

# ARE YOU STRESSED OUT?

Sometimes being young isn't all that great. Your parents are getting on your case, and your friends are being weird or maybe you just feel like you have too much to do and not enough time to do it.

Now your stomach hurts, you can't concentrate in school, and the smallest things get on your nerves. You're probably stressed out.

## WHAT IS STRESS?

**Stress is a reaction that you feel in response to pressures in your life.**

You are taking a test. You find yourself in an unfamiliar situation. You're rushing from one thing to the next. In each case, the pressure is on and you may feel the effects in your mind and body. That's stress.

**Not all stress is bad.**

Stress can rev you up and give you more energy to handle a situation. That's the way that your body makes sure you will come out ok. Stress is a normal part of life, especially when you are going through lots of changes or aren't sure about how things will turn out.

**Stress can become a bad thing when you feel it all the time.**

This means that your body is working extra hard and isn't getting the break it needs to recover.

## HOW DOES STRESS FEEL?

Learning how your body reacts when you become stressed and looking for those signs in the future can help you reduce the physical effects.

**Here are the common signs of stress:**

- Feeling angry, irritable or easily frustrated
- Trouble sleeping or wanting to sleep all the time
- Losing your temper with others
- Headaches or other unexplained aches and pains
- Changes in appetite or eating habits
- Getting colds more than usual
- Fighting with family and friends
- Trouble concentrating or thinking clearly
- Feeling sad or moody
- Feeling nervous or anxious
- Feeling that you can't handle life's challenges
- Not wanting to be around people or take part in activities

If you're having any of these symptoms, it's important that you take care of yourself.

## WHAT IS STRESSING PEOPLE OUT MOST?

Mental Health America surveyed 11-17 year olds who came to MHAScreening.org about what was stressing them out. Here's are the top 5 things that caused them stress.

**76%**

**GETTING GOOD GRADES**



**76%**

**PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE**



**68%**

**LONELINESS**



**62%**

**BODY APPEARANCE**



**61%**

**JUGGLING PRIORITIES**

(School, sports, jobs, clubs, etc.)



# WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT STRESS?

You might not be able to change what is stressing you out, but you can control how you react and respond to stress. If you notice that you're showing signs of stress, here are some things you can do to help yourself:

## LEAVE THE ROOM.

Getting up and removing yourself from the stressful situation can be a huge help. A brief change of scenery can help put some distance between you and your feelings. If you're in class, take a quick walk to the bathroom. Buried in homework? Take 60 seconds to walk to the kitchen for a glass of water.

## ORGANIZE.

Pick something small: your desk, your closet, or your to-do list are all great choices. Spend 20 minutes focused on tidying up—it will help you feel in control of something and give you a sense of accomplishment.

## DO SOME BREATHING EXERCISES.

Think about how you breathe when you're relaxed—like when you're about to fall asleep. Slow and deep, right? Forcing yourself to breathe this way is one of the best ways to bring on calmer feelings. Breathe2Relax and Breath are two good apps for guided breathing exercises.

## EXERCISE.

One of the best ways to handle built-up stress is to physically release it.<sup>1</sup> Lace up your sneakers and head outside for a run—your feet pounding against the ground is sure to help you get some frustration out.

## WRITE DOWN 3 THINGS YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR.

Showing gratitude is known to improve mood and help you better handle adversity<sup>2</sup>—so not only is it a good way to reduce your immediate stress, but it can help you keep your future stress level down, too. And when you write down a few things you're thankful for, you can always look back at your list when you start to feel that stress bubbling up again.

## TALK IT OUT.

Sometimes when we're stressed, everything little problem seems like a big deal. Talking to a friend, parent, teacher, coach, or someone else you trust can help you get out of your own head and see things from a different point of view. Try using the NotOK app to help you reach out to others when you're feeling overly stressed. Visit [bit.ly/tips4talking](http://bit.ly/tips4talking) for tips on how to start the conversation.

## WRITE IT OUT.

When your feelings start to bubble up and get overwhelming, putting them on paper can help you untangle them. Try a stream of consciousness exercise: 10 minutes of writing down all your thoughts without hesitating. Or make a list of things stressing you out—seeing them reduced to bullet points can help you think more clearly.

## MEDITATE.

Meditation triggers your body's "relaxation response"—the complete opposite of the common stress response of "fight or flight." It slows your breathing, blood pressure, and pulse—all things that go along with being in a calm state of mind. Some apps you can try to help you meditate are Calm, Sanvello, and Headspace.

## WATCH SOMETHING FUNNY.

Putting on a funny show or video will help take your mind off of everything going on for a little bit. And laughter really can be the best medicine! It's known to reduce stress hormones,<sup>3</sup> improve mood,<sup>4</sup> and bring on feelings of relaxation.

## WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE HELP?

If you still feel overwhelmed, unable to cope and feel as though your stress is affecting how you function every day, you may be experiencing the first signs of a mental health condition, like depression or anxiety.

Take the youth screen at [MHAScreening.org](http://MHAScreening.org) to see if you may be at risk. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.

### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup><https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/exercising-to-relax>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>

<sup>3</sup>JongEun Yim. (2016). Therapeutic Benefits of Laughter in Mental Health: A Theoretical Review. The Tohoku Journal of Experimental Medicine. 239(3): 243-249.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/indepth/stress-relief/art-20044456>.