



Managing Stress

Developing your ability to manage stress begins by recognizing the signs of stress that you experience, looking honestly at how you react to stress, and acting quickly to reduce the stress rather than letting it build up. Some people choose unhealthy ways to manage stress, such as using drugs or withdrawing from friends. Others choose helpful techniques, such as being physically active or writing in a journal about what is causing the stress. The good news is that everyone can learn the skills needed to manage stress.



Here are some ways to manage stress:

- **Cut down on the number of activities** you commit to. If your stress level is high, choose to engage only in the activities that are most important to you.
- **Get regular physical activity.** Choose an activity that you find relaxing rather than one that increases your stress.
- **Eat nutritious foods in appropriate amounts.** It's easy to think that a few fast food burgers won't hurt when you have limited time. However, keeping your body working well during stressful times will help you cope.
- **Get a good night's sleep.** For teens, this means about nine hours of sleep. Your body will be better able to deal with stressors when you are rested.
- **Make time to relax.** Relaxing is the opposite of stress. It creates a sense of well-being and calm. People report these activities as relaxing: reading a good book, making time for a hobby, spending time with your pet, taking a relaxing bath, gardening, tinkering with electronics, listening to music, practicing relaxation techniques, being physically active, spending time outdoors, getting involved in an art project, writing in a journal, playing video games, surfing the Internet.
- **Stay calm.**
- **Watch what you're thinking.** Your attitude and thoughts influence the way you see things. Thinking positively about situations helps prevent feelings of hopelessness and anxiety.
- **Have realistic expectations** and lower unrealistic ones.
- **Focus on things you can control** and let go of things you cannot control.
- **Accept that you are under stress.** Everyone experiences stress, sometimes too much stress. Use your best stress management skills and accept things as they are. You can also talk to a friend or a counselor. The perception that you are alone or can't cope only adds another stressor.
- **Accept the fact that you will make mistakes** and may need help from time to time. Remember that you can learn from mistakes.
- **Rehearse** feared situations, such as asking someone out or refusing to go smoke.
- **Reach out to a friend or family member.** Talk about what's going on or just take a break and have fun.

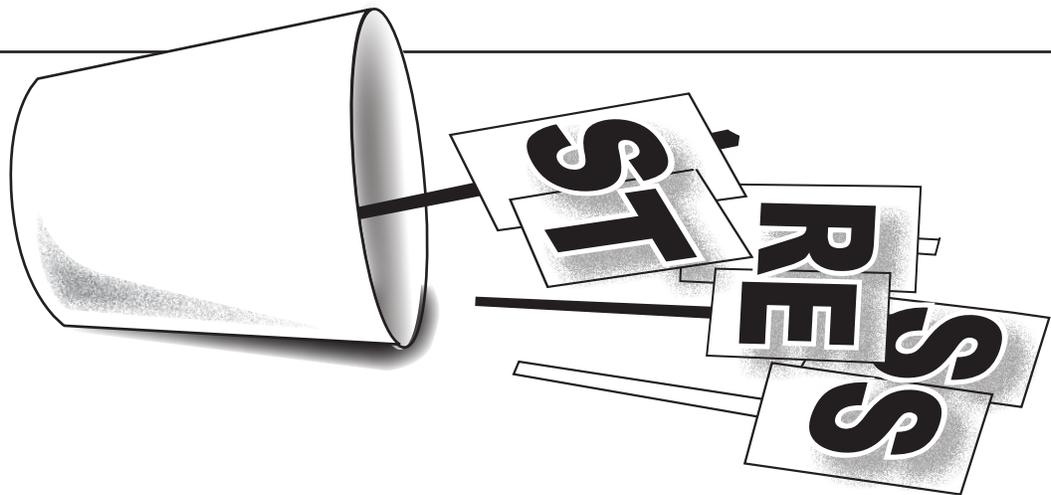


- **Do enjoyable activities.** Choose activities that are relaxing and distract you from constantly thinking about your stress.
- **Laugh.** Take a break from being serious.
- **Get professional help.** If your stress management efforts aren't helpful enough, check with a doctor or counselor. Uncontrolled stress that lingers can lead to a variety of potentially serious health problems, including depression and physical pain.

Sometimes stress goes away or stressful situations resolve themselves, but that doesn't always happen. Since stress is a normal part of life, work on getting control of the stress in your life so that it doesn't control you. Don't wait until you are so stressed out you don't know what to do or how to change things. Practice stress management when things are relatively calm; then, using the same skills under pressure will be easier.

If you don't think you can cope with the stress in your life, get help!

- Call a physician, health provider, counselor, or clergy
- Phone the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Go to the nearest hospital or emergency room
- Phone the National Alliance on Mental Illness
www.nami.org
1-800-950-NAMI (6264)



Sources:
American Psychological Association's "Stress in America" Press Room, www.apa.org
Nemours Foundation, www.teenshealth.org
Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.com