

Managing stress for young people

Long-term stress can increase the risk of developing depression, anxiety and other mental health problems. Dealing with stress early can help prevent these problems.

what is stress?

Stress can be defined as a strain on your abilities to cope with the demands placed on you by everyday life. Stress results from things such as:

- Life events that result in change, such as moving to a different city or changing schools. Even positive changes can create stress.
- School and work, due to difficult tasks and deadlines.
- Disagreements or arguing with friends, family or co-workers.
- Daily hassles such as getting stuck in traffic, missing the bus, or misplacing your keys.
- Lifestyle issues such as drug abuse, poor diet and bad sleep habits.
- Concern about health problems.
- Your own thoughts, such as worrying too much.

Research has shown that long-term stress can increase the risk of developing depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems. Dealing with stress early helps to prevent it from leading to these types of problems.

what to look for

Before you can start to manage your stress you must first learn to recognize it. This is not always easy. Stress symptoms include many mental and physical changes.

Common symptoms of stress include:

- Feelings of exhaustion and fatigue
- Irritability or anxiety
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Headaches and/or muscle tension in the back and neck

Increased use of alcohol and/or drugs may also be an indication of stress.

Each person's response to stress is different and unique. Make a note of what symptoms you experience when under stress and be on the lookout for them. Try out some of these strategies when you recognize any symptoms of stress.



tips for managing stress

1. Anticipating Stress: Be Ready For It!

By anticipating stress, you can prepare for it and work out how to control it when it happens. You can do this in a number of ways:

Rehearsal:

This is a useful strategy for any upcoming event that you are worried about. This might be a job interview or a certain social situation where you won't know anybody. Go over the event in your mind and rehearse things to say or do that will prepare you for the event.

Problem-solving:

By analyzing any problems you are faced with, you can come up with some possible solutions. Check out the problem-solving factsheet at mindcheck.ca.

Avoidance:

If a situation is likely to be unpleasant, and will not result in any benefit, it may be one you can just avoid. You should be certain, though, that you are not running away from problems or making things worse by avoiding something that you really should deal with.

See next two pages for more tips.

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mindcheck.ca encourages the early detection and intervention of mental health and substance use issues in British Columbian teens and young adults.



tips for managing stress

2. Relaxation: Deal With Stress in a Different Way!

Through relaxation, you can calm your body and mind and decrease your response to stress. There are different ways in which you can engage in relaxation.

Taking time out:

Engage in calming activities that you enjoy – take a long slow walk, listen to music, or take a warm bath. Find activities that are quiet and calming that you enjoy, and set time aside to engage in them regularly. Allowing yourself time to unwind can be very helpful in reducing stress.

Imagery:

Use your imagination to recreate a place or scene that is very relaxing. For example, if you imagine yourself lying on a beach, you may “see” the sea and sand around you, “hear” the waves crashing against rocks, “smell” the salt in the air, and “feel” the warmth of the sun and a gentle breeze on your body. Other scenarios might include enjoying a mountain view, swimming in a tropical pool, or whatever works best for you. Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress.

Progressive muscle relaxation:

This physical technique relaxes your body when muscles are tense. Tense up a group of muscles so they are as tightly contracted as possible, and hold them in that state for a few seconds. Then, relax the muscles to their previous state. Finally, try and relax them again as much as you can. You can apply this technique to any or all of the muscle groups in your body. Experiment first with your hand and then try it with other parts of the body.

3. Rational Thinking: Think Positively!

Negative thinking causes stress because it damages your confidence. You are thinking negatively when you put yourself down, criticize yourself for errors, doubt your abilities or expect failure. The following two steps can help you control negative thinking.

Thought awareness:

Observe your thoughts for a time, perhaps when under stress, and become aware of what is going through your head. It is best not to suppress any thoughts – just let them run their course while you observe them and watch for negative thoughts.

Common negative thoughts include worries about how you appear to other people, self-criticism and feelings of inadequacy. Make a note of any negative thoughts you encounter. Thought awareness is the first step in the process of eliminating negative thoughts – you cannot challenge any negative thoughts that you are not aware of.

DID YOU KNOW?

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Rational thinking:

Once you are aware of your negative thoughts, write them down and review them. See whether or not the thoughts have any basis in reality. Often you find that when you properly challenge negative thoughts, they are obviously wrong – they simply persist because they go unchallenged.

With rational thinking, you look at the basis of these negative thoughts, and challenge them rationally. Where the thoughts are obviously wrong, you can eliminate them. Where the thoughts may be fair, you can work on the underlying problem to eliminate them.



4. Reducing Daily Hassles: Get Organized!

We all experience frustrations on a regular basis. Things such as misplacing one's keys or glasses, being stuck in a long line-up at the grocery store, and missing the bus may seem relatively minor. However, these types of daily hassles can add up to create a good deal of stress. Many of these daily hassles can be easily avoided or managed through the use of two simple strategies.

Time management:

Analyze how you currently spend your time and revise this so that the use of your time is more effective. For example:

- If you always go to the store at 5 p.m. when it is most crowded, consider going at a different time of day to avoid long waits in line.
- If you often miss the bus on your way to school, consider setting an alarm to go off at the time you must leave the house to ensure you catch the bus on time.

In planning how you will spend your time, it is important to use a daily schedule to help remind you of the things you are to do at specific times.

Increased organization:

A cluttered environment and frequently misplacing things can increase stress. You can help reduce your stress simply by reducing clutter and developing a system for storing or placing important items (e.g., a hook for a key by the front door, using a filing system for school notes, etc.).

5. Reducing Responsibilities: Re-think Your Workload!

It is important to recognize when stress gets to be too much, and when the other stress management strategies are not helping to eliminate your feelings of stress. When this happens, it is time to consider reducing your responsibilities and obligations in order to reduce your stress level. These could be responsibilities such as:

- Volunteering
- Work or school
- Organized social activities
- Household duties

It can be difficult to reduce your responsibilities, but sometimes it is necessary to reduce your stress levels. Here are some steps that may help guide you.

List all responsibilities:

Make a list of all the different things that you are currently doing and are responsible for.

Evaluate your responsibilities:

For each of the responsibilities on your list, consider how stressful you find each one and what the consequences would be for no longer engaging in them.

Decide which responsibilities to reduce:

Your decision should be based on your evaluation.

Develop and carry out a plan for reducing these responsibilities:

This might involve informing others of your decision or asking someone else to help out.

DID YOU KNOW?

If your stress level is too high and nothing seems to be working to reduce it, it may be time to decrease your workload.

managing stress

The best approach to stress management is one that you develop yourself – experiment with different strategies to find ways of reducing stress that work for you. Visit mindcheck.ca for other strategies, such as sleeping well, problem-solving and goal-setting.

Check it out... Act now!

Information and resources: mindcheck.ca