

How to cope with stress

Worksheet 1 Teacher's notes

1. What is stress? Can you try to define it?

Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way. The difference between "stress" and "a stressor" - a stressor is an agent or stimulus that causes stress. Stress is the feeling we have when under pressure, while stressors are the things we respond to in our environment. Examples of stressors are noises, unpleasant people, a speeding car, or even going out on a first date. Generally (but not always), the more stressors we experience, the more stressed we feel.

2. What causes stress?

Many different things can cause stress -- from physical (such as fear of something dangerous) to emotional (such as worry over your family or job.) Identifying what may be causing you stress is often the first step in learning how to better deal with your stress. Some of the most common sources of stress are:

Survival Stress - You may have heard the phrase "fight or flight" before. This is a common response to danger in all people and animals. When you are afraid that someone or something may physically hurt you, your body naturally responds with a burst of energy so that you will be better able to survive the dangerous situation (fight) or escape it all together (flight). This is survival stress.

Internal Stress - Have you ever caught yourself worrying about things you can do nothing about or worrying for no reason at all? This is internal stress and it is one of the most important kinds of stress to understand and manage. Internal stress is when people make themselves stressed. This often happens when we worry about things we can't control or put ourselves in situations we know will cause us stress. Some people become addicted to the kind of hurried, tense, lifestyle that results from being under stress. They even look for stressful situations and feel stress about things that aren't stressful.

Environmental Stress - This is a response to things around you that cause stress, such as noise, crowding, and pressure from work or family. Identifying these environmental stresses and learning to avoid them or deal with them will help lower your stress level.

Fatigue and Overwork - This kind of stress builds up over a long time and can take a hard toll on your body. It can be caused by working too much or too hard at your job(s), school, or home. It can also be caused by not knowing how to manage your time well or how to take time out for rest and relaxation. This can be one of the hardest kinds of stress to avoid because many people feel this is out of their control. Later in this course we will show you that you DO have options and offer some useful tips for dealing with fatigue.

3. How hormones and our nervous system are involved in stress?

Stress causes a surge of hormones in your body. When your body detects stress, a small region in the base of the brain called the hypothalamus reacts by stimulating the body to produce hormones that include adrenaline and cortisol.

These hormones help you to deal with any threats or pressure you are facing - which is called the 'fight or flight' response.

How to cope with stress

Worksheet 1 Teacher's notes

Adrenaline increases your heart rate, raises your blood pressure and provides extra energy.

Cortisol, known as the stress hormone, also temporarily increases energy by triggering the release of glucose into the bloodstream, to help the person fight or run away. At the same time, other bodily functions which are not immediately needed, such as digestion, are suppressed.

The body's response to stress usually regulates itself. As your hormone levels fall, your heart and blood pressure will return to normal

4. How does our body cope with stress? What is the body stress response?

When you perceive a threat, your nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones rouse the body for emergency action.

Your heart pounds faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and your senses become sharper. These physical changes increase your strength and stamina, speed your reaction time, and enhance your focus—preparing you to either fight or flee from the danger at hand.

5. What are the symptoms of stress?

| Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms | |
|--|--|
| Cognitive Symptoms | Emotional Symptoms |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Memory problems▪ Inability to concentrate▪ Poor judgment▪ Seeing only the negative▪ Anxious or racing thoughts▪ Constant worrying | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Moodiness▪ Irritability or short temper▪ Agitation, inability to relax▪ Feeling overwhelmed▪ Sense of loneliness and isolation▪ Depression or general unhappiness |
| Physical Symptoms | Behavioral Symptoms |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Aches and pains▪ Diarrhea or constipation▪ Nausea, dizziness▪ Chest pain, rapid heartbeat▪ Loss of sex drive▪ Frequent colds | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Eating more or less▪ Sleeping too much or too little▪ Isolating yourself from others▪ Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities▪ Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax▪ Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing) |

6. What are the symptoms of chronic stress?

anxiety or panic attacks

a feeling of being constantly pressured, hassled, and hurried

irritability and moodiness

physical symptoms, such as stomach problems, headaches, or even chest pain

allergic reactions, such as eczema or asthma

problems sleeping

How to cope with stress

Worksheet 1 Teacher's notes

*drinking too much, smoking, overeating, or doing drugs
sadness or depression*

Many health problems are caused or exacerbated by stress, including:

-
- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ▪ Pain of any kind | ▪ Depression |
| ▪ Heart disease | ▪ Weight problems |
| ▪ Digestive problems | ▪ Autoimmune diseases |
| ▪ Sleep problems | ▪ Skin conditions, such as eczema |

7. Is stress always bad ?

Good Stress and Bad Stress

*The stress response (also called the **fight or flight response**) is critical during emergency situations, such as when a driver has to slam on the brakes to avoid an accident. It can also be activated in a milder form at a time when the pressure's on but there's no actual danger — like stepping up to take the foul shot that could win the game, getting ready to go to a big dance, or sitting down for a final exam. A little of this stress can help keep you on your toes, ready to rise to a challenge. And the nervous system quickly returns to its normal state, standing by to respond again when needed.*

But stress doesn't always happen in response to things that are immediate or that are over quickly. Ongoing or long-term events, like coping with a divorce or moving to a new neighborhood or school, can cause stress, too.

Long-term stressful situations can produce a lasting, low-level stress that's hard on people. The nervous system senses continued pressure and may remain slightly activated and continue to pump out extra stress hormones over an extended period. This can wear out the body's reserves, leave a person feeling depleted or overwhelmed, weaken the body's immune system, and cause other problems.

8. How can we cope with stress?

Self help for treating stress

Exercise - exercise has been proven to have a beneficial effect on a person's mental and physical state. For many people exercise is an extremely effective stress buster.

Division of labor - try to delegate your responsibilities at work, or share them. If you make yourself indispensable the likelihood of your feeling highly stressed is significantly greater.

Assertiveness - don't say yes to everything. If you can't do something well, or if something is not your responsibility, try to seek ways of not agreeing to do them.

Alcohol and drugs - alcohol and drugs will not help you manage your stress better. Either stop consuming them completely, or cut down.

Caffeine - if your consumption of coffee and other drinks which contain caffeine is high, cut down.

How to cope with stress

Worksheet 1 Teacher's notes

Nutrition - eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Make sure you have a healthy and balanced diet.

Time - make sure you set aside some time each day just for yourself. Use that time to organize your life, relax, and pursue your own interests.

Breathing - there are some effective breathing techniques which will slow down your system and help you relax.

Talk - talk to you family, friends, work colleagues and your boss. Express your thoughts and worries.

Seek professional help - if the stress is affecting the way you function; go and see your doctor. Heightened stress for prolonged periods can be bad for your physical and mental health.

Relaxation techniques - meditation, massage, or yoga have been known to greatly help people with stress.

Here are some things that can help keep stress under control:

Take a stand against over scheduling. If you're feeling stretched, consider cutting out an activity or two, opting for just the ones that are most important to you.

Be realistic. Don't try to be perfect — no one is. And expecting others to be perfect can add to your stress level, too (not to mention put a lot of pressure on them!). If you need help on something, like schoolwork, ask for it.

Get a good night's sleep. Getting enough sleep helps keep your body and mind in top shape, making you better equipped to deal with any negative stressors. Because the biological "sleep clock" shifts during adolescence, many teens prefer staying up a little later at night and sleeping a little later in the morning. But if you stay up late and still need to get up early for school, you may not get all the hours of sleep you need.

Learn to relax. The body's natural antidote to stress is called the relaxation response. It's your body's opposite of stress, and it creates a sense of well-being and calm. The chemical benefits of the relaxation response can be activated simply by relaxing. You can help trigger the relaxation response by learning simple breathing exercises and then using them when you're caught up in stressful situations. (Click on the button to try one.) And ensure you stay relaxed by building time into your schedule for activities that are calming and pleasurable: reading a good book or making time for a hobby, spending time with your pet, or just taking a relaxing bath.

Treat your body well. Experts agree that getting regular exercise helps people manage stress. (Excessive or compulsive exercise can contribute to stress, though, so as in all things, use moderation.) And eat well to help your body get the right fuel to function at its best. It's easy when you're stressed out to eat on the run or eat junk food or fast food. But under stressful conditions, the body needs its vitamins and minerals more than ever. Some people may turn to substance abuse as a way to ease tension. Although alcohol or drugs may seem to lift the stress

How to cope with stress

Worksheet 1 Teacher's notes

temporarily, relying on them to cope with stress actually promotes more stress because it wears down the body's ability to bounce back.

Watch what you're thinking. Your outlook, attitude, and thoughts influence the way you see things. Is your cup half full or half empty? A healthy dose of optimism can help you make the best of stressful circumstances. Even if you're out of practice, or tend to be a bit of a pessimist, everyone can learn to think more optimistically and reap the benefits.

Solve the little problems. Learning to solve everyday problems can give you a sense of control. But avoiding them can leave you feeling like you have little control and that just adds to stress. Develop skills to calmly look at a problem, figure out options, and take some action toward a solution. Feeling capable of solving little problems builds the inner confidence to move on to life's bigger ones — and it can serve you well in times of stress.

9. Check how vulnerable you are to stress <http://www.stress.org.uk/stresstest.aspx> .
10. Check what your level of stress is : <http://www.seventeen.com/fun/quizzes/health/stress-quiz>
11. Write a list of things you can change in your life to reduce stress .
questions 8-10 students' own answers

suggested pages:

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/145855.php>

<http://www.mtstcil.org/skills/stress-definition-1.html>

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm

http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/stress.html

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/0/21685448>

http://www.fosteringresilience.com/what_is_stress.php