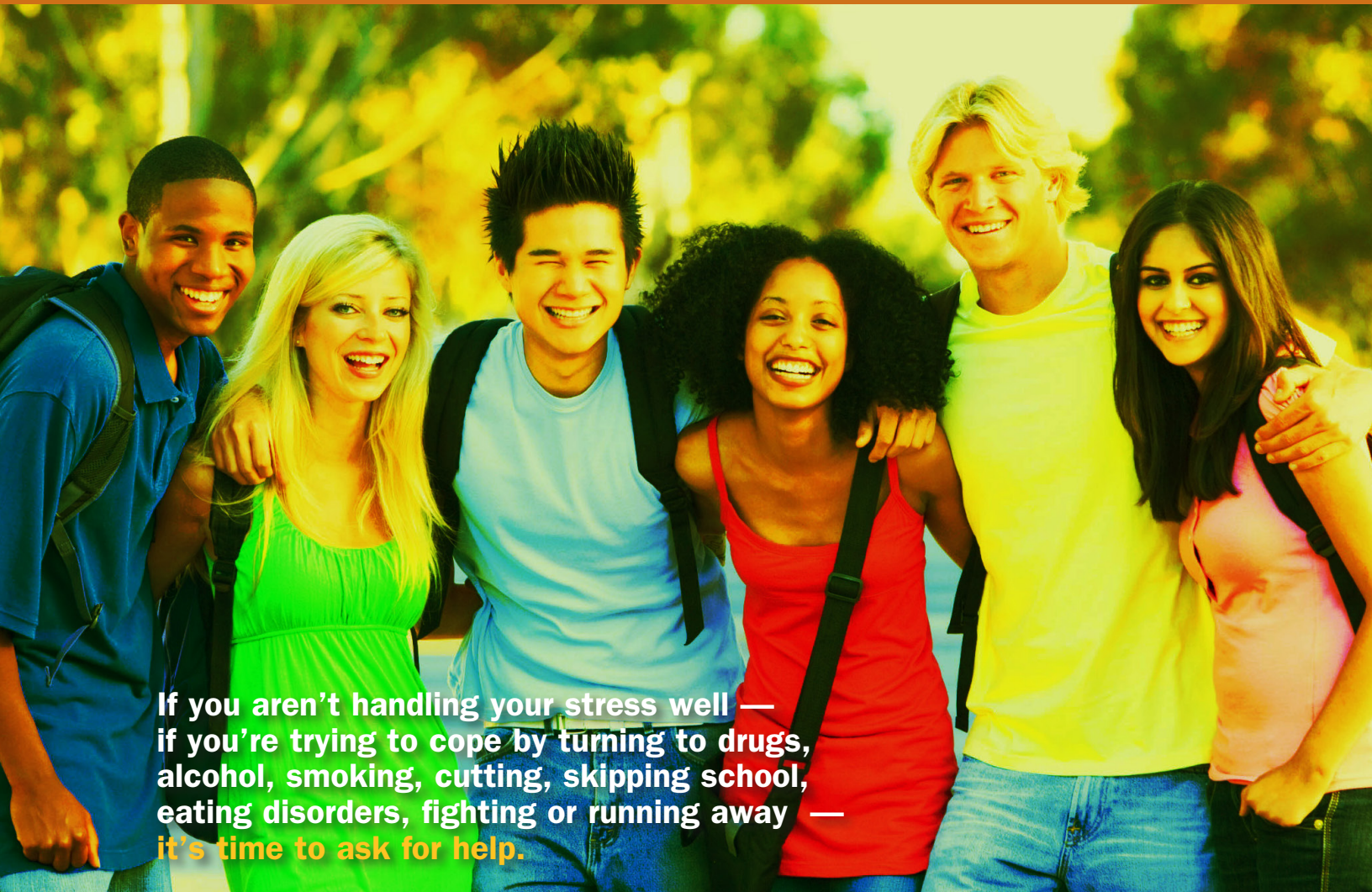
Take a break from stressful situations

Listen to music ... talk to a friend ... spend time with a pet ... write in your journal

Prioritize your priorities.



The Final Word



**If you aren't handling your stress well —
if you're trying to cope by turning to drugs,
alcohol, smoking, cutting, skipping school,
eating disorders, fighting or running away —
it's time to ask for help.**

Of course, dealing with stress isn't always as simple as following some tips in a booklet.

Significant difficulties with stress may require working with a professional — just like athletes work with coaches to improve their game — to learn how to change behaviors and manage stress.

The strategies highlighted here can work for you. Give them a try.

But if your stress won't go away, talk to your parents, doctor or other trusted adult about seeing a health care professional.

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal patient of Mayo Clinic for more than 40 years. She was a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching, even as she assembled a museum-quality collection of antiques and fine art. She was best known by Mayo staff for her patient advocacy and support.

Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. Mrs. Lips had a profound appreciation for the care she received at Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.



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