

Stop and take notice when you are stressed. The first step in dealing with stress is taking notice of the signs in yourself telling you that you're feeling tense or worried.

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Stress is a physical reaction that happens when you see a situation as threatening, difficult or painful and you don't know how to deal with it.

Most people get stressed out sometimes, but there are things you can do that may help keep stress from becoming a problem for you.

The following factors may be causing stress in your life right now:

- Coping with school demands and homework
- Negative self image
- Changes in your body
- Problems with friends
- Problems with your boyfriend or girlfriend
- Issues with your family
- Separation or divorce of parents
- Serious illness
- Death of a loved one
- Moving
- Changing school
- Moving from primary school to high school to uni
- Juggling family, work, school and social commitments

Things you can do that might help reduce stress:

- Try and be organised. Make a list of what you need to do in order of importance, so that when you get stressed out, you can cut things from the bottom of the list that aren't a priority.
- Be able to recognise when you are stressed out so you can take a break to relax, exercise and have some fun. Physical activity is a really good way to reduce stress. Find something that relaxes you and put it on your list of things to do.
- Hang out or talk on the phone with friends, tell them what's stressing you.

STRESS AND COPING

- Try and remember that you don't have to be perfect. Most people prefer a friend who is human like themselves.

Things that aren't such a good idea:

- Drugs and alcohol, including smoking. They won't solve the problem and might only make you feel worse in the long run.
- Keep on going the way you are; working harder and getting more and more stressed.
- Drinking heaps of coffee or cola. Caffeine can make you feel more tense and irritable even though it might keep you going for a while.
- Thinking that you should always win no matter what.
- Having goals that are impossible and unrealistic.
- Showing aggression - fighting with friends and family.

Thinking Positively

What you think and how you see yourself and the world around you has a big impact on how you handle stressful situations.

If you say to yourself at the start of a difficult task **"This is too hard for me"**, you might get so stressed out about it that you won't be able to get very much done.

So think about what would happen if you said to yourself **"I can do this"** or **"I'll do my best"** – sounds like a bit of an infomercial doesn't it? Give it a go anyway, you might be surprised.



Test stress

Tests are a stressful time for most of us and everyone deals with this stress in different ways. Some of us cope better with stress than others.

Example

Two students are freaking out thinking they will fail an exam.

Student A deals with the stress by working harder, asking for help when it's needed and chilling out by playing sport with friends.

Student B deals with it by avoiding study, denying the fear and chilling out by partying on weekends.

Student A finds that their coping strategies have resulted in sympathy, praise and support from other people.

Student B finds their coping strategies have brought them disapproval from parents and complaints from teachers.

It seems like Student A has got the right idea. So, when you're suffering the pre-exam stress-out, take some time to chill out and relax.

A relaxation technique

- Stretch and yawn.
- Lie comfortably on your back and close your eyes.
- Concentrate on your breathing and let negative thoughts drift away. Try breathing smoothly, slowly and deeply. Concentrate on the rise and fall of your stomach. As you breathe out, imagine you are exhaling the stress in your life, inhaling peace and fresh air.
- Starting with your toes, and moving up to your head, tense and relax your muscles, tensing each muscle for five seconds, then releasing.
- Now scrunch up your whole face and body as tight as you can. Hold it. Hold it. Relax.
- Let your jaw drop slightly, your tongue relax, feel your eyes sink back, relax your forehead.
- Imagine you are in your favourite place like the beach or a waterfall.
- Hear the sounds, feel the breeze, the warm sun and picture yourself there.
- Slowly start to concentrate on your surroundings, roll on to your side before opening your eyes.

If you're not asleep by this stage you will at least feel really relaxed!

Check out the **Relationships** fact sheet (number 4) for information on relationship stress.

