

## Stress and Youth

Stress is how we react when we feel under pressure or threatened. It usually happens when we are in a situation that we don't feel we can manage or control. The teenage years are ripe with new experiences, opportunities and challenges. Also during this time, teenagers' brains are changing, and they want more independence and autonomy. During this time, there are also many stressors.

Common Causes for Youth Stress:

- Schoolwork, decisions about subjects, exams, and pressure to do well.
- Relationships with friends and romantic relationships
- Life changes like leaving school, moving house, going to university, or getting a job.
- Too many things to do and feeling unprepared or overwhelmed by tasks.
- Exciting things, like trying a new sport.
- Family conflict
- Big decisions, like deciding whether to talk about something sensitive or important.
- Lack of sleep.



### Young adults can exhibit stress in many ways:

Irritability and anger – teenagers may be snappy or argumentative because of stress.

Aches and pains – young adults struggling with stress may complain of increased aches and pains such as headaches, muscle pains, and fatigue.

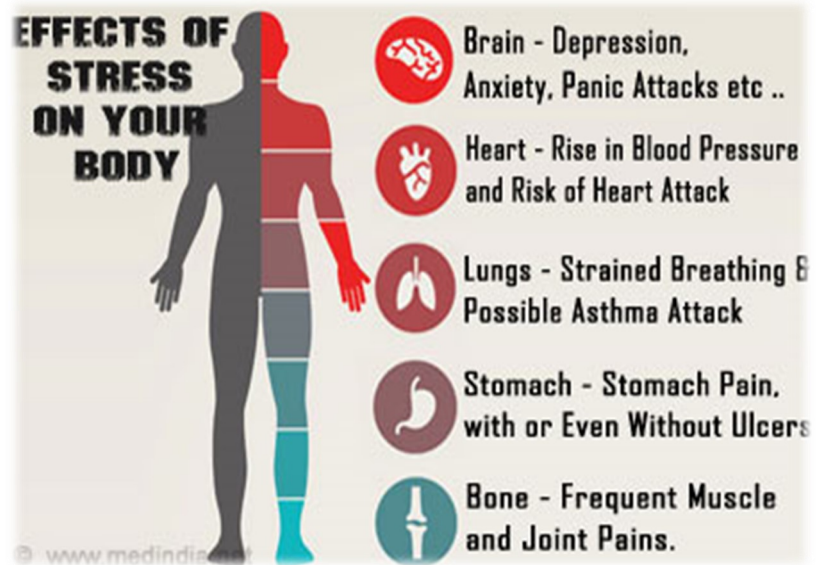
Increased anxiety – stress can cause young adults to be more anxious than usual.

Eating changes – stress can cause appetite changes in young people. They may eat more or much less than usual.

Neglecting chores or hobbies – teenagers may neglect their set chores, hobbies, or responsibilities as a reaction to stress.

# Stress and the effects on the Body:

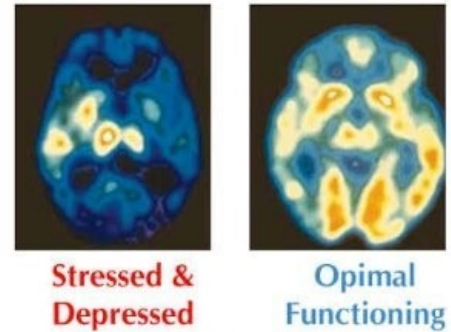
Your body responds to stress by releasing hormones that increase your heart and breathing rates and ready your muscles to respond. Yet if your stress response doesn't stop firing, and these stress levels stay elevated far longer than is necessary for survival, it can take a toll on your health. Chronic stress can cause a variety of symptoms and affect your overall well-being.



- **Central nervous and endocrine systems (CNS):** The CNS is in charge of your “fight or flight” response. In your brain, the hypothalamus gets the ball rolling, telling your adrenal glands to release the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol.
  - When the perceived fear is gone, the hypothalamus should tell all systems to go back to normal. If the CNS fails to return to normal, or if the stressor doesn't go away, the response will continue.
- **Respiratory and cardiovascular systems:** Stress hormones affect your respiratory and cardiovascular systems. During the stress response, you breathe faster in an effort to quickly distribute oxygen-rich blood to your body.
  - Under stress, your heart also pumps faster. Stress hormones cause your blood vessels to constrict and divert more oxygen to your muscles so you'll have more strength to take action. But this also raises your blood pressure.
  - As a result, frequent or chronic stress will make your heart work too hard for too long. When your blood pressure rises, so do your risks for having a stroke or heart attack.
- **Digestive system:** The rush of hormones, rapid breathing, and increased heart rate can also upset your digestive system. You're more likely to have heartburn or acid reflux thanks to an increase in stomach acid. Stress doesn't cause ulcers (a bacterium called *H. pylori* often does), but it can increase your risk for them and cause existing ulcers to act up.
  - Stress can also affect the way food moves through your body, leading to diarrhea or constipation. You might also experience nausea, vomiting, or a stomachache.
- **Immune system:** Stress hormones will weaken your immune system and reduce your body's response to foreign invaders. People under chronic stress are more susceptible to viral illnesses like the flu and the common cold, as well as other infections. Stress can also increase the time it takes you to recover from an illness or injury.

## Stress and the Impacts on the Brain:

- Impairs Memory: One effect of chronic stress that researchers have observed is memory impairment. Specifically, it has been noted that people who are stressed tend to be more forgetful and less likely to remember specific information.
- Changes the Brain's Structure: Your brain is composed of both gray matter and white matter. Gray matter is used for decision-making and problem-solving, while white matter is used to connect regions of the brain and communicate information. It has been noted that during times of chronic stress, the myelin sheaths that make up white matter become overproduced, while less gray matter is produced.
- Stress shrinks the Brain: Chronic stress also made people more likely to experience brain shrinkage when exposed to intense stressors. This means that people under constant stress may find it harder to deal with future stress.



## Stress and Drinking

Like drugs and alcohol, certain things should not be mixed. Stress and drinking can be a similarly toxic combination that has unfortunately become normalized. The normalization comes from culture and media. When we watch a TV show or a movie, we often see characters using alcohol to relax and even outside of media, it is engraved in the American culture, to use alcohol to relax and during celebrations.

### The Impact of Alcohol & Stress

- Anxiety and Depression: Anxiety and depression can occur when your body is constantly in fight or flight mode. Mixing alcohol and anxiety can have some of the same adverse effects.
- Even moderate use of alcohol can increase anxiety.
- **Physical Concerns:**
  - There are many physical concerns that come with prolonged increased levels of cortisol (primary stress hormone) in the body. This can include things like headaches, problems with digestion, and heart disease.
  - Physical symptoms over time can begin to impact other parts of your life as well. For example, another effect is memory and concentration problems.
  - Trouble Sleeping:
    - Stress and sleep are connected in significant ways. When you're stressed, it's hard to sleep. However, when you're not getting enough sleep, your stress levels rise.
    - It's a vicious circle that seems like it will never end. A lack of sleep also comes with a wealth of physical and mental health problems, like depression, arthritis, diabetes, obesity, and more.

# Stress Management Skills for Teens

- Exercise and eat regularly.
- Get enough sleep and have a good sleep routine.
- Avoid excess caffeine which can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation.
- Avoid illegal drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.
- Learn relaxation exercises (abdominal breathing and muscle relaxation techniques).
- Develop assertiveness training skills. For example, state feelings in polite, firm, and not overly aggressive or passive ways: ("I feel angry when you yell at me." "Please stop yelling.")

## 5 HEALTH BENEFITS OF REDUCING STRESS

Stress affects more than your mind. Here are five ways a stress management routine could help your body.



1 BETTER SLEEP

2 LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE

3 IMPROVED DIGESTION

4 REDUCED MUSCLE TENSION

5 BOOSTED IMMUNE SYSTEM

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- Rehearse and practice situations which cause stress. One example is taking a speech class if talking in front of a class makes you anxious.
- Learn practical coping skills. For example, break a large task into smaller, more attainable tasks.
- Decrease negative self-talk: challenge negative thoughts - with alternative, neutral, or positive thoughts. "My life will never get better" can be transformed into "I may feel hopeless now, but my life will probably get better if I work at it and get some help."
- Learn to feel good about doing a competent or "good enough" job rather than demanding perfection from yourself and others.
- Take a break from stressful situations. Activities like listening to music, talking to a friend, drawing, writing, or spending time with a pet can reduce stress.
- Build a network of friends who help you cope in a positive way.
- Parents can help their teen in following ways:
  - Monitor if stress is affecting their teen's health, behavior, thoughts, or feelings
  - Listen carefully to teens and watch for overloading
  - Learn and model stress management skills
  - Support involvement in sports and other pro-social activities

Q	E	R	T	Y	U	I	O	P	L	K	J	H	G	F	D	S	A	Z	X	C	V	B	N	M	J	K	L	H	G
F	G	G	A	R	D	E	N	H	K	L	M	M	A	Y	N	B	B	U	G	S	V	X	C	X	A	M	S	D	F
P	D	A	I	S	Y	O	I	U	Y	T	R	E	W	Q	A	S	D	F	G	R	O	S	E	G	O	H	J	K	L
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J	W	E	S	Y	B	T	D	P	O	I	U	U	Y	T	R	E	Q	A	S	D	F	G	B	X	C	F	R	E	Q

Aim	Buds	Family	Iris	Picnic	Sweetpea
Analysis	Bugs	Flowers	June	Rainy	Taurus
April	Composure	Fool	Ladybug	Relief	Tulip
Baby Breath	Crocus	Garden	Lily	Robin	Underground
Bees	Daffodil	Grass	May	Rose	Queen Annes
Black-eyed Susan	Daisy	Green	March	Showers	Lace
Bloom	Diamond	Growth	Mud	Snapdragon	
Blubs	Earth	Heather	Passover	Stress	
	Easter	Hydrangea	Petunia	Sunflower	



McFarland is a small community south of Madison in Dane County. In January of 2017, a group of concerned citizens came together to discuss substance abuse problems in the McFarland area. The McFarland RADAR is a result of these meetings

**We are comprised of local representatives from schools, businesses, churches, village administration as well as parents, and youth—all working together to promote healthy lifestyles**

**For more information go to: <https://www.radarmc.com/>**



For time, day and place of meetings, please contact Cathy Kalina at [CathyK@fsmad.org](mailto:CathyK@fsmad.org)

*The McFarland RADAR (RADAR stands for Relevant Alcohol & Drug Awareness Resources) Coalition works to develop, implement and support environmental strategies to reduce substance abuse.*

*We believe by working together, we can nurture social and environmental changes to make the McFarland area a safer and healthier place, brightening the future of our children, youth and families.*

### **McFarland RADAR Mission Statement**

*“The mission of McFarland’s RADAR Coalition is to promote healthy lifestyles in the McFarland area through alcohol and drug abuse prevention and education efforts.”*

### **HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

We are asking you to give the gift of time. Make a difference in the lives of our youth and our community by

1. Working with us in providing support for planning, project management and awareness campaigns
2. Helping with coalition events, conferences, workshops, and fairs held throughout the year.
3. Being a voice for change in our community, it is time to come together and be that force for change in the McFarland area.