

Children and Young People's Health Directorate

## Children's Psychological Health and Wellbeing Team

**'Stress Less'**



**What is stress and  
how to manage it.**

Derriford Hospital  
Derriford Road  
Plymouth  
PL6 8DH

Tel: 0845 155 8155

[www.plymouthhospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.plymouthhospitals.nhs.uk)

## What is Stress?

Everyone feels stress sometimes – young people and adults. Stress can make you feel tense, worried, sad, angry or a horrible mixture of these! Stress is your body's natural response to situations that may be scary or worrying for you, such as preparing for exams, arguments at home or having problems with friends.

## What causes stress?

There are lots of things that can make you feel stressed. Some of these include:

- Problems with friends
- Problems at home or with your family
  - Exam and school work pressure
    - Illness
    - Money worries
- Going to a new school and making new friends
  - Moving home
  - Growing up
- Worrying about others
- Taking on too much

**Can you think of any other things that could make you feel stressed? Write these down in the box below.**

## How do I know if I am too stressed?

Everybody feels stress differently. Below are some ways to tell if you are stressed. The more of these you answer 'YES' to, the more stressed you probably are.

- Do you find it hard to get to sleep?
- Do you lie in bed at night and worry about things?
- Do you often feel tired or like you have no energy?
- Do you find it hard to concentrate or make decisions?
- Are you being more forgetful than usual?
- Do you often feel irritable or impatient?
- Do you find yourself getting into fights with others and sometimes you don't know why?
- Do you often feel like crying – sometimes over 'silly' things?
- Do you often feel yourself getting hot and sweaty, get a dry mouth, a knot in your tummy, a thumping heart or feel that you need to use the toilet quickly?
- Do you get lots of tummy aches?
- Do you get lots of headaches?
- Do you feel like your muscles are tense or sore?
- Are you eating much more or much less than you normally do?
- Does everything seem to go wrong for you?

## Resources

Below are some useful books you could read and websites you could visit to give you more ideas about managing your stress:

### • Books

- ✓ Cool Cats, Calm Kids by Mary L Williams
- ✓ 101 Relaxation Games for Children by Alison Bartl
- ✓ What To Do if I Worry Too Much: A Kids Guide to Overcoming Anxiety by Dawn Huebner

### • Websites

- ✓ Minnesota Children's Hospital website: Managing stress. Go to <http://www.uofmchildrenshospital.org/kidshealth/article.aspx?artid=20400>
- or
- <http://www.uofmchildrenshospital.org/kidshealth/article.aspx?artid=22872>
- ✓ Rethink website. Go to [http://www.rethink.org/living\\_with\\_mental\\_illness/everyday\\_living/physical\\_health\\_and\\_wellbeing/stress/managing\\_stress.html](http://www.rethink.org/living_with_mental_illness/everyday_living/physical_health_and_wellbeing/stress/managing_stress.html)

## Note to Parents

Mums and dads can help kids who worry by listening to their children's worries and fears, accepting these and taking them seriously.

Keep in mind that all children respond to stress differently and that stress and worry can emerge as physical health problems such as poor health, pain (especially headaches and tummy aches), low moods, withdrawal or 'naughty' behaviour.

## Clinical Psychologists

Level 12

Derriford Hospital

Plymouth

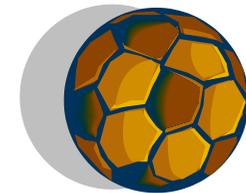
PL6 8DH

Tel: 01752 432553/432554

## What does stress do?

Your body is designed to handle some stress and sometimes stress can be good for you.

It can remind you to meet your coursework deadline or help you rise to the challenge of a race and run fast on sports day.



But your body is not made to deal with too much stress.

Too much stress can make you feel tired and forgetful or stop you from sleeping. It can make you very upset and tearful or can stop you eating. You may even get tummy aches and headaches from too much stress.

bad about it. For each idea think to yourself “what will happen if I do that?”

Step 4: Once you have done this, choose the idea that you think is the best one (the idea that has a lot of good things about it and you think will help you the most). You can ask someone you trust whether they also think this is the best idea. Then do it!

Step 5: Once you have tried your idea, take a new look at your problem. Did your idea work? Did your problem change? Do you feel less stressed?

Step 6: Go back to step 1 and problem solve again if you need to.

Here is an example:

Jo was feeling stressed about doing badly in school exams. This stress was making Jo feel sick and worried. It was stopping Jo from sleeping and was giving Jo headaches.

Jo decided to brainstorm ways to manage this stress. Jo wrote down all the ideas she could think of and decided the best idea would be to talk to her favourite teacher at school about this.

Jo's teacher gave her lots of advice. She told Jo to start revising early for the exams so that Jo felt more prepared, and to design a revision timetable so that Jo could learn everything she needed to in manageable bits. Jo's teacher reminded her to eat and sleep well before the exam and to stay calm during the exam and while revising by doing some relaxation exercises (these are described later in this booklet).

Jo felt much happier and less stressed. This helped Jo to revise better and Jo passed the exams.

- **Imagination Exercises**

Some people find it easier to use their imagination to help them feel less stressed.

Think about your dream place. It could be a real place or a made up place. It could be anywhere - a peaceful beach or a calm quiet wood.

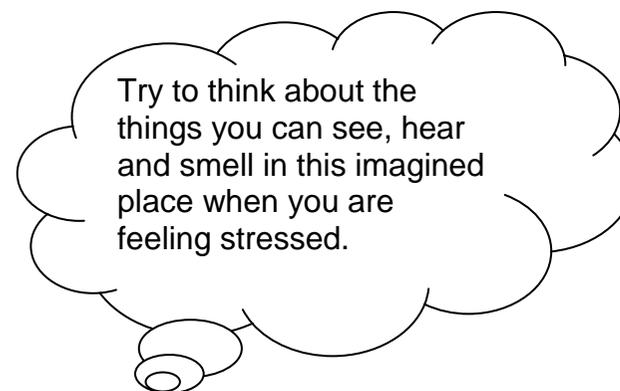
Concentrate on walking along a path in this place.

Feel the sun on your face. Imagine a breeze in your hair or in the trees. How does this feel?

What lovely things can you smell?

What nice sounds can you hear? Soft music, birds twittering, the sound of the sea?

As you walk along the path you get more and more relaxed with every step you take.



### 5. Worry Time

You could allocate a special time in the day – only 5 or 10 minutes – that is your ‘worry time’. During this time you are allowed to worry about your stresses. You could write them down, say them in your head or talk about them with someone you trust. Then stop and carry on with your day. When you find yourself getting too stressed, tell yourself to **stop!** and save it for your next ‘worry time’.

### 6. Give your Worries Away

You could write your worries down on paper and then tear the paper up and throw the worries away. Or you could write your worries down and give them to a grown up to look after. This means that you don’t have to keep the worries locked up in your head all the time!

You could also get a worry doll. Worry dolls are very good at worrying for you – so you don’t have to! Many people believe that if you put one under your pillow at night the worry dolls take your worries away while you sleep. You could also put a dream catcher by your bed to catch all your bad dreams and worries in the night.



### 7. Change your thinking

Try to see stressful situations as challenges and opportunities. Be more positive about the situation and believe that you can manage the stress using the ideas in this booklet as well as your own ideas.

## Beating stress!

Stress is a normal part of life but if you think too much stress is making you have lots of these problems then you should do things to try and beat your stress.

### How to beat stress

#### 1. Be aware

Some people pretend that they are fine when really they are very stressed and upset. Being aware of when you are feeling stressed is the first step in making things better.

#### 2. Problem solve

You can do this on your own or with someone’s help. Try to think about ways to change a problem that is making you feel stressed, or think about how you can better cope with a stressful situation that you cannot change.

Here are some tips on how to problem solve:

Step 1: Write down what the problem is that is making you feel stressed

Step 2: Brainstorm all the things you can think of to solve the problem. Write down even the ‘silly’ ideas!

Step 3: Once you have written your list, look at each of your ideas and write down what is good about that idea and what is

- **Get a good night's sleep** to keep you body and mind better able to deal with any stressors.

In fact, there are a couple of things you can do to help you sleep:

- Go to bed at the same time every night; this helps your body get into a routine.
- Take a warm bath, listen to calm music or read a relaxing book as part of your bed time routine.
- Don't watch scary TV programmes or play exciting computer games just before bedtime because these can sometimes make it hard to fall asleep.
- Don't have a TV in your room. If you have a TV, turn it off when it's time to sleep.
- Use your bed just for sleeping – don't do your homework, play games or talk on the phone on your bed. This will train your body to associate your bed with sleep.

- **Have some leisure time.** Spend time doing the fun things you like!

#### **4. Learn to Relax**

Sometimes we can try different exercises to help us relax.

- **Physical Relaxation Exercises**

Using physical relaxation exercises, all the major muscles in your body are tensed for a few seconds and then relaxed. It's very important that you tense or squeeze your muscles while you do the exercises and try to concentrate on what your muscles feel like when they are tensed and relaxed. This will help you recognise when your body is tense or stressed during the day. You can then start relaxing your muscles whenever they feel tense which will help make you feel less stressed. The more you practise this, the better and faster you will become at relaxing. Find somewhere comfortable and quiet where you won't be disturbed to practise this.

Arms and hands: Clench your hands and scrunch your shoulders up. Hold for five seconds, think about how that feels and then relax.

Legs and feet: scrunch up your toes, gently raise your legs and stretch them out in front of you. Hold and then go floppy and relax.

Stomach: Push out your tummy. Hold, and relax.

Face: Screw up your face, squeezing your eyes shut. Hold, and then relax your face.

You can include other parts of your body in the exercise such as your tongue, neck or bottom. You could try practising the exercises with someone you trust, or alone before bed.

- **Breathing Exercises**

You can do this exercise anywhere and often other people don't even notice you are doing it!



Picture a clock with only 1 hand. Imagine that at 12 o'clock you are the most stressed you could possibly be. Imagine that at 6 o'clock you are completely calm and relaxed.

Think about where you are on the clock right now.

Take a slow deep breath in. Hold this and count to 5. Slowly breathe out and imagine the clock hand moving closer to 6 o'clock.

Keep breathing in and out until the clock hand reaches 6 o'clock.

### 3. Look after your body

- **Eat healthily** so that your body has the vitamins and minerals it needs to fight against stress.
  - ✓ Try swapping sugary snacks and drinks for ones that are lower in sugar. You could swap soft drinks for water, milk or a mixture of fresh fruit juice and water.
  - ✓ Swap crisps, biscuits and sweets for fruit, breadsticks and unsalted nuts
  - ✓ Try to eat regular meals.
  - ✓ Try and eat 5 portions of fruit or vegetables every day. These can include fresh fruit juices, canned and dried fruit
  - ✓ Try not to eat too much junk food or caffeine (like coca-cola or coffee).
- **Exercise** regularly. You could walk or cycle to school instead of going in the car. You could visit your local swimming pool, play in the park or join an after-school club. Exercise will help you sleep and feel more relaxed. Make sure you don't exercise just before going to bed though. Exercise earlier in the day - it will help you sleep better.