Stress and Young People

Edited by Justin Healey
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Stress and Young People is Volume 447 in the ‘Issues in Society’ series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC
Most people suffer from stress at some point in their lives, yet it affects people in different ways. A certain level of stress is necessary to motivate us to reach our potential, however if we experience too much stress, it can become a serious health concern.

This guide is aimed at helping young Australians to identify and understand stress and its impacts on their mental and physical health. It features a range of tips, strategies and tools for managing and reducing stress, including relaxation techniques. The title also dedicates a chapter to handling exam stress, showing readers how to reduce stress caused by study pressures and most effectively prepare for exams. Learn how to stress less and be at your best under pressure.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Titles in the ‘Issues in Society’ series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the ‘Issues in Society’ series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:

- Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
- Website fact sheets
- Magazine and journal articles
- Statistics and surveys
- Government reports
- Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION
As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES
The ‘Exploring issues’ section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH
This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The ‘Web links’ section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.
STRESS: A FACT SHEET

BETTER HEALTH CHANNELExplains stress and how to manage its effects

**SUMMARY**

- Stress is when you feel under pressure to do something and think you will fail.
- A balanced lifestyle and coping strategies can help you manage stress.
- Issues that cause stress cannot always be resolved but changing your expectations of a problem may help.
- Untreated stress can lead to serious illness.
- It’s important to get help if you feel you can’t cope.

Stress is a process, not a diagnosis. We experience stress when there is an imbalance between the demands being made on us and our resources to cope with those demands. The level and extent of stress a person may feel depends a great deal on their attitude to a particular situation. An event that may be extremely stressful for one person can be a mere hiccup in another person’s life.

You may feel under pressure to do something and fear you may fail. The more important the outcome, the more stressed you feel. You can feel stressed by external situations (too much work, children misbehaving) and by internal triggers (the way you think about external situations).

Stress is not always a bad thing. Some people thrive on stress and even need it to get things done. When the term ‘stress’ is used in a clinical sense, it refers to a situation that causes discomfort and distress for a person and can lead to other mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression.

Stress may also contribute to physical illness such as cardiovascular disease. When stress turns into a serious illness, it is important to get professional help as soon as possible. Untreated anxiety disorders can lead to serious depression.

**Effects of stress**

Stress affects us in many ways, including:

- **Emotionally** – anxiety, depression, tension, anger
- **The way we think** – poor concentration, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, apathy, hopelessness
- **Behaviourally** – increased drinking and smoking, insomnia, accident proneness, weight problems, obsessive compulsive behaviour, nervousness, gambling.

The level and extent of stress a person may feel depends a great deal on their attitude to a particular situation. An event that may be extremely stressful for one person can be a mere hiccup in another person’s life.

Your response to stress

Your attitude, personality and approach to life will influence how you respond to stress.

Factors that play a part include:

- How you think about a problem
- How anxious you feel generally
- How severely the problem affects you
- Whether you have experienced anything like this before
- Whether you can control what is happening
- How long the event affects you
- How important the outcome is to you
- The different ways a person copes with difficult situations
- Your life experiences and life history
- Your self-esteem
- Whether you have people around who can provide support.
Stress as a health problem
As a health problem, stress occurs when a person feels that the demands made on them exceed their ability to cope.

Factors contributing to a person feeling stressed might include:
• Environment (work, home, school)
• Lifestyle
• Emotional and personal problems.

Stress and physical illness
When we feel under stress, our body kicks into high gear to deal with the threat. Our heartbeat, breathing rate and blood pressure all go up. The longer we feel stressed, the greater the demand on our body.

The more often we are placed under stress, the more often we have to use energy to cope. There is growing evidence that stress may contribute to physical illness such as cardiovascular disease (although this link remains controversial and research is ongoing), high blood pressure, proneness to infection and chronic fatigue.

Whatever the cause, physical diseases need appropriate medical management before any attempt is made at stress management. Discuss with your doctor how stress management may be used to support treatment of your physical symptoms.

Stress and anxiety
Untreated stress can turn into a mental illness such as an anxiety disorder or depression.

Almost everyone experiences some anxiety. This is normal. However, an anxiety disorder is different from everyday anxiety – it is more severe, can persist and may interfere with a person’s daily life.

Common anxiety disorders include:
• Panic disorder
• Specific phobias – such as fear of flying or of spiders
• Agoraphobia – fear of public places or of being away from home
• Social anxiety disorder – fear of the scrutiny and judgement of others
• Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – following a real and very distressing event such as a disaster, accident, war, torture, violent death or assault.

Other, less common, anxiety disorders include:
• Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
• Acute stress disorder
• Generalised anxiety disorder – the person is constantly worried, often about irrational things, and cannot be reassured.

Anxiety is a very treatable condition. There are many different psychological and medication options. Treatments need to be individually decided on and regularly reviewed to make sure they are effective and to minimise side effects of medications. Separately and in combination, psychotherapy and medication therapy generally produce good results.

Untreated anxiety disorders and depression
Untreated anxiety disorders can lead to serious depression. Depressive illness is common – about 17 per cent of Australians will suffer from depression at some time in their life.
Depression is about twice as common in women as in men. The most common time in life for people to suffer from depression is in their 40s. However, it can develop at any age. Depression is often associated with an increased incidence of suicide. The annual suicide rate for people with depression is three or four times higher than that of other psychiatric disorders.

**Stress at work**

Stress in the workplace is common and is caused by many different factors, including excessive hours, conflicts with others and feelings of isolation. The amount of stress a person experiences is often determined by whether or not they can accept that some things in life will simply never be sorted out to their satisfaction. For example, a person may feel stressed by the way they are treated by their employer or by the behaviour of a work colleague.

*Stress is not always a bad thing. Some people thrive on stress and even need it to get things done.*

Sometimes, this stress can be resolved by dealing with the particular behaviour. In many organisations, there are processes to deal with workplace problems like harassment, victimisation or unfair treatment. In many cases, the problem can be resolved if the behaviour is changed.

However, some problems will never be fully resolved and you may have to accept them. For example, if someone who you think is poorly qualified is given a job you felt entitled to, you may continue to feel stressed, unless you are able to let go of that grievance and move on.

**Management of stress**

The old adage ‘prevention is better than cure’ is certainly true for stress management.

It will help if you:

- **Exercise regularly** – regular exercise is a great way to manage stress. You should do some form of exercise that causes you to feel puffed afterwards – a leisurely stroll to the bus stop is not enough! Have at least 20 minutes of exercise three times a week
- **Avoid conflict** – avoid situations that make you feel stressed such as unnecessary arguments and conflict (although ignoring a problem is not always the best way to reduce stress). Assertiveness is fine but becoming distressed is not
- **Relax** – give yourself some time to relax each day and try to spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself
- **Eat well** – a nutritious diet is important. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and avoid sweet and fatty foods
- **Sleep** – a good sleep routine is essential. If you have difficulty falling asleep, do something calm and relaxing before you go to bed like listening to music or reading
- **Enjoy your life** – it’s important to make time to have some fun and to get a balance in your life.

To deal with stress more effectively, it helps to investigate your stresses and how you react to them.

Try to:

- Understand what situations make you feel stressed
- Understand what situations you can and can’t control
- Prepare for stressful events in advance, by thinking about the future
- Keep yourself healthy with good nutrition, exercise and regular relaxation
- Try to do happy things every day.

**Getting help for stress**

You should see your doctor or community health centre if:

- You feel stressed often
- Particular things stress you and you feel they are beyond your control
- You feel your reactions to stress are extreme or worry you
- You feel anxious or depressed about stress.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Psychologist or counsellor
- This way up – an online Coping with Stress and an Intro to Mindfulness course developed by the Clinical Research Unit of Anxiety and Depression (CRUfAD) at St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney and University of New South Wales (UNSW) Faculty of Medicine. [https://thiswayup.org.au](https://thiswayup.org.au)
- Community mental health service
- Mental Health Foundation of Australia (Victoria) Tel. (03) 9826 1422 (Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm) [www.mhfa.org.au](http://www.mhfa.org.au)
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14, [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
- SuicideLine Victoria Tel. 1300 651 251 [www.suicideline.org.au](http://www.suicideline.org.au)

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Stress and Young People

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MENTAL HEALTH: STRESS

Most people suffer from stress at some point in their lives. Showing signs of stress does not mean that you are a weak person, just human like everybody else. Stress affects different people in different ways – your attitude and personality play a big part in how it affects you, and how you cope with it. myDr explains

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the description used for strain, pressure or force on a system. That system may be you. Stress can be the result of trivial annoyances like driving in heavy traffic, or a life-altering major crisis such as the death of a loved one.

Stress can be used both to refer to the event that is causing the disturbance or the effects of that event on your body. Usually when we say we are feeling stressed we are talking about the symptoms caused by your body’s stress response.

SYMPTOMS AND EFFECTS OF STRESS

Some of the symptoms and health problems that can be caused or exacerbated by high levels of ongoing stress include:
• Migraine or tension-induced headaches;
• Insomnia, fitful sleeping or nightmares;
• Anxiety, anger or irritability;
• Low, irritable or unstable mood;
• Memory lapses;
• Shoulder, neck or back pain;
• Fatigue;
• Rapid heartbeat;
• High blood pressure;
• Skin eruptions and worsening of conditions such as eczema;
• Heartburn, nausea (feeling sick), diarrhoea or constipation;
• Reduced libido;
• Shortness of breath;
• Problems with your immune system;
• Heart disease; and
• Chronic pain.

HOW STRESS AFFECTS YOUR BODY

At the first sign of alarm, certain sensory nerves in your body are stimulated and hormones are released that automatically trigger physical reactions to stress. Your heart rate increases, blood is diverted to your muscles and brain, breathing rate increases, digestion slows down, saliva production stops (your mouth feels dry), perspiration increases and your pupils widen. You feel tense, you startle easily and your attention narrows to focus on possible threats.

This is the ‘fight or flight’ phenomenon, which makes your body tense, alert, and ready for action. After this reaction to a real or perceived threat, your body stays on alert until you feel the danger has passed. When the stressor is gone, the brain signals an ‘all clear’, and your body gradually returns to normal.

While some short-term stress is thought to be good for you, pushing you to make that extra effort in a sporting event or game, chronic or long-term stress can be harmful to your health. This kind of stress is when you feel under constant, intense pressure, or you just cannot see a way out of a terrible situation.

DEALING WITH STRESS

Dealing with stress effectively can be complicated, but usually involves:
• General measures to improve your overall wellbeing; and
• Specific steps to deal with particular challenging situations.

You may also reflect on any underlying coping styles that make you more vulnerable to stress. Stress commonly results when you feel your resources – for example, time, money or skills – are insufficient to deal with your responsibilities. Doing a ‘stress audit’, where you examine your demands and resources can be a useful first step in dealing with stress.

Problem-solving techniques may help you cut some problems down to size, or you may need to work on limiting your obligations or asking for extra resources. You may need to accept that there are times in life where you simply can’t do everything that others – or more commonly you – expect.

One way to help deal with stress is to maintain a healthier mind and body. Try the following stress-buster tips.

STRESS-BUSTER TIPS
• Exercise regularly and work off your tensions – but check with your doctor that your chosen physical activity is right for you.
• Treat yourself to sufficient relaxation time – switch off for a while, as this will help to give you a refreshed and energetic outlook on life. Learn yoga, meditation or other relaxation exercises.
• Make sure you get enough sleep.
• Maintain a balanced diet.
• Learn to accept what you cannot change but also learn to be more assertive, especially if you are one of those people who always say ‘yes’. Assertiveness training, setting clear boundaries and learning to say no can be very helpful in avoiding overload.
• Spend time doing things you like, such as seeing people whose company you enjoy, listening to music, playing sport or gardening.
• Talk about troubles: confide in a special friend or a trained professional. Another person may help you see your problem in a new light.
• Avoid the use of drugs or alcohol as a means of coping with stress.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I NEED HELP?
You may think that you can, or should, deal with your problems yourself. But you should consider seeking help if:
• You constantly worry and have trouble concentrating;
• You feel a lot of guilt;
• Your sleep, energy and motivation is poor;
• You can’t be bothered doing things anymore;
• You experience several of the physical symptoms associated with stress;
• You recognise that you are turning to self-destructive behaviours for temporary relief;
• Everything and everybody around you is being affected by the way you feel; or
• You feel as though there’s nowhere to turn.

There are qualified professionals who can help – speak to your doctor, who can refer you to the right person. Or there are 24-hour Australian support help-lines to get you through a crisis.

REFERENCES
STRESS AND ITS IMPACT ON YOU

STRESS IS OFTEN CONFUSED WITH ANXIETY, BUT IT IS NOT ACTUALLY A DIAGNOSABLE MENTAL ILLNESS, EXPLAINS BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is our body’s response to a demand placed on it. Stress is often confused with anxiety, but stress is not a diagnosable mental illness.

Stress is a normal condition, experienced by everyone. It involves an emotional, physical or mental response to events that cause bodily or mental tension. It can be thought of as a state of readiness – the ‘fight or flight’ response.

A small amount of stress from time to time is not a problem, it can even motivate us to get things done. But when stress is intense and ongoing, it can start to impact our physical and mental health.

EXPERIENCING STRESS

Stress has a thinking part and a feeling part. When stressed, you might have thoughts like “I can’t cope with this”, “This is too much pressure for me”, “I don’t have enough time” and “How am I going to get this done?”. In essence, your mind has decided you have ‘more on your plate than you can chew’.

At the same time, your body goes into ‘fight or flight’ mode. Your nervous system is activated, and hormones are released that enable you to react quickly. For example, when stressed you might notice your heart rate increases, pupils dilate, breathing rate increases and muscles tense. You might also notice changes in mood or emotions. These changes enable you to deal with the situation.

Stress has also been shown to affect the body’s immune response. This change in immune response and increased inflammation is a possible link between various physical diseases and stress, including cardiovascular disease, thyroid disease, and diabetes.

IMPACT OF STRESS ON DAILY ACTIVITIES

Initially increasing stress, or arousal, increases performance, this is explained by the Yerkes-Dodson Law (see diagram).

The ‘comfort’ zone allows you to work under stressful conditions. Levels of arousal or stress above the ‘comfort’ zone however, lead to impaired performance, reduced concentration and fatigue.

If not addressed, prolonged chronic stress can lead to structural and functional changes inside the brain.

These changes can play a role in the development of, or trigger, several physical and mental illnesses including:

- Depression, anxiety, schizophrenia
- Autism spectrum illnesses
- Hypertension
- Cardiovascular diseases
- Endothelial dysfunction
- Sleeping problems.

HOW MUCH STRESS IS TOO MUCH?

Stress is personal. What someone thinks is stressful, you might find satisfying and fun. For example, some people may find working 10 hours a day for long periods does not cause stress; for others, it will. Some people enjoy public speaking; for others, this is too stressful.

There are many things that can cause stress. When they do, we call them ‘stressors’.

Potential stressors include:

- Relationship difficulties
- Work issues
- Life changes (e.g. marriage, separation, retirement, moving house, starting a new job, being retrenched or becoming unemployed)
- Illness
- Study demands
- Event planning (e.g. holidays and family events).

And the list goes on. Your stressors will also change over time as your life demands change.

Recent studies have found genetic differences in the genes that direct the production of stress hormones, and that there are differences in the way stress impacts on these genes. This may be the reason why people respond differently to stress, and why some are more vulnerable to the effect of chronic exposure to stress.

STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

There’s a common misconception that there is a direct correlation between stress levels and mental health. There has been an assumption that if we want to improve mental health, and particularly mental health at work, we need to reduce stress. However, the
research shows that the factors affecting our mental health are much more complex and interlinked than this simplistic model.

Our mental health and wellbeing is impacted by:
• Individual factors: personal resilience, genetics, early life events, personality, mental health history, lifestyle factors
• Home/work factors: conflicting demands, significant life events
• Workplace factors: the design of our jobs, the teams we work in and the culture of an organisation.

MANAGING STRESS
It’s important to remember that stress is more than just feeling overworked. We have become accustomed to feeling high levels of stress and hence are often unaware of, or may not even know, what it feels like to be relaxed.

You need to be able to recognise stress to deal with it. By repeating these 4 steps regularly, you may start to recognise your stressors.
1. Event: Describe to yourself one event this week that you found stressful. Consider where you were, when it was, who was there and what you were doing.
2. Rating: On a scale of 1-5, how stressful was this event? (1 = mildly stressful, 5 = extremely stressful)
3. Thinking: What were you thinking about this event? For example, were you thinking of the worst possible outcomes? Were you focusing on the stress itself?
4. Feeling: Where did you feel the stress? For example, as a physical ache or more emotional response, such as making you irritable? Did it change the way you were thinking, e.g. less able to concentrate or change your behaviour, such as disturbing your sleep?

It is helpful to develop a range of responses to stress. Luckily, there are some tried-and-true strategies for dealing effectively with the stress that shows up in our lives.

1. Recharge activities: When we get stressed, we often stop making time for things that are nourishing, satisfying and refreshing to do.
2. Daily routines: The human mind likes predictability and certainty. When life gets stressful, we can restore some order to the chaos by ensuring that we continue with simple daily routines.
3. Circles of concern and influence: The problems, issues and difficulties we face generally fall into two ‘circles’:
   - Circle of concern contains things over which you have little direct control
   - Circle of influence contains those concerns that you can actually do something about – focus on making changes in this circle
4. Reality check: As mentioned before, stress has a large ‘thinking’ component, and certain types of thinking are likely to trigger stress and/or make your stress worse. Thought challenging is a useful strategy to ensure the way you are thinking about a situation is more balanced, realistic and helpful.

KEY MESSAGES
• Stress is a normal condition, not a mental illness
• Everyone experiences stress, but we experience it differently and this changes over time
• Prolonged stress can negatively impact physical and mental health
• Learn to recognise your stressors so you can deal with them.

RESOURCES
• Fact sheet: Mindfulness in everyday life
• MyCompass: www.mycompass.org.au

STRESS AND YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

- When we feel stressed and under pressure the nervous system releases stress hormones including adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. These hormones produce physiological changes in our bodies to physically help us cope with a perceived threat or danger, known as the ‘fight-or-flight response’ or ‘stress response’.

- Continuous activation of the stress response on the nervous system causes wear and tear on the body.

- When under stress, the respiratory system is immediately affected, as we tend to breathe harder and quicker in an effort to quickly distribute oxygen-rich blood around our body – this can cause problems for people with asthma, as well as potentially causing hyperventilation in people who are prone to anxiety or panic attacks.

- Stress can weaken immune systems. When cortisol released in our bodies suppresses the immune system and inflammatory pathways, we become more susceptible to infections and chronic inflammatory conditions, and our ability to fight off illness is reduced. Too much cortisol can increase weight gain, cause thin and fragile skin to take longer to heal, trigger acne, and in women promote facial hair and irregular menstrual periods.

- Stress can affect the musculoskeletal system, as our muscles tense up, which is the body’s natural way of protecting us from injury and pain. Repeated muscle tension can cause bodily aches and pains, and when it occurs in the shoulders, neck and head it may result in tension headaches and migraines.

- When stress is acute (in the moment), it affects your cardiovascular system. Under acute stress, heart rate and blood pressure increase, and then return to normal once it has passed. However, if acute stress is recurrent or becomes chronic (over a long period of time) it can cause damage to blood vessels and arteries, increasing risk of hypertension, heart attack or stroke.

- The endocrine system suffers when you are under stress. This system regulates mood, growth and development, tissue function, reproductive processes and metabolism. Stress signals coming from the hypothalamus in the brain (which connects the nervous and endocrine systems) trigger the release of stress hormones cortisol and epinephrine, then blood sugar (glucose) is produced by the liver to provide you with energy to deal with the stressful situation. Most people are able to reabsorb the extra glucose when the stress abates, however for some people there is an increased risk of diabetes.

- Stress can have gastrointestinal effects, such as heartburn and acid reflux, especially if there have been changes in eating habits such as eating more/less, or increasing the consumption of fatty/sugary foods. The ability of our intestines to absorb nutrients from food may be reduced, and can lead to stomach pain, bloating and nausea, diarrhea or constipation.

- Stress can cause problems with the reproductive system. Women can experience changes to their menstrual cycles and increased premenstrual symptoms, while for men, chronic stress may affect the production of testosterone and sperm, or lead to erectile dysfunction or impotence.

STRESS IN TEENAGERS

Recognising stress and learning how to reduce stress are important life skills for teenagers. Raising Children Network offers the following fact sheet advice for parents on how to guide children towards helpful ways of thinking and healthy lifestyle choices

If your child is stressed, he’s not alone. Teenage stress is pretty common, so recognising stress and learning how to reduce stress are important life skills for teenagers. You can help your child by guiding him towards helpful ways of thinking and healthy lifestyle choices.

TEENAGE STRESS: WHAT IS IT?

Stress in teenagers – and anyone – isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Stress is the way your body responds to challenges and gets you ready to face them with attention, energy and strength. Stress gets you ready for action. When you feel you can cope with these challenges, stress gives you the motivation to get things done.

But there can be problems when your stress is greater than your ability to cope.

SIGNS OF TEENAGE STRESS

Signs of stress in teenagers can show up in their behaviour, emotions, body and thinking.

Behaviour signs

If your child is stressed, you might see some changes in your child’s behaviour.

For example, your child might:
• Not want to see friends or take part in activities she usually enjoys, or she might want to be by herself more than usual
• Seem nervous or anxious
• Sleep too little or too much
• Eat more ‘comfort food’ than usual, or eat less
• Refuse to go to school, or not do as well at school
• Drink more caffeine products, or take over-the-counter painkillers, use alcohol or other drugs, or gamble
• Behave aggressively
• Not care about her appearance
• Behave differently in her relationship with you – for example, suddenly stop wanting to talk to you.

Emotional signs

If your child is stressed, you might see changes in your child’s emotions.

For example, your child might:
• Be cranky or moody
• Cry or feel sad, down or hopeless, or feel that ‘nothing is going right’
• Worry about missing out on what his peers are up to
• Find it hard to relax or switch off, especially from social media

• Get more angry more than usual
• Feel like he’s on an ‘emotional rollercoaster ride’ and have emotional ‘ups and downs’ for no obvious reason.

Physical signs

Sometimes you might see physical signs of stress. Your child might:
• Feel sick – for example, she might have headaches, shoulder pain, stomach aches or jaw pain
• Not feel hungry
• Say she feels more tired than usual, even if she’s getting enough sleep
• Lose or gain weight
• Get frequent colds or infections
• Have panic attacks, dizzy spells, fast breathing or pins and needles
• Have changes in her period.

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Thinking signs
Stress can affect your child’s thinking. You might notice that your child is:
• Finding it hard to concentrate and stay focused
• Losing the thread of thoughts or conversations
• Having trouble remembering things
• Making snap decisions or errors in judgment
• Having trouble organising, planning or making decisions
• Getting confused or irrational.

CAUSES OF TEENAGE STRESS
Some of the things that cause stress in teenagers include study worries, social media, caring for other family members, friendships, family conflict, body image, work, bullying, discrimination, alcohol and other drug use, tension between cultural worlds, high personal expectations or high expectations from parents, teachers and friends.

If you can keep an eye on things that could cause stress for your child, try to reduce those things and also respond early to signs of stress in teenagers, you might be able to prevent stress tipping over into anxiety and depression.

HOW TO REDUCE STRESS IN TEENAGERS
In general, you can help your child with stress by listening, spending time together and doing things that make your child feel good.

You can also help your child reduce stress by working together on two key areas – helpful thinking and healthy lifestyle.

Helpful thinking to reduce stress in teenagers
How you think about things affects how stressed you get by them. Like adults, teenagers can develop unhelpful thinking that makes it harder to deal with stress. Unhelpful thinking can get out of control, particularly if it becomes the normal way you think about things.

Some common unhelpful thinking patterns are:
• Mind-reading, or expecting other people to have a bad opinion of you – for example, ‘They think I’m stupid’, ‘She thinks I’m no good at anything’
• Thinking things will always go wrong – for example, ‘Things never work out for me’, ‘Everyone is always against me’, ‘I’ll never be able to ...’
• Labelling yourself – for example, ‘I’m no good’, ‘I’m stupid’, ‘I’m hopeless’
• Absolute thinking – for example, ‘I have to do it this way’, ‘This will never work’
• Fortune-telling or expecting the worst – for example, ‘I’m sure to mess this up’, ‘It’s not going to work out anyway’, ‘I’m going to feel awful when it doesn’t happen’
• All-or-nothing thinking – for example, ‘He does everything right, and I always get it wrong’, ‘It has to be perfect’, ‘If only I had done it that way, it would be OK’.

Speaking to you or someone else can help your child to see that there are other ways of thinking about a situation.

You and your child could try these steps to change unhelpful thinking patterns:
1. With your child, work out what’s causing the stress – for example, your child gets a last-minute text from a friend to cancel an outing.
2. Encourage your child to list the thoughts connected to this situation or event – for example, ‘He doesn’t really like me’, ‘She should have told me sooner’, ‘My day’s ruined’.
3. Help your child decide if the thoughts are helpful – for example, how does your child know his friend doesn’t like him? Is it possible the friend couldn’t have told him sooner? Are there other good things your child could do with the day?
4. Encourage your child to suggest some other thoughts – for example, ‘I don’t really know why he cancelled – there could be an emergency’, ‘Life has its ups and downs’, ‘I can go out anyway’, ‘This gives me time to do other things’, ‘I’m disappointed but I can cope’, or ‘We can go out together another day’.
5. Help your child notice that when he changes his unhelpful thinking, his feelings also change – usually for the better.

Healthy lifestyle changes to reduce stress in teenagers
When your child feels stressed, it’s easy to forget to do everyday healthy things.
Here are some healthy family lifestyle changes that you and your child can make to reduce stress:

- Do some physical activity: exercise burns off the 'stress hormone' cortisol, so exercise can help the body relax.
- Stay connected to family and friends: plan some special time with your child when you know she’s feeling stressed. Positive relationships are the building blocks of mental health.
- Get enough sleep: one of the biggest causes of stress in teenagers is not getting enough sleep. Your child still needs about 9¼ hours of sleep a night.
- Eat good food: aim for a family diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegies, lean meat, dairy foods and wholegrains.
- Relax and unwind: this might be going for a walk, reading a book, having a relaxing bath or listening to some music.

WHEN TO GET HELP FOR STRESS IN TEENAGERS

If your child’s stress won’t go away, your child’s worries have got worse over time, or your child’s stress is getting in the way of sleep, appetite, energy levels, enjoyment or socialising, it’s a good idea to see a professional.

Your child could start by:
- Talking to your GP
- Seeing the school counsellor – school counsellors have specialist training in child and adolescent mental health
- Talking to a spiritual leader or elder
- Talking to a youth worker if your child goes to a local youth centre
- Calling Lifeline on 131 114.

If your child is having thoughts about harming himself or others, or feels that life isn’t worth living, he needs professional help. If your child is talking about killing himself, get him to your nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance on 000.

STRESS AND YOUR BODY

When you feel threatened, your body automatically gets you ready for a 'fight, flight or freeze' response. The problem is your brain doesn’t choose between real or imagined threats and responds automatically the same way to both. Two powerful hormones – adrenaline and noradrenaline – get working.

These hormones act to:
- Speed up your reflexes so you can react quickly to threats
- Raise your heart rate and blood pressure
- Raise your blood sugar and body functioning to increase the performance of your big muscle groups and lungs
- Burn energy quickly for fast physical activity
- Shut down the digestive system
- Divert blood away from your skin – this is why people under deep stress can have pale skin
- Produce high-oxygenated blood – this can lead to blackouts and an irregular heartbeat
- Thicken your blood, making your heart work harder.

Cortisol is also released. Cortisol puts your body on extra alert. Although it’s a natural body chemical, regular release of cortisol over a long time can weaken your immune system. Increased release of adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol as a reaction to hard-to-manage stress puts strain on your body and mind. Over time it damages overall health and wellbeing.

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ANXIETY VERSUS STRESS

Anxiety is the most common mental health condition diagnosed in Australia. One in every three women and one in every five men experience anxiety at some point in their lives. Anxious feelings are quite normal; simply feeling anxious sometimes does not mean you have an anxiety disorder. There is, however, a difference between a normal level of feeling anxious, and medical terms of ‘pathological anxiety,’ or ‘generalised anxiety disorder’.

When under stress, you may also feel anxious, leading some people to believe they may have an anxiety disorder. It can be hard to spot the difference between anxiety and stress as many of the physical symptoms are the same, such as sweating, insomnia, heart palpitations and headaches. To further add to the complexity of diagnosis, prolonged stress can lead to anxiety and depression, which is why it is important to learn how to manage stress.

The key difference between stress and anxiety is the period of time in which symptoms are felt. There are different types of stress which are defined by duration and intensity:

**Acute stress**
Acute stress lasts only for a short period of time, and includes situations such as sitting an exam, starting a new job, giving a speech, or facing a work deadline. The body typically recovers well from acute stress if managed by the person. However, if the stress experienced is severe or involves a life-threatening situation, acute stress can lead to mental health problems like post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Chronic stress**
Chronic stress continues for a long period of time and does not go away. It can occur in circumstances involving ongoing financial difficulties, social isolation and loneliness, relationship problems, chronic health problems, caring for someone with complex needs, being overworked, being bullied, or living in an unsafe environment such as a war zone or where there is family violence. Stress can be cumulative; when a number of stressors occur simultaneously or one after the other without the opportunity or time to recover, stress levels can elevate and remain high.

**Different types of stress**
One of the reasons why people have a hard time ending stress is that they are not addressing the core issues within their lives. Following are six categories of stress which may be combined in people’s lives.

**Work/study-related stress:** deadlines, conflict with boss/co-workers and/or teachers, coping with abrupt changes/threats to security, failing an exam or course of study.

**Relationship/family-related stress:** divorce/separation, extra-marital affairs, child-rearing, teenage break-ups and unwanted pregnancies.

**Environment-related stress:** disturbances and changes that the person cannot cope with, such as surrounding noise disturbances, weather; or changes in the environment such as moving to a new area, new job, or having a completely different lifestyle; or critical incident stress (CIS).

**Psychological stress:** fear which can either be real or a phobia which is not grounded in reality; sleeplessness, anxieties and worries caused by unrealistic concerns without basis.

**Financial stress:** financial problems can also have spill-over effects in areas such as relationships and health.

**Health-related stress:** ranges from sleeplessness to drug abuse and serious illness. Some common illnesses are specifically the result and/or cause of stress, such as influenza, asthma or psoriasis.

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Compiled by The Spinney Press.
Extinguished and anguished: what is burnout and what can we do about it?

People from all walks of life may experience burnout, and not just from work, explain Gabriela Tavella and Gordon Parker in this article from The Conversation

Feeling “burnt out” is a pretty common phrase in daily parlance, but we’re starting to learn more about its longer-term destructive effects. Sufferers often describe feeling exhausted and disconnected, and as though they’re “going through the motions” without motivation or meaning.

Burnout can have serious consequences, including reduced work performance and life satisfaction, and has been associated with other mental health conditions. For instance, it has been linked to depression, as both conditions share a number of symptoms such as fatigue, social withdrawal and decreased work performance.

Burnout is usually seen as a consequence of a chronic stressful work environment, emerging as a workplace concern in the 1970s when American researchers found many human services workers were not coping with their jobs and felt “burnt out”.

The workers reported:
• Emotional exhaustion: becoming emotionally drained and fatigued
• Depersonalisation: a loss of empathy towards clients
• Reduced personal accomplishment: feeling incompetent and inept at work

Burnout can have serious consequences, including reduced work performance and life satisfaction, and has been associated with other mental health conditions. For instance, it has been linked to depression, as both conditions share a number of symptoms such as fatigue, social withdrawal and decreased work performance.

Since then, burnout research has expanded across other occupations and its definition modified to include cynicism towards work.

However most research still focuses on work-related burnout. But people from all walks of life may experience burnout, and not just from work.

For example, burnout may also be experienced by...
students who are overwhelmed by their study commitments, or a mother (or carer) caring for a severely disabled child.

The risk of burnout for those in caring roles is not a new phenomenon. Records from Christian monks of the 4th Century outline what they call *acedia* (Greek word which translates as “non-caring”), a state probably akin to burnout. After decades of caring for others, the monks were said to have doubted whether they were doing anything useful and judged each day as “grey”.

Burnout appears to occur across a range of contexts, but we do not know enough about its causes and how to diagnose and manage it successfully.

**CAUSES**

We know job-related burnout can be triggered by exposure to multiple and continuing work stressors. While such stressors may differ across occupations, they relate to the demanding and unrelenting nature of a job, combined with a toxic mix of lack of resources and support.

Burnout can also be triggered by certain personality traits. For instance, research has linked burnout to a person’s evaluation of themselves and their abilities, a trait known as core self-evaluation.

Low core self-evaluation is when someone has negative views about their own skills and ability to control situations. People with low core self-evaluation are susceptible to burnout as they likely view difficult work assignments as threatening or overwhelming, rather than achievable challenges.

Perfectionists are also at greater risk of burnout, as they tend to set excessively high performance standards they inevitably fail to meet, thus diminishing their sense of personal accomplishment.

**MEASUREMENT AND DIAGNOSIS**

The main tool used in research studies to measure burnout is called the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a survey that requires individuals to answer several questions relating to emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation/cynicism and reduced personal accomplishment.

People from all walks of life may experience burnout, and not just from work. For example, burnout may also be experienced by students who are overwhelmed by their study commitments, or a mother (or carer) caring for a severely disabled child.

But it has been widely criticised due to concerns it doesn’t accurately capture the concept of burnout, is not culturally sensitive for use outside of the United States, and was designed to measure burnout in individuals still in the workforce – not those who have stopped working as a consequence of clinical burnout.

In addition to the issues surrounding measuring burnout in a research context, it is also difficult to diagnose in clinical settings. This is because the condition is...
not recognised in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, used internationally to diagnose mental health disorders. So there is no set of indicative criteria for mental health professionals to use to diagnose people suffering from clinically significant burnout.

This in turn influences treatment, as without a concrete diagnosis it’s difficult for mental health professionals and their patients to make decisions about appropriate treatment.

MANAGEMENT

Management strategies remain quite unclear, however should be targeted to individual sufferers. This means addressing the unique stressors that contribute to burnout in each person.

Management strategies should also acknowledge the individual’s personality style. Strategies that work to remove external stressors (such taking a month off work and lying on a beach) might assist some sufferers, but might further stress others whose personalities don’t allow them to “switch off” outside the office.

Personality styles are generally thought to be unchangeable across a person’s lifespan. So for those who have personality traits that put them at extra risk of burnout, it has been suggested they be taught techniques that help them cope more effectively with external stressors, rather than trying to change their personality.

Successful interventions to prevent and treat burnout depend on a more complete understanding of the condition. Our team at the Black Dog Institute is currently conducting a study that should assist in defining and measuring burnout and its principal causes.

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CHAPTER 2
Managing and reducing stress

TOOL KIT: OVERCOMING STRESS
LIFELINE RESOURCE TO HELP IDENTIFY AND MANAGE EVERYDAY STRESS

This stress awareness and management tool kit from Lifeline will provide some practical information about:

- Understanding what stress is
- Understanding the causes of stress
- Understanding why managing stress is important
- Monitoring your health and resilience
- Recognising the signs of stress
- Developing some strategies to manage stress.

WHAT IS STRESS?
Stress is the body’s way of dealing with pressure. It is a human reaction to life’s demands. When we experience a high level of pressure due to situations occurring around us (life, work or social), it can trigger an increase in energy and alertness.

In many cases this is a healthy human reaction as it helps us to cope and get through the event or situation in the best possible way. However, too much stress can affect our health, so it needs to be managed appropriately.

Everyone experiences stress of some kind in varying levels of intensity during their lives. The important issue is how people are affected by stress and how they react or respond to the situation.

WHAT CAUSES STRESS?
There are many different causes of stress (stressors). Some stressors are external pressures from outside sources, such as the death of a relative or friend. Other stressors are said to be internal, based on how a person responds to life situations.

Responses to stress may be determined by personality, cultural background, social circumstances, support networks and the current situation in which you may find yourself.

These responses may also vary depending on life stage and previous experiences. Everyone will respond and react differently to stress in their lives.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF STRESS?
There are many signs that may indicate you or someone you know is experiencing stress.

Signs of stress are usually experienced as physical, mental, emotional or behavioural changes from what’s normal for us.

There are practical strategies available that can help you to learn how to manage and even reduce the level of stress in your life. These strategies will help anyone maintain a healthy life balance and build resilience.

Some of these signs may include:

- Lack of motivation
- Moodiness, increased or erratic emotions
- Increased irritability or frustration
- Inability to sleep or too much sleep
- Difficulty concentrating
- Headaches
- Anxiety or feeling overwhelmed
- Not coping with demands and responsibilities
- Reliance on alcohol or other substances to cope
- Increased eating, drinking or nervous habits.

There are many life experiences and stressors that contribute to our stress responses and impact on our resilience and wellbeing.
Some of these include:
• Interpersonal relationship problems
• Personal or family illness
• Conflict e.g. bullying, harassment
• Work pressures
• Traumatic events
• Financial problems
• Concerns about life direction
• Job loss
• Pressures from competing demands or a combination of the above.

**WHY IS MANAGING STRESS IMPORTANT?**

Our lives are becoming more hectic than ever before. Life is full of change, which affects us as individuals, family members, friends, employees, and in community life and society generally.

Everyone reacts differently to different circumstances and challenges. A situation that may bring about a positive stress response for one person, may have a negative impact for someone else. For example, flying on a plane can be a pleasurable activity for one person, but terrifying for someone else.

Too much stress over an extended period of time can be harmful to physical and mental wellbeing and impact on your ability to function and live productively.

**MONITORING OUR HEALTH AND RESILIENCE**

Resilience is an ability to bounce back from challenges and adversity, to cope with the ups and downs of life.

There are practical strategies available that can help you to learn how to manage and even reduce the level of stress in your life. These strategies will help anyone maintain a healthy life balance and build resilience.

Firstly, it is important to be aware of any stress building up, and to find out what may be the cause and whether the stressors are causing negative or positive reactions to occur.

By acknowledging the stress, it is then possible to do something to take control and action before becoming overwhelmed. It is important to recognise the signals that things are not going so well. Ignoring these signals can put wellness and resilience at risk.

By learning to recognise what is normal stress and when something is abnormal, action can be taken to manage the changes needed.

Learning how to respond appropriately will help to ‘stress down’, build personal resilience and improve health.

**HELP ME! I’M “STRESSED”**

The first step in managing stress is to acknowledge that it exists. If possible, remove yourself from the stressful situation or location and find a quiet place.
Take a deep slow breath, take another one, and another one. Try to clear your mind of all thoughts, and bring yourself to the moment.

This can be helpful in stopping the overwhelming feelings in their tracks. Emotions pass, stressful or painful feelings may at times feel like they will take over and will never leave, but they do and will.

A clear mind can help you identify what is causing your stress, which will help you to manage the feelings, reactions and the situation. Experiencing the feelings when they occur and telling yourself that they will pass may also be helpful.

Thinking positive thoughts is also important. By learning to recognise what is normal stress and when something is abnormal, action can be taken to manage the changes needed. Learning how to respond appropriately will help to 'stress down', build personal resilience and improve health.

**HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL TIPS FOR MANAGING STRESS AND MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH AND STAYING RESILIENT:**

1. **Talk to someone you trust (partner, friend, colleague or helpline)**
   
   Talking is great way to let off steam or get some perspective, and helps release negative or upsetting feelings from remaining hidden inside. Talking can help you or someone you know feel much better. Having someone to listen to you, or you to them, reinforces that you are cared for and are valued.

   As humans it’s important for us to feel connectedness with others, especially when at times we may feel isolated and alone. It won’t necessarily fix the problem, but will help start the process of identifying the problem and make you feel better knowing someone has listened to you.

2. **Have a health check with your general practitioner**

   Knowing that your body is in sync is an important step in maintaining good health and resilience. Your GP can check your physical health and general wellbeing for any negative signs that stress may be causing. Your health professional’s perspective can help you understand what you need to look out for and nurture more.

   Seek urgent medical assistance if you are experiencing lack of sleep, loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed, loss of energy, distress or any other negative physical symptoms over a period of two weeks, and your ability to function normally is impacted.

3. **Take up regular physical exercise**

   Evidence suggests that physical exercise will help you feel good about yourself. Regular physical exercise produces a chemical response that triggers positive feelings. As well as helping your body to stay healthy, you will also help your emotional wellbeing. You can share time and yourself with others or do this on your own as a way to help clear your mind. Physical activity may even help to vent your frustrations from a situation or person, and may help promote better sleeping habits.
4. **Try to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet**

Diet can play a big part in your emotional wellbeing. Certain foods and consuming too much or not enough can impact on your health and wellbeing. Different foods can contribute to our mood states, so talk with a dietician for advice.

Try to limit alcohol, nicotine and caffeine, as these can contribute to feelings of anxiousness and discourage sleep, and may adversely impact on your overall health.

5. **Find time to do activities you enjoy such as:**

- Spending time with friends and family
- Participating in sports, games or hobbies
- Writing, listening to music, reading
- Going out, travelling, sightseeing
- Practising relaxation techniques.

Doing the things you enjoy can help remind you of the wonderful things in life, as well as helping you to recharge your body and mind. These are important for achieving balance at times when life may appear to be getting out of balance.

Whether the activities are with other people or solitary, they will encourage self-discovery, create times when you can escape your problems, help you engage with others or simply be in the moment. Their importance in building your resilience and wellbeing cannot be underestimated, and will help you be more productive in the areas of your life that you may find less enjoyable but need to do.

**PLACES TO GO FOR HELP NOW:**

By seeking help it’s possible to manage and alleviate your stress levels.

- Talk to a trusted family member or friend, or a health professional such as your GP or counsellor
- Connect with a helpline. Call Lifeline’s 24-hour telephone counselling service on 13 11 14
- Young people can ring Kids Help Line 1800 551 800

If you, or anyone you know is experiencing emotional distress, please contact Lifeline. Call 13 11 14 or webchat at www.lifeline.org.au.

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STRESS BUSTERS

ARE YOU FEELING STRESSED? HERE, YOU’LL FIND PLENTY OF TIPS FROM BETTER HEALTH CHANNEL TO HELP PLAN FOR FEELING BETTER

SUMMARY

- When you feel stressed, you need to work out what’s bothering you.
- Once you know your stress triggers, you can work on ways to deal with your stress.
- You can call on plenty of stress-busting techniques that are easy and free. Some are even fun!

First, let’s learn more about stress. It’s a natural response when you face a difficult or dangerous situation, or when you feel pressured to do or feel something.

Stress is part of life, and it may even help you feel more alert or capable. But it can also feel overwhelming. In this case, your health, wellbeing, relationships, work and enjoyment of life can suffer.

You may be feeling big stresses, such as money worries, the loss of someone you love, or a marriage breakdown. Or you may be feeling smaller stresses, such as a constantly ringing phone, a long trip to work every day, or a grumpy toddler.

And maybe the small stresses add up to being too much, because they’ve been going on for so long, or a lot of them are happening all at the same time.

But you don’t have to let stress rule your life. Whether you feel stressed every now and then, or all the time, you need to work out what’s bothering you and find ways to cope.

STRESS ISN’T GOOD FOR YOU ... MOSTLY

You need to know the difference between good stress and bad stress. It sounds strange, but some stress can help you get through a tough situation. When you’re alert and aware of a problem, you have a better chance of tackling it.

But other stress is not doing you any favours. It makes you feel uptight and anxious, and it doesn’t leave you alone. Of course, different people feel stressed in different situations.

The most common causes of stress are:

- Work
- Tertiary studies
- Relationships
- Certain times, such as Christmas and holidays.

Stress is also common among people who live in rural areas.

You may feel stress having an impact on your body (rapid heartbeat, sweating, faster breathing, difficulty with digestion) and your mind (negative thoughts such as ‘my blood is boiling’, ‘she is a pain in the neck’, ‘I hate this job’, ‘I’ve had enough’ or ‘I can’t believe what’s happening’). It might also be affecting your everyday life (perhaps you’re arguing more with your family, or you dread going to work).

While each of us reacts to stress in different ways, it’s important to deal with any stress that is affecting...
In other words, if you’re not bothered by long work hours, then that’s fine. But if a work overload is making you lose sleep, feel impatient with your family, or behave in other unwanted ways, then you need to make a change.

For more information on types of stress, see the beyondblue, mindhealthconnect and Reachout websites.

**STRESS CAN HURT YOUR BODY AND YOUR MIND**

Think about whether stress is hurting you:

- Is stress affecting your physical health? Is it giving you tension headaches or migraines, messing up your digestion, or leading you to eat or drink more, or smoke?
- Is stress affecting your mental health? Is it bringing on panic attacks, making you fearful, causing irritability, leading you to binge eat or starve yourself, making you struggle in relationships, or making you feel depressed?

Here are more questions that may help you recognise stress:

- Can you switch off when you want to rest? Or can you not stop thinking?
- Are you coping? Or do little things get you down?
- Do you feel mostly calm? Or do you feel irritable?
- Can you enjoy other people’s company, and the things you have always found fun? Or do you feel like being alone more than usual?
- Do you find you can read and work okay? Or is it hard to concentrate?
- Do you feel well in yourself? Or do you have aches and pains that are not related to exercise or illness?
- Are you eating and sleeping normally? Or do you find it harder to eat and sleep well?

If your answers show you are stressed, then it’s time to come up with some stress busters! Remember, if you can learn to manage your stress, then you can avoid more serious illness.

**THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS**

The best way to handle stress is different for each person. Look for your body’s warning signs, such as having a headache, grinding your teeth, clenching your jaw or feeling frustrated. And know your stress triggers, such as hunger, tiredness, arguments with your family or friends, certain times of day with your children, or deadlines.

Then, work on de-stressing. The good news is that plenty of simple (and free) stress-busting techniques are available:

- Establish regular times for when you eat, sleep, read, exercise, grocery shop and so on. And try to set up a routine for your household, so everyone knows what is happening and when.
- Look after your health, with healthy food, regular exercise and calm times in your day. And avoid using alcohol and other drugs to get through your day.
- Be aware of thoughts that don’t help. Saying to yourself that you can’t cope, or don’t have enough time, or feel exhausted, for example, doesn’t help. Instead, try talking yourself through a tough situation: ‘I’m doing pretty well despite my fear’, ‘I can keep calm’, ‘Everything will be okay’.
- Face whatever worries or scares you. If you don’t like job interviews, for example, try a practice interview with a friend. Or, if you know you’re having trouble paying your mortgage, speak with your bank manager. Sometimes, worrying about a problem is worse than the actual problem.
- Think about breaking a big problem into smaller ones. Look at different ways of tackling each problem, the possible consequences and your best options. In other words, work on your problem solving, and don’t wait for a sudden miraculous answer.
- Write a to-do list. If a task or problem is on paper, then it doesn’t have to be in your head.
- Hang out with people who care about you. Other people can remind you of your own strengths, and listen when you need to ‘download’ your worries.
- Be mindful of how you’re feeling, where you are, and who you’re with. Try to clear your head of thoughts about the past or future, and focus on...
being in the present.

• Practise relaxing. You can try formal relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation, or just sit quietly in the park and let your body and mind settle.

• Take time out every day to do something you enjoy (like reading a book, doing a puzzle or listening to music).

Just looking after yourself can also be a great way to tackle stress. A healthy body is a great first step to thinking clearly and feeling better:

• Avoid drugs and alcohol.
• Eat well and regularly.
• Sleep enough to top up your energy.
• Plan to exercise, and stick to the plan.
• Breathe steadily.

MAKE STRESS MANAGEMENT FUN!
Sometimes, the same old approaches don’t seem enough, or don’t inspire you to start dealing with your stress.

Why not try some of these stress busters, for a fresh perspective?

• Sweat out your stress with a high intensity workout. Or do the opposite: completely wind down in a tai chi class.

• Spend time with someone who makes you laugh or has plenty of good stories that distract you.

• Meditate, and learn to look at yourself with honesty and compassion rather than judgement and criticism.

• Just stop. In other words, sit or lie on your own, and just breathe.

• Grab some pencils and a colouring book. While you’re colouring in, you are slowing your thoughts and using your creativity.

• Dance around the house to your favourite music. Or listen to music while you work.

• Head outside for fresh air and a close encounter with the natural environment. Look up at the sky, watch for butterflies and lizards, and pick some flowers.

• Visualise yourself somewhere that is idyllic to you, or with someone you love. Think about the sounds, smells and tastes of your perfect place.

• Buy a plant. Simply being around plants is good for your relaxation.

• Wiggle about. Starting with your feet and moving up to your face, try tightening and relaxing your muscles.

• Tune out, or plug in. Turning off your screens and devices can help you switch off your thinking. On the flip side, watching a funny movie or talking to someone on Facetime can help you feel better too.

• Eat a banana or a potato. These foods have potassium, which can improve your body’s energy and recovery.

• Find a repetitive activity, such as knitting, wood carving or making jewellery. The simple act of repeating a skill with your hands can relieve stress.

REMEMBER …

• Stress can be easy to overcome, or sometimes harder to tackle. If you recognise you are feeling stressed, and know the cause, then you are in a good position to push that stress out of your body and mind.

• If stress keeps having a negative impact on your life, then you may want to seek help. Your GP is a good place to start.

WHERE TO GET HELP

• Your GP
• Beyondblue Tel. 1300 22 46 36 www.beyondblue.org.au
• Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 55 1800 https://kidshelpline.com.au
• MensLine Australia Tel. 1300 78 99 78 https://mensline.org.au
• Australian Psychological Association Tel. 1800 333 497, www.psychology.org.au
• Mental Health Foundation Australia (Victoria) Tel. 9826 1422, www.mhfa.org.au
• This way up – an online Coping with Stress and an Intro to Mindfulness course developed by the Clinical Research Unit of Anxiety and Depression (CRUfAD) at St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney and University of New South Wales (UNSW) Faculty of Medicine. https://thiswayup.org.au

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MINDFULNESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE
BLACK DOG INSTITUTE EXPLAINS HOW TO APPLY MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES

What this fact sheet covers:
- What is mindfulness?
- Examples of mindfulness techniques
- How can mindfulness help?

Mindfulness is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist mindfulness meditation. It has been adapted for use in treatment of depression, especially preventing relapse and for assisting with mood regulation.

MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES TO PRACTISE

One-minute exercise
Sit in front of a clock or watch that you can use to time the passing of one minute. Your task is to focus your entire attention on your breathing, and nothing else, for the minute. Have a go – do it now.

Mindful eating
This involves sitting down at a table and eating a meal without engaging in any other activities – no newspaper, book, TV, radio, music, or talking.

Now eat your meal paying full attention to which piece of food you select to eat, how it looks, how it smells, how you cut the food, the muscles you use to raise it to your mouth, the texture and taste of the food as you chew it slowly.

You may be amazed at how different food tastes when eaten in this way and how filling a meal can be.

Mindful walking
Here the same principle, while walking concentrate on the feel of the ground under your feet, you’re breathing while walking.

Just observe what is around you as you walk, staying in the present. Let your other thoughts go, just look at the sky, the view, the other walkers; feel the wind, the temperature on your skin; enjoy the moment.

De-stressing exercise
Bring yourself into the present by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. Then ask yourself, “What is going on with me at the moment?”

You simply allow yourself to observe whatever happens. Label any thoughts that you have and then leave them alone ... just be prepared to let them float away. Attend to your breathing or simply take in your surroundings instead.

Besides thoughts, there may be sounds you hear, bodily sensations that you are aware of. If you find yourself constantly elaborating on thoughts, rather than labelling them and returning to the neutral, remember to observe your breathing.

When emotions or memories of painful events occur, don’t allow yourself to become caught up by them.

Give them short labels such as, “that’s a sad feeling” and “that’s an angry feeling,” then just allow them to drift or float away. These memories and feelings will gradually decrease in intensity and frequency.

More importantly, you will begin to identify yourself as an objective observer or witness, rather than a person who is disturbed by these thoughts and feelings. This requires practice but can then be used when ever you are stressed.

We all have the capacity to be mindful. It simply involves cultivating our ability to pay attention in the present moment and allows us to disengage from mental “clutter” and to have a clear mind.

Associated breathing exercise
Stay with any distressing thoughts for a few moments, then as you let them float away, you gently redirect your full attention to your breathing.

Pay attention to each breath in and out as they follow rhythmically one after the other. This will ground you in the present and help you to move into a state of awareness and stillness.

HOW CAN MINDFULNESS HELP?
We all have the capacity to be mindful. It simply involves cultivating our ability to pay attention in
the present moment and allows us to disengage from mental “clutter” and to have a clear mind. It makes it possible for us to respond rather than react to situations, thus improving our decision making and potential for physical and mental relaxation.

It is not simply a relaxation technique or ‘power of positive thinking’. The technique is based on Buddhist meditation principles but was described by Teasdale et al. for use in treatment of depression.

It makes it possible for us to respond rather than react to situations, thus improving our decision making and potential for physical and mental relaxation. It is not simply a relaxation technique or ‘power of positive thinking’.

Linehan (1993) also used mindfulness as a core skill in her cognitive behavioural therapy for Borderline Personality Disorder. Linehan (1993) describes three “what” skills: observing (simply attending to events and emotions), describing (applying labels to behaviours, emotions and situations) and participating (entering into current activities) and three “how” skills: taking a ‘no judgemental’ stance, focusing on one thing in the moment and being effective (doing what is needed rather than worrying about what is right or second guessing the situation). These are all included in the ‘de-stressing’ exercise.

Mindfulness can be incorporated into the treatment of those suffering from bipolar. Research by Black Dog Institute, and others, has shown that mindfulness can have a positive effect on people experiencing bipolar disorder due to the way it can improve emotional regulation and reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Mindfulness takes practice and daily sessions can be entered on the mood chart (also available at the Black Dog Institute website [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/factsheets]).

REFERENCE LIST

Stress and Young People
Issues in Society | Volume 447

STRESS – LEARNING TO RELAX
ADVICE FROM THE WOMEN’S AND CHILDREN’S HEALTH NETWORK

If you are feeling stressed, then you may be having trouble with sleeping and concentrating, and with being positive and hopeful. Your body may be trying to get you to recognise that it is feeling stressed by giving you headaches, making you feel sick, giving you indigestion, a fluttery feeling in the tummy, or any one of a number of other signs that are trying to show you that you need to relax.

- There is another topic on our site Stress – how to recognise it
- The Reachout website has many great topics about stress and managing stress in the Stress section: https://au.reachout.com/everyday-issues/stress

Recognise your signs of stress
Think of a time that was stressful for you – it might have been an exam or a disagreement with a friend, or maybe you needed to tell someone something really important and didn’t know how they’d react.

Try to remember how your body felt
- Did you have butterflies in the tummy before the exam?
- Did you get a headache when arguing?
- Did you find it hard to sleep before telling that person the news?
- Did you feel sick when people were shouting?

Stop now and have a think about how it felt for you. Perhaps you could write those signs down so you’ll remember later.

Dealing with stress (your reactions)
- How did you deal with the stress in the situation you thought about before? Was it helpful?
- Was there another situation where you dealt with stress really well?

Perhaps you could write those strategies down to remember for times you need them. There are many choices in the way that you can deal with stress. Talk to friends about good ways they use to deal with stress to increase your choices.

Positive self-talk
Positive self-talk helps you tap into your inner strengths. We all have inner strengths. Positive self-talk is about using your mind in the way you want, to help yourself. It helps us to decide how we’ll react to stress. When we do the opposite (negative thinking) we create more stress for ourselves.

Here are some ways to use positive self-talk.
- Tell yourself positive statements every day (examples: “I am good at …”, “I have inner strength”, “I have true beauty within”, “All is well”, “I feel peaceful now”).
- Picture seeing yourself in a positive situation – one that you want to move towards (e.g. see yourself doing that school test and being relaxed about it, and doing well. Picture the teacher reading your test and being impressed on how well you did).
- Remind yourself of things you’ve done well in the past (“I did well on that school project last year – this means I can do it again”).
- Look at the big picture – will it really matter in 5 years? Will the world stop turning if it does or doesn’t happen?
- Work on what you can control, accept the rest and let it go.
- You can even make a tape of your own voice saying positive, relaxing, supportive things.

Relaxation
What do you find relaxing? Is it dancing, art, meditation, fishing, going for a walk with friends, reading a book, listening to music, shopping, a gym work-out, talking to a friend or playing sport?

Think about things you can do that relax you, and find ways to build them into your weekly routine. These are ways both to prevent stress and to deal with stress.

There are other ways to relax and unwind.
- How about a massage? You could give a friend a neck and shoulder massage or a hand massage and ask for one back.
- Perhaps a yoga or tai chi class is for you.
- Herbal teas like chamomile may help and so can a warm bath or aromatherapy oils like lavender oil.

There are quick relaxation techniques that take just a few minutes. You can use these in many places.

For example, take a few minutes to relax in the middle of an exam if you find yourself getting stressed and not thinking clearly.
- Deep breathing – breathe in through the nose and let the air fill the bottom of your lungs first, breathe right down to your stomach, then breathe out slowly, concentrating on letting the muscles of your body relax.
- Focused breathing – breathe in through the nose and as you breathe out say a positive statement to yourself like “relax” or “calm down”.
- Stretching – stretch out muscles, reach the arms above the head and stretch, or just stretch whatever part of the body you feel needs it.
- Visualisation – this is where you picture a pleasant place and use slow breathing through the nose – you can make the place anywhere you want to and
you can change anything in the picture to see, feel, sound or smell just as you wish.

**Stress-relieving relaxation**

This kind of relaxation takes a little longer.
- You start by sitting or lying down comfortably. A quiet place or relaxing music to listen to is nice.
- Close your eyes.
- Tighten then relax your muscles in order – for example, start at the feet, work your way up through the legs, the middle, your chest and your face muscles.
- One at a time, scrunch each set of muscles up tightly for about 30 seconds, then let them go loose.
- Feel which parts of your body are tight and need more work.

You can get tapes to help you do this. This is also good to help you feel the difference between when you are relaxed and when you are tense. This raises your awareness of when you’re getting tense and stressed.

**Meditation**

There are various ways to meditate.
- You can learn by listening to meditation tapes and CDs, by going to a meditation class, or by learning from a friend.
- Or you could teach yourself – try this simple meditation.
  - Prepare by getting comfortable and becoming aware of your breathing.
  - Start to count after each breath. Breathe in, breathe out, one, breathe in, breathe out two ... up to ten then start again. If you lose count, go back to one. Just do this for a few minutes. Later you might want to do it for longer and concentrate more and more on your breathing and the feel of your breath going into and out of your body.
  - If any thoughts or noises enter your mind, notice them, let them go and gently return to your meditation.

**Exercise**

Many people find physical activity helps burn up some of that stress. It can be fun too.

Check out the Exercise section on the Reachout site: [https://au.reachout.com/everyday-issues/exercise-and-eating-well](https://au.reachout.com/everyday-issues/exercise-and-eating-well)

**A balanced lifestyle**

This is another key to coping well. Make time for:
- Yourself – rest, relaxation, thinking time, exercise, and healthy eating
- Your relationships
- Your social life
- Your spiritual needs (this could be religion, nature, or whatever is right for you)
- Work or study.

To do all this you need to:
- Manage your time, e.g. make lists, prioritise – there are many books around on time management, or friends may be able to help you with this
- Take time out to enjoy your life
- Set goals and work towards them – smaller goals are important to have as well as longer term goals
- At work or study, keep in mind that you can only do so much, and that you should take regular breaks.
If it’s all getting too much, ask for support. Talk to a friend or family member, or someone supportive at school, uni or college. Above all, *keep your sense of humour*.

**Dealing with anger**

Anger can lead to stress.

- You might try something physical like going for a run or a bike ride.
- Some people write letters and put in everything they feel angry about, then burn them.
- Other people turn the music up loud and say out loud whatever it is they’d really like to tell someone.
- Learn techniques to deal with situations where you feel anger towards someone.

It’s OK, in fact it’s good, to express anger. We all get angry. We can choose what we do about it and how we express it. Do what’s right for you as long as you don’t hurt anyone or anything.

The topic, *Anger – managing the anger in your life*, may help.

**Drugs, alcohol and smoking won’t change what is causing stress**

Some people try drugs, like alcohol and they smoke more.

- This is likely to be more harmful than helpful when you consider the health risks.
- Importantly, they won’t change whatever is causing the stress.
- Sometimes doctors prescribe medication for adults like antidepressants. This could help, but on its own doesn’t change whatever is causing the stress.

It’s important to look at the causes and ways to deal with the causes – whether that might be by increasing your own coping capacities or making changes to your lifestyle.

**Changing your life**

Sometimes changes in your life are the only way to really reduce stress.

- If it’s hard to decide how to do that, talk to a trusted friend.
- You could go to counselling to find ways to make changes.

It might mean that you do less for now. For example, if you’re studying full time and working and have a relationship and a social life, you may need to cut down somewhere, or cut down a bit everywhere.

**RESOURCES**

- Kids Helpline – telephone 1800 55 1800  
  https://kids helpline.com.au
- Reachout – for help you need when times are tough  
  http://au.reachout.com
- Youth Beyondblue, www.youthbeyondblue.com
- Your school counsellor
- Your family doctor.

The information on this site should not be used as an alternative to professional care. If you have a particular problem, see a doctor or other health professional.

Mel says:

“Sometimes people become very stressed because they are trying to help friends or relatives who are in stressful circumstances. It is very hard seeing someone suffer and feeling powerless to help. Sometimes you have to accept that you can’t fix other people’s problems. You can only support them in their efforts to fix things themselves.”

“My gran told me about all the changes she has seen in her life. Wow! And then I thought about all the changes my friends and I are dealing with now. One thing’s for sure, we have to be really well-organised if we want to fit everything in. Life gets really busy at times, but if you can keep a balance of exercise, rest, school stuff and friendship stuff, then you will cope and your life will be full but not stressful.”

Women’s and Children’s Health Network.  
RELAXATION TECHNIQUES FOR STRESS RELIEF

Relaxation can help to relieve the symptoms of stress. It can help you calm down and take a step back from a stressful situation, according to this fact sheet advice from healthdirect.

Although the cause of the anxiety won’t disappear, you will probably feel more able to deal with it once you’ve released the tension in your body and cleared your thoughts.

Many relaxation techniques combine breathing more deeply with relaxing muscles. Don’t worry if you find it difficult to relax at first. It’s a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice.

Yoga and tai chi are both good forms of exercise that can help to improve breathing and relaxation.

RELAXING YOUR BREATHING

Practise deep breathing at a regular time and in a quiet place where you won’t be disturbed. Loosen or remove any tight clothes you have on, such as shoes or jackets. Make yourself feel completely comfortable.

Sit in a comfy chair that supports your head, or lie on the floor or bed. Place your arms on the arms of the chair, or flat on the floor or bed. Your arms should be a little bit away from the side of your body and with the palms facing up. If you’re lying down, stretch out your legs, keeping them hip-width apart or slightly wider. If you’re sitting in a chair, don’t cross your legs.

Relaxation techniques usually start with focusing on your breathing. The way to do it is to breathe in and out slowly, using a regular rhythm since this will help you to calm down.

1. Breathe in, filling the whole of your lungs with air but without forcing. Imagine you’re filling up a bottle, so that your lungs fill from the bottom.
2. You should breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
3. Breathe in slowly and regularly, counting from 1 to 5 (don’t worry if you can’t reach 5 at first).
4. Then let the breath escape slowly, counting from 1 to 5.
5. Keep doing this until you feel calm. Breathe without pausing or holding your breath.

You should practise this relaxed breathing for 3 to 5 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day (or whenever you feel stressed).

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

This technique takes around 20 minutes. It stretches different muscles in turn and then relaxes them to release tension from the body and relax the mind.

Find a warm, quiet place with no distractions. Get completely comfortable, either sitting or lying down. Close your eyes and begin by focusing on your breathing, breathing slowly and deeply, as described above.

If you have pain in certain muscles, or if there are muscles that you find it difficult to focus on, spend more time on relaxing other parts of your body.

You may want to play some soothing music to help relaxation. As with all relaxation techniques, deep muscle relaxation will require a bit of practice before you start feeling its benefits.

In each exercise, hold the stretch for a few seconds, then relax. Repeat a couple of times. It’s useful to keep to the same order as you work through the muscle groups:

Many relaxation techniques combine breathing more deeply with relaxing muscles.
• **Face** – push your eyebrows together, as though frowning, then release.
• **Neck** – gently tilt your head forwards, pushing chin down towards chest, then slowly lift again.
• **Shoulders** – pull your shoulders up towards the ears (shrug), then relax them down towards the feet.
• **Chest** – breathe slowly and deeply into your diaphragm (below your bottom rib) so that you’re using all of your lungs. Then breathe slowly out, allowing your belly to deflate as all the air is exhaled.
• **Arms** – stretch your arms away from your body, reach, then relax.
• **Legs** – push your toes away from the body, pull them towards the body, then relax.
• **Wrists and hands** – stretch your wrist by pulling your hand up towards you, stretch out the fingers and thumbs, then relax.

If you find these relaxation techniques are still not helping you with your stress, you might want to consider talking to your doctor or getting some other form of professional advice.

**SOURCES**
- beyondblue: *Relaxation techniques to help reduce stress and worry*, [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

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Apps and websites for dealing with stress

A HANDY LIST OF FREE APPS AND WEBSITES TO HELP YOU DEAL WITH STRESS

**APPS**

**Breakup Shakeup**
iOS only
Provides ideas for fun, easy things to do to help you cope after a breakup. The app teaches you that planning activities and increasing your social support will help you recover faster. It can help you to recover after a relationship break-up.

**Calm**
iOS and Android
A guided meditation app to help reduce stress and enhance wellbeing. The 7-step program teaches you how to meditate, with adjustable nature scenes and relaxing music tracks. Sessions range from 2 to 30 minutes on the topics of focus, creativity, energy, confidence, sleep and more.

**Coach Me**
iOS and Android
Designed to help you with goal setting and achievements. It provides you with inspiration and reminders and helps you track habits. It can help you to achieve goals and build better habits.

**Colorfy**
iOS and Android
Colouring therapy for adults now available on your mobile phone. Let the colours fill your mind and your anxiety reduce in a relaxing painting experience.

**digipill**
iOS and Android
Offers guided relaxation and methods for approaching real life problems, from quitting smoking and sleeping better to reducing anxiety and beating stress.

**HabitBull**
iOS and Android
Can help you organise your life. You can customise, set goals and create positive habits and routines that can help you feel more in control of unwanted habits. It can help you to achieve goals and build better habits.

**Happify**
iOS, Android and Web
www.happify.com
An app for adults aimed at improving overall wellbeing and happiness, influenced by positive psychology, cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness. Whether you are feeling sad, anxious and stressed, or dealing with constant negative thoughts, Happify has tools and programs to help you take control of your emotional wellbeing.

**Headspace**
iOS, Android and Web
www.headspace.com
Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help manage stress, resilience, anxiety, depression and improve general health and wellbeing. Headspace uses guided meditation activities to reduce anxiety and improve general wellbeing.

**MindShift**
iOS and Android
An app designed to help teens and young adults cope with anxiety. MindShift can help you learn how to relax, develop more helpful ways of thinking, and identify active steps to take charge of your anxiety. This app includes strategies to deal with everyday anxiety, as well as specific tools to tackle exam anxiety, perfectionism, social anxiety, performance anxiety, worry, panic and conflict.

**Pacifica**
iOS, Android and Web
www.thinkpacifica.com
Daily tools for stress, anxiety, and depression alongside a supportive community; based on cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness meditation.

**ReachOut Breathe**
iOS only
This app helps you to reduce the physical symptoms of stress and anxiety by slowing down your breathing and heart rate. Aimed at reducing anxiety, managing stress and controlling symptoms of panic.

**ReachOut WorryTime**
iOS and Android
An app which gives you space to record worries or persistent thoughts and schedule ‘worry’ time when it is manageable and safe. It helps to reduce anxiety and manage stress.

**Recharge**
iOS only
This app provides you with a personalised six-week program that helps improve your general health and wellbeing by focusing on regular sleep times, daylight exposure and physical activity. It helps you to sleep better and improve general wellbeing.

**SAM App**
iOS and Android
Self-Help for Anxiety Management (SAM) offers a range of methods to help you manage anxiety. It has been developed by psychologists and provides 25 self-help options on anxiety, relaxation and health. You are encouraged to use the resources and tools in SAM to build your own anxiety toolkit that will help you cope when you are feeling anxious.

**Smiling Mind**
iOS, Android and Web
www.smilingmind.com.au
Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help manage stress, resilience, anxiety, depression and improve general health and wellbeing. Smiling Mind uses meditation and mindfulness activities to reduce anxiety and improve general wellbeing.

**Stop, Breathe and Think**
iOS and Android
App designed to help you be more mindful and compassionate using a meditation guide. You can check in daily, track your progress and feel more calm.

**The Mindfulness App**
iOS and Android
Provides an app-based introduction to mindfulness, guided mindfulness and meditations and helps you to keep track of your journey with reminders and mindful notes. It can help you to reduce anxiety.

**WellMind**
iOS and Android
Designed to help you with stress, anxiety and depression. The app includes advice, tips and tools to improve your mental health and boost your wellbeing. It may help you to overcome depression and manage stress and anxiety.

**What’s Up?**
iOS and Android
This app can help you cope with anxiety, stress and feelings of depression. Contains interactive games, forums, thought-tracking diary and helpful techniques to manage your feelings.

**WEBSITES**

**moodgym**
Web only
https://moodgym.com.au
This website can help you to understand your emotions, develop coping skills, improve your relationships and self-esteem and manage your stress levels.

**myCompass**
Web only
www.mycompass.org.au
A personalised self-help online program. It provides you with a mental health toolkit, and helps you to stay motivated and to improve and develop healthy mental habits.

**This Way Up**
Web only
Website which offers apps designed to provide relief for a range of psychological disorders, utilising extensive research and proven, effective cognitive behaviour therapy. Note: the phone apps from this Australian site are not free, however the online course for stress management is.

Compiled by The Spinney Press.
Two-thirds of young people experience ‘worrying levels’ of exam stress, survey finds

Young people are experiencing high levels of exam stress, according to a study by online youth service ReachOut. Bellinda Kontominas reports for ABC News

Genevieve Lee expected her final year of high school to be stressful, but the 17-year-old realised the pressure had become too great when her behaviour changed completely.

The vice-captain of Gilroy College in Castle Hill said she felt “so burdened with the pressure” of achieving good marks and pleasing her Fijian parents, it was causing her to procrastinate, forget to eat during the day and completely cut herself off from others.

“I’m such a social person but when stress hits, no one sees me for a solid week, not even my family,” she said.

“It got to the point where I was crying every single day.”

The stress “got to the point where I wasn’t me” and developed into anxiety, she said.

“I went from being a really confident person to stuttering, feeling sweaty and being nervous about what people would think about me,” she said.

“When that started to happen I realised … this isn’t right.”

Two-thirds of young people are now experiencing “worrying levels” of exam stress, a study by youth service ReachOut has found.

A national survey of 1,000 young people aged between 14 and 25 revealed those experiencing worrying

Advice for students
- Stay connected to the things that nourish you: family, friends, sports, hobbies
- Eat well and rest, particularly as exam times near
- Remember, there’s not just one direct path to your future.

Source: ReachOut
levels of exam stress had increased from 51.2 per cent in 2017 to 65.1 per cent in 2018.

Traditionally, expectations from parents and schools have been among the greatest source of stress for young people. However this year young people were increasingly worried about the future in general and getting a job.

Traditionally, expectations from parents and schools have been among the greatest source of stress for young people. However this year young people were increasingly worried about the future in general and getting a job.

CHANGING WORKFORCE CAUSING UNCERTAINTY

ReachOut chief executive Ashley de Silva said the growing number of young people worried about the future was likely linked to economic uncertainty, including job prospects and housing affordability.

“They’re being asked to make lifelong career decisions right now and it’s happening against a backdrop of lots of change that’s only getting faster with technology,” he said.

With talk about robots replacing entry level jobs in industries such as accounting and law, Mr de Silva said young people were now asking themselves: ‘Will I have the right skillset for what the market needs in five years time?’

LATE-NIGHT CRAM SESSION AN IMPORTANT LESSON

Liam Maher, also from Gilroy College, said he felt under enormous pressure to perform well in his final exams to reach his goal of studying a Bachelor of Business at the University of Technology Sydney.

“My stress is that if I don’t get the ATAR, what am I going to do? I don’t have a backup plan,” he said.

The pressure reared its ugly head the night before Liam’s first trial exam last month when he was so stressed he stayed up until 4:00am trying to memorise his work.

“When I woke up I was drained, I could not remember a thing, so from then I had to learn that cramming doesn’t work for me,” he said.

“That whole night was useless.”

Fellow Year 12 student Sina Aghamofid, 17, said he had witnessed the outcome when people let stress build up over their final two years of school.

“I’ve seen numerous people who have been hospitalised for six weeks through stress and anxiety and depression because it all adds up,” he said.

MORE SEEKING HELP

Crucially, ReachOut’s study also found that the number of young people seeking mental health or medical help had doubled in the past year from 15.5 per cent in 2017 to 30.5 per cent this year. Online searches for help almost tripled.

Ms Lee says her friends first noticed something was wrong and encouraged her to talk about it. Her parents also suggested she seek professional help.

She now makes sure to take regular study breaks, eat well and be more connected to her family and friends.

She has also learned to use “good stress” as a motivator to do better.
OECD REPORT HIGHLIGHTS PRESSURES FELT BY TEENAGERS WORLDWIDE

Is your child’s academic performance suffering? It might be worth checking in to see how they’re coping with life’s stresses. An ABC News report by Nick Grimm

An international study has shown pressures at school and home are undermining teenagers’ wellbeing and their performances at school.

The OECD PISA 2015 Students’ Well-being report, covering teenagers from 72 countries, identified a range of factors including exam anxiety, deadlines, social pressures, and emotionally remote parents and teachers.

Here are some of the key findings from the report:
- Two-thirds of students felt stressed about their performances at school;
- Boys were more likely to be physically bullied, while girls suffered from verbal and psychological bullying;
- Students at schools with a higher frequency of bullying reported lower levels of satisfaction;
- Bullying was less frequent in schools where students reported more positive relationships with their teachers;
- Teens who talked with their parents at dinner reported higher levels of overall life satisfaction.

Australian teenagers lagged behind their global counterparts on a range of measures.

Students in star performing nations like Finland reported higher happiness levels and a greater sense of belonging within their school communities, while still

Wellbeing report results for Aussie school students

- The PISA report is based on a survey of 540,000 students in 72 countries, including Australia.
- The report presents insights into issues including study anxiety, stress levels and bullying.
- Australian teens are placed higher than the OECD average on several measures including their expectations to go to university and likelihood of wanting to top their class.
- But when it comes to a range of wellbeing measures, our teens lag behind many of their global counterparts.

Key wellbeing-related outcomes include:
- 68% of Australian teenagers said they feel very anxious about tests even if they are well prepared, compared with an average of 55.5% of students across OECD countries.
- 47% of Australian students say they get very tense when they study, higher than the average of 37%.
- Girls were far more likely to experience anxiety, with nearly 74% saying they worry about getting poor grades, compared with 57% of boys.
- Children who receive help with their homework from their parents perform worse than those who do it on their own.
- Girls suffer greater academic anxiety than boys; a fear of making mistakes on a test can disrupt the performance of top-performing girls who can choke under pressure.
- The report warns of the pressure elite schools can put on students to perform well. Parents of students in elite schools often pay substantial tuition fees and expect their children to gain admission to top-tier universities.

- Bullying is common at schools; 15% admit they are “frequently bullied at school”, compared to the average of 9% in other nations; 6% said they were “hit or pushed” around by classmates, compared to 4% in other countries.

The report showed that:
- Students who perceive that their teacher provides individual help when they are struggling were less likely to report feeling tense or anxious.
- Bullying was less frequent in schools where students reported more positive relationships with their teachers.
- Adolescents who feel that they are part of a school community are more likely to perform better academically and be more motivated in school; they are also less likely to engage in risky and antisocial behaviour.
- Students with a strong sense of belonging at school are also more satisfied with their life.
- The findings help demonstrate how important it is that schools, along with parents, help students to develop their wellbeing and resilience.


SOURCES
outperforming Australian students academically.

But Australian teens were also more likely to report that they intended to go to university, and were more likely to be ambitious to top their class.

And they were three times more likely to have a paid job outside school than their Finnish counterparts.

We asked a few Australian teenagers how they were coping with the combined stresses of school, sibling relations and their social lives.

‘People need to remember we’re just teenagers’

Sixteen-year-old Stella Conlon has a one-hour commute on a train to catch up with her school mates in Sydney’s inner west during the school holidays.

“When I’m at my mum’s house I do travel quite far to school, so sometimes that limits what I can do outside of school,” she said.

“There is definitely pressure from friends in terms of what you do on the weekends and so on ... sometimes it can all feel a little overwhelming.

“That kind of pressure does weigh on my mind a little bit.”

The year eleven Canterbury Girls High School student is preparing to do her HSC next year and said her parents were already worried about her "burning out" as a result of a hectic schedule.

“They obviously want me to fulfil my potential but they also don’t want me to burn myself out ... [or] push myself almost to my breaking point,” Stella said.

“I know that there are lots of people whose parents are constantly at them, making sure they’re constantly getting the highest mark they can in tests and that the only thing they are focused on is school.

“There are a few girls that I know who never do anything except studying and stuff like that.

“I think sometimes people need to remember we’re only aged 13 to 18.

“There’s a lot expected from us but I don’t think teenagers are exactly equipped to deal with the stress and pressures that are put on us.”

Two-thirds of students felt stressed about their performances at school.

‘Those pressures are part of growing up I think’

James Browning, a 15-year-old student at Sydney’s Trinity Grammar, said there was a lot of pressure on teenagers to perform academically and also socially.

“I go to an all-boy school so obviously I don’t have the pressures of having to interact with girls or anything,” he said.

“But I do see for a lot of people in my year that there’s a lot of pressure to perform in your academics.”

James said there was pressure to be “an all-round kind of person”.

“And I do think that there are a lot of people that struggle with those kind of issues,” he said.

“They struggle academically, so ... they suddenly put all their time into being social or sporty.

“It’s really important that people shouldn’t feel pressured ... they should feel comfortable and happy and do what they’re good at doing.”

“Those pressures are part of growing up I think ... they should be teaching people to be comfortable with whatever they want to do.”

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HOW TO REDUCE STRESS AND PREPARE FOR EXAMS

To help reduce stress and ensure that you’re as organised as you can be, learn more about planning and looking after yourself and about staying focused in order to be as ready for the exam as you can be. This advice is courtesy of headspace

TAKE THE TIME TO PLAN

- Prepare a study plan and goals for each day/week. Make sure it’s balanced with other important things in your life – that way it will be easier to stick to.
- Talk to your employers early to let them know you need to limit your shifts/hours while studying.
- Create a study space that is comfortable, quiet, well lit, organised, and has no distractions nearby, such as a TV, phone, people talking, etc.
- Make sure you have everything you need for each study session as this helps to feel more confident and organised.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

- Self-care is especially important when you have a big demand in your life – that way you have the energy to commit to what you need to accomplish.
- Build activities you enjoy and that bring your stress levels down into your study plan, such as sport, spending time with friends, internet, etc.
- Don’t get hungry before or while studying. Grab nutritional snacks that keep you going, such as fruit/nuts/dairy, etc.
- Remember to get some exercise every day as this helps you to keep focused and energetic.

REST WHEN YOU NEED TO

- Work out what times of day you have the most energy and plan to study then.
- Don’t study more than 40-60 minutes without a short break. Even a 5-minute break will help. A glass of water helps too!
- When you have a break do something physical or fun, such as go for a short run or play with a pet.
- Try to keep your focus on school and exams rather than other stuff happening in your life; you don’t need this extra worry around relationships, friendships etc. right now.
- Relaxation is important, especially before bed, to slow the brain activity down. Try some slow, deep breathing, a shower or a bath, herbal tea etc.
- Learn more about sleeping well.
STAY FOCUSED
- Say “no” to parties during the weeks close to the exams. This will help to keep you refreshed and energised.
- When studying, switch your phone and email off to stop the distractions.
- Try to keep a focus on your health and wellbeing by not using things like drugs or alcohol; they can make it much harder to study.

ASK FOR HELP
- Stay at school until your last day so you don’t miss any important info about exams, or fun events with your colleagues.
- Practise writing essays and show your teachers for feedback for improvement.
- Ask teachers the best way to study for each subject; they have many years’ experience they can share with you.
- Some teachers are happy to be contacted during the time leading up to the exams. Find out which ones you can contact and make use of this if you need to.
- If you have trouble approaching your own teacher for advice, talk to one of the other ones who teach the same subject.
- Group study sessions with classmates can be a helpful and entertaining way of studying, but keep your focus on what you want to achieve with these sessions.
- Talk about what you are studying with family members and friends as this helps to retain the info more, especially names and dates, etc.

BE PREPARED
- Read/write everything three times as this also helps to commit the info to memory.
- Use your trial exam results to focus in on what you need study.
- Use previous exam papers to get a feel for what to expect.
- Ask friends what they are doing that is helping with their study or friends who did it last year.
- You need to study within 24 hours of the exam on that subject to retain more info.
- Write things in coloured texta that you have trouble remembering (such as names and dates) and blu-tak to your toilet wall/door. Sounds funny, but it really works!

DAY OF THE EXAM
- Do your usual routine, for example, have what you normally eat for breakfast.
- Take some water and a healthy snack (if allowed) to the exam.
AND FINALLY ...
If the stress is getting to you it will prevent you from studying effectively and confidently – so ask for help from headspace, a counsellor, professional, or help line.

OTHER WEBSITE RESOURCES
- Thedesk – aims to support Australian tertiary students to achieve mental and physical health and wellbeing. thedesk online resources will help people improve their wellbeing and be able to study more effectively. thedesk offers free access to online modules, tools, quizzes and advice, www.thedesk.org.au
- University of the Sunshine Coast – Academic and study supports – successful learning strategies to get the most out of tertiary studies, www.usc.edu.au
- Macquarie University – Study Tips, www.mq.edu.au
- Open Colleges – 10 study smart strategies, www.opencolleges.edu.au
- The Royal Children’s Hospital – Studying with a chronic health condition/disability, www.rch.org.au

5 STEPS TO STUDY SUCCESS

We've done the homework on studying so you don't have to. These are your scientifically proven steps to study success.

1. **NOT ALL STRESS IS BAD**

   While it’s often given a bad rap, the right amount of stress can actually motivate you to get stuff done. The key thing is to recognise when stress has tipped over from being a motivating force to an overwhelming emotion.

2. **20-MINUTE STUDY RULE**

   No one can study for six hours straight and be effective. Break up your time into twenty-minute chunks for the most effective use of your brain.

3. **SAY IT OUT LOUD**

   The best way to really remember and learn is to talk about what you’re learning out loud, without using any notes.

4. **BREAKS = GOOD, CONSTANT DISTRACTION = BAD**

   Taking planned and timed breaks will help you remain on task, but checking your social every 5 minutes is a sure-fire study fail. Research shows that it can take up to twenty minutes to refocus on your task once you’ve been distracted.

5. **SLEEP IS YOUR FRIEND**

   If you get a good night’s sleep before your exam, you are scientifically proven to retain more of what you studied the day before than if you stay up crazy late.


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Stress and Young People

Issues in Society | Volume 447
EXAM STRESS TIPS

Have exams coming up? Sometimes the pressure you feel can help keep you focused, other times it can cause stress. Check out these tips from Kids Helpline to help you cope with stress during exam time.

WHAT DOES EXAM STRESS LOOK LIKE?
Some signs of stress include:
• Feeling confused.
• Losing touch with friends.
• Feeling moody and low.
• Having trouble making decisions.
• Feeling overwhelmed.
• Lack of motivation to do anything.
• Trouble sleeping or getting out of bed.
• Tense muscles or headaches.
• Having an upset stomach or feeling sick.
• Fidgeting, nail biting, teeth grinding.

WHY DO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE EXAM STRESS?
People may experience it because they:
• Worry they might fail.
• Don’t feel prepared.
• Want to do really well.
• Don’t have much time to study.
• Need to get a certain result.
• Don’t think they will do well.
• Find it hard to understand what they’re studying.
• Feel pressure from family to get good marks.
• Feel they need to compete with others.
• Have other things happening in their life.

GETTING READY TO STUDY
It’s never too late to set up good study habits. Here are some helpful ideas:
• Find a quiet place to study without distractions.
• Set-up your study space. Make sure it’s not too cluttered and has everything you might need.
• Find out as much as you can about the exam so you can prepare.
• Ask your teacher if you’re unsure of what will be tested.
• Learn to make ‘mind maps’ and use them to collect ideas and thoughts, use bright colours to help remember important links.
• Make a plan of what you want to work on in each study session. Break it down into small tasks and work on one task at a time.
• Take regular short breaks – use this time to have a drink, get something to eat or play with a pet.
• Ask for help – If you’re having trouble with something you’re studying ask a teacher, friend, sibling or parent to help.

TIPS TO HELP WHILE STUDYING
Try these tips and tricks:
• Stick to a routine by eating and sleeping at around the same time each day.
• Get a good night’s sleep. This gives your brain time to recharge and remember what you’ve learnt.
• Give yourself mini rewards once you achieve your study goals – watch a TV show or go for a run.
• Keep focused on your study – don’t let other stuff like friendship worries distract you.
• Avoid junk food – it will bring a sudden burst of energy and then fall away quickly leaving you feeling worn-out.
• Eat a well-balanced diet – lots of fresh fruit, vegetables, cereals, grains, nuts and protein are all good for the brain and energy levels.
• Allow yourself time to rest – try out some relaxation activities like deep breathing, meditation or listening to music.
• Cut back on energy drinks, they can increase nerves. Drink lots of water instead!

IDEAS FOR EXAM DAY
Here are some tips to help exam day go smoothly:
• Work out what you need to take with you on exam day and organise this the night before.
• Eat a good, light breakfast – this will help with energy and concentration.
• Go to the toilet before the exam starts.
• If you feel yourself getting worried before your exam – spend some time focussing on your breathing.
• When you sit down to do your exam, take time to slow your breathing and relax.
• Read through the exam paper carefully. Underline key words and instructions.
• Work out how long you have for each question or section.
• Aim to have time to re-read answers through and to make any changes.
• Work on the questions that you find easiest first.

“Remember, passing an exam is only part of the story. There’s always a second chance or another way to reach your goals.”

**IF YOU’RE FEELING STRESSED ABOUT EXAMS, YOU’RE NOT ALONE**

**Talking to someone and finding ways to cope during exam time can help.**

If you need help coping with exam stress, give us a call (1800 55 1800), start a WebChat or email us today.

If you are looking for more digital services and resources, check out Head to Health (www.headtohealth.gov.au).

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APPS TO DEAL WITH EXAM STRESS
A LIST OF FREE APPS TO HELP YOU BEAT THE STRESSES OF STUDY

EGENDA
Android, iOS, http://egenda-app.com
A powerful homework manager built by students for students. It allows you to manage all of your homework, projects, assignments and assessments from all of your classes in one place. Includes daily reminders for when assignments are due, and offers the ability to add notes and to sort by class, due date or completion.

EVERNOTE
Android, iOS, https://evernote.com
Write, collect and capture ideas as searchable notes, notebooks, checklists and to-dos, and synch everything automatically across any computer, phone or tablet. Using Evernote to create revision notes as you study is a great way to ensure that you always have something available at hand to revise.

EXAM COUNTDOWN
Android, iOS, https://examcountdownapp.com
This app helps you to organise your upcoming exam dates to keep you motivated. Features a daily countdown for your exams.

FOREST
Android, iOS, www.forestapp.cc/
In this app, you plant a seed and watch it grow into a tree – but only if you can resist closing the app down. Forest keeps you focused on study and avoiding ‘app hopping’ and internet addiction. The longer the app is kept open, the larger your tree will grow. However, if you cannot resist the temptation and start to browse the websites on your blacklist, your tree will wither away.

GO CONOR STUDY PLANNER
Early organisation of study can help prevent exam stress and anxiety. This online study planner enables you to schedule events in a calendar, allocate time to key subject areas, and keep track of the time you spend on each subject.

ISTUDIEZ PRO
Android, iOS, https://istudentpro.com
This app allows you to plan out each term/semester in great detail, providing you with an overview of your daily schedule and tasks, and giving you a quick snapshot of what you need to get done every day. You can start each term/semester by uploading your entire assignment due dates, as well as breaking it down into easy-to-achieve steps that will allow you to avoid the stress of completing assignments or exam study at the last minute.

MY STUDY LIFE
Android, iOS, www.mystudylife.com
A free cross-platform planner app for students, teachers and lecturers designed to make your study life easier to manage. This app is an all-in-one student organiser, with scheduling and class timetabling that can sync with your calendar. The reminders notify you of incomplete tasks and upcoming classes and exams. It also syncs across all devices, saves everything to the cloud and is available offline.

QUIZLET
Android, iOS, https://quizlet.com
Students who study on the go will appreciate this app as it allows you to access study notes on your mobile device. Create your own flashcards or choose from pre-made sets created by other students, to revise course content for your exams.

SELFCONTROL
iOS, http://selfcontrolapp.com
Free open-source application that lets you block your own access to distracting websites, your mail servers, or anything else on the internet. You simply set a period of time to block out, and add sites to your blacklist. Until the timer expires, you will be unable to access those sites, even if you restart your computer or delete the application.

TODAIT
Android, iOS, https://todait.com
Keep up with your exam preparation and study with this time management application. The app tells you how much study you should be doing each day and provides feedback on your study habits. It also has lockout modes for when you need to do practice exams.

Compiled by The Spinney Press.
Exam slaying checklist

CHECK
your exam location and start time

EAT
a decent brekky

DO
a light revision of your notes (don’t go overboard)

PACK
your bag

LAY
out your clothes

ARRIVE
a little early

SET
your alarm

AVOID
any people that stress you out

VISUALISE
yourself being calm and confident in the exam room

TAKE 2
minutes and practice deep and slow breathing

GO
to bed early enough to get a good amount of sleep

GET
comfortable in your assigned seat and then get to work

Early intervention is key to support students with anxiety about starting university

Learning how to manage anxiety takes time and practice. It’s not helpful to wait until stress levels are at a peak before seeking help, advises Viviana Wuthrich

Roughly one in five students drop out of university in Australia in their first year. Students with prior emotional difficulties, who are doing their degrees part-time, mature age at entry, or from a lower socioeconomic status background are most likely to be in this category.

Not all of these factors can be changed. But there are ways parents and students can prepare for the transition to university.

Students who have previously struggled with emotional difficulties or mental health problems are particularly at risk. But the earlier the strategies to support these students are put in place, the more likely they are to succeed.

HOW MUCH STRESS OR ANXIETY IS NORMAL?
Starting university is a common cause of heightened stress. There are many new challenges to overcome, such as adjusting to a new learning environment that has less personalised assistance and greater emphasis on independent learning. It’s also challenging to be in a course with hundreds of other students you don’t know.

Most students adjust to these challenges, and the stress they experience should be temporary. But those who find change difficult, who worry excessively about their performance, are overly perfectionistic, or are fearful of public speaking or exams are likely to find transitioning to university particularly challenging.

Students who find these things difficult on an ongoing basis are likely suffering from an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders tend to run in families, and often start early in life. They have very negative impacts on someone’s functioning and wellbeing.

If your child is skipping lectures or tutorials, avoiding class presentations or exams, failing regularly, not handing in assignments, losing sleep, constantly worrying about their performance or thinking they’re not good enough, it’s time to intervene.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO HELP?
Fortunately, anxiety can be treated. Cognitive behavioural therapy is the treatment of choice for anxiety-
related problems.

Cognitive behavioural therapy teaches people to change unhelpful thinking, and to face fears over eight to 12 weeks.

Learning how to manage anxiety takes time and practice, so it’s not helpful to wait until stress levels are at a peak before seeking help. If a student has anxiety related to these circumstances, it’s advisable to get assistance before they start university, or as soon as the problems arise.

Parents can assist students to make appointments and possibly assist with gap payments for professional services such as for a private clinical psychologist or specialist anxiety clinics with expertise in cognitive behavioural therapy for anxiety disorders. Assistance can also be sought from local headspace services for free.

Self-help resources that teach cognitive behavioural therapy skills are available online, including internet-based therapy programs.

Most universities also offer student support services. These services can get very busy around exam time. So, it’s best to tackle issues as soon as they arise – preferably before a student heads to university.

Here are some tips on how to deal with exam anxiety using CBT techniques: www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/Test_Anxiety_Booklet.pdf

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

In addition to playing a role in facilitating early intervention, parents can also assist students by setting realistic expectations. These would be related to performance at university, and the time taken to learn new and often complex skills and theories.

Parents can also encourage students not to avoid classes or assessments they find difficult, but to enrol in support courses or workshops to enhance learning in particular tasks they’re struggling with, such as an essay writing course.

But while parents are an important support network for university students, as young adults, parents have to balance support with encouraging independence.

Important support for students will come from other students in the same course. They will be able to provide information on how to approach an assignment or to discuss what a particular theoretical concept means.

When most students begin university they often don’t know anyone else in the same course, or at least not in their tutorial group. Parents can play an important role in encouraging students to start up conversations with others in their course, encouraging them to get involved in university social clubs and mentoring programs.

Parental pressure plays an important role in academic stress in high school students. And although it has not been specifically examined in university settings, it’s likely to be a source of stress.

Parents need to prepare for the transition to university by managing their own expectations about what marks the student should be getting or what courses they should be studying. They should step back and encourage and facilitate their child to make their own decisions and to get external assistance if needed.

Transitions to university are difficult for most, but stress should be temporary. If your child has anxiety or had difficulties coping with Year 12, it’s important to seek help to prepare them for the challenges of university before they begin.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Viviana Wuthrich is a Clinical Psychologist and an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and Centre for Emotional Health, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. She receives funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council, Rotary Australia and Parkinson’s NSW. She is a member of the Australian Psychological Society and other professional organisations. She is a Board Member of WayAhead. She is an author on the Ageing Wisely, Study without Stress, and Cool Kids programs but does not receive any royalties.

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Viviana Wuthrich is Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology, Macquarie University.

THE CONVERSATION

MAJORITY OF AUSSIE UNI AND TAFE STUDENTS STRESSED, DEPRESSED

Worryingly high numbers of Australian university and TAFE students are stressed and anxious, with many having thoughts of self-harm or suicide, according to new research from headspace and the National Union of Students.

One of the largest national student surveys into the mental health of Australian students has revealed that close to 70 per cent of respondents rated their mental health as poor or fair. While two-thirds reported high or very high psychological distress over the past 12 months.

headspace CEO Jason Trethowan described the results as alarming, but not surprising.

"Like all big life transitions, after finishing Year 12 young people can be more vulnerable, they are an at-risk group with no clear check-in point for mental health difficulties," he said.

“They might have moved out of home for the first time, they might have greater responsibilities financially, and domestically. Some young people might engage in risky behaviours such as drug use. They may have less parental contact leaving them vulnerable and changes in their mental health going unnoticed," he said.

“They are a group that can fall through the cracks.”

Mr Trethowan said mental health services are available on Australian campuses, but differed from one to the next. “Young people need to know that headspace is here to help, we have 99 centres across Australia, as well as the online and over-the-phone counselling service, eheadspace.”

It is the first time the annual NUS survey – completed by thousands of students across the country – has focused on the mental health of Australia’s tertiary students, aged 17 to 25. The survey results have been released to coincide with National Youth Week.

National Union of Students welfare officer Jill Molloy said there were a number of challenges that impacted on student’s mental health and wellbeing.

“Workload, looming deadlines, relationship problems, financial difficulties, drug and alcohol use, it’s a long list that students themselves say have a detrimental impact,” she said.

“This is why we have partnered with headspace to bring these issues to light.”

Mr Trethowan said headspace will be providing vital help seeking and information about access to services to the NUS in order for it to share with its student membership across the country.

SURVEY RESULTS

The students surveyed said the following mental health issues impacted their study in the past 12 months:

**KEY FINDINGS**

**For young adults:**
- 67% rated their mental health as “fair” or “poor” compared with 39% who rated their physical health as “fair” or “poor”.
- 65% reported high or very high psychological distress.
- Only 1.6% reported that no symptoms of mental health problems impacted their study in the past year.
- 27% had accessed on-campus counselling services, and 24% rated their experience as negative.
- 28% had accessed on-campus medical services, and 13% rated their experience as negative.

**For mature adults:**
- 59% rated their mental health as “fair” or “poor” compared with 41% who rated their physical health as “fair” or “poor”.
- 53% reported high or very high psychological distress.
- Only 3.4% reported that no symptoms of mental health problems impacted their study in the past year.
- 32% had accessed on-campus counselling services, and 20% rated their experience as negative.
- 26% had accessed on-campus medical services, and 9% rated their experience as negative.
Amelia Walters, 18, sought help at headspace after she became paralysed by a need to justify her place at university and was overwhelmed by the demands of study.

“We don’t talk enough about just how hard university is – not just in academics, but as a total readjustment, self-discovery period,” she said.

Amelia – who is now a headspace Youth Advocate – said many of her friends feel disconnected and unable to talk about what is going on for them.

“There is this idea that everyone else is managing and is succeeding, but it’s not the case, and many people still don’t talk about the pressure because there is a stigma in admitting that you’re struggling.”

**TIPS AND ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Managing study stress**
To help reduce stress and ensure that you’re as organised as you can be during study, there are easy ways to plan ahead and look after yourself.

- Prepare a study plan and goals for each day/week.
- Talk to your employers early to let them know you need to limit your shifts/hours while studying.
- Create a study space that is comfortable, quiet, well lit, organised, and has no distractions nearby such as a TV, phone, people talking, etc.
- Don’t get hungry before or while studying. Grab nutritional snacks that keep you going, such as fruit/nuts/dairy, etc. Fill up on good food (like veggies, fruit, whole grains) and drink plenty of water to give your body and brain all the power it needs to function well.

**Stay socially connected**
Connecting with people and spending time with friends, family and pets) can improve your general wellbeing and help you feel supported. Plan a catch-up with a friend or family member you haven’t seen in a while, or get involved in a local group activity.

- Remember to get some exercise every day as this helps you to keep focused and energetic.
- Self-care is especially important when you have a big demand in your life – that way you have the energy to commit to what you need to accomplish.
- Devoting time to doing fun things can help you relax, recharge and connect with your friends or a community group.

**Alcohol and other drugs**

- Some people use alcohol or drugs in student life because you think it will make you feel better, however, it can increase feelings of anxiety and stress.
- Using alcohol and drugs also makes you more tired and less focussed, which can impact your work. To perform your best, avoid alcohol and other drugs.

If you are going through a tough time visit your local headspace centre or contact eheadspace at [www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au) or 1800 650 890.
RENT, DEBT, JOBS, STUDY: WHY UNI STUDENTS ARE FEELING MORE STRESSED

A national report has found students have higher rates of mental health problems than non-students, and being loaded with debt doesn’t help. A report from Triple J’s Hack program

Days after the Federal Government announced a uni student fee hike, a national report has found students have higher rates of mental health problems than non-students, and being loaded with debt doesn’t help. The report by the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, Orygen, lists some key reasons why uni students struggle with mental health. They include, lack of sleep, poor diet, being away from family, feelings of isolation among international students, academic pressure, uncertain graduate employment, and financial stress.

Because there’s no solid baseline data, the report stops short of concluding uni students have become more stressed, but it points out that students counsellors have been warning for years of increasing demand for their services, and not enough resources. Some of this may be due to the destigmatisation of mental health, meaning more students are likely to go and see a counsellor.

But apart from this, there are deeper causes, according to Vivienne Browne, Orygen Senior Policy Analyst.

IF YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW NEEDS HELP:
“We know a number of students are concerned they’re accumulating an increasing amount of debt to obtain an academic qualification,” she said.

“There’s also an understanding among uni students that the bar of entry into the workforce is becoming higher, and there’s no expectation they’re going to get work straight away.”

To summarise: higher fees and job anxiety is creating student stress.

This is backed up by Jeremy Cass, a psychologist and manager of counselling services at RMIT university in Melbourne. He estimated there had been a 10 per cent increase in demand for counselling services at the university just in the past year.

“The main two are depression and anxiety,” he said.

“A lot of students are stressed about life in general.”

The increase in demand experienced at RMIT is happening at other universities. In 2013, the umbrella body for student services associations in Australia and New Zealand, ANZSSA, found counselling services were reporting seeing more students with mental health problems.

The Orygen report comes only two days after the Federal Government released its proposed higher education reform. Student fees will rise 7.5 per cent by 2021, and the HELP repayment income threshold will decrease from $55,000 to $42,000. Students will have more debt and have to pay it back sooner.

KEY ISSUES
Of Australia’s 1.4 million university students approximately three in five are aged between 15 and 24 years, and at least one in four of these young people will experience mental ill-health in any one year.

Students with an experience of mental ill-health have been shown to be more likely to leave, consider exiting, or exit their course early. Failing to provide effective interventions for mental ill-health among university students is also likely to cost government/s through a) lost investment through course non-completion and b) downstream costs to mental health systems from not intervening early with mental and substance use disorders.

While Australia provides world-class higher education and has been an international leader in the response to youth mental health, the mental health of university students (and tertiary students more broady) has largely been absent at a policy level, impacting on the capacity of the university sector and the mental health sector to respond.


Students have higher rates of mental health problems than non-students, and being loaded with debt doesn’t help.

LET’S LOOK AT THE POTENTIAL CAUSES OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG STUDENTS:
1. Financial pressure
A Universities Australia report in 2013 found most uni students today are living under the poverty line and have 30 per cent more debt in 2012 than 2006.

Two-thirds of undergraduates were worried about their financial situation. Students with financial stress were twice as likely to report mental illness compared
to students with no financial stress.

Last week, an AngliCare report found housing affordability was at an all-time low. This year, out of 67,000 properties surveyed, the research found less than 1 per cent were affordable for pensioners and those on other Centrelink benefits, or those earning the minimum wage.

Vivienne Brown said many students are having to work full-time or many part-time hours.

“It means studying through the day and working at night,” she said,

“This is impacting on quality of sleep and diet.”

2. The rising bar and low graduate employment

There are over 1.4 million university students in Australia. The figure has been going up steeply since a 2008 review of higher education set a target of 40 per cent of 25-34 year olds having a bachelor degree or above by 2020. It’s gone up so steeply we may have already reached the target.

One consequence of the increase has been the value of a bachelor degree being partly diluted by the number of graduates. Where a bachelor degree may once have secured you a job, now you need a masters-level degree. Rates of graduate employment have also gone down.

“A number of students are aware that, unlike in the past, obtaining a bachelor or equivalent degree isn’t enough to make them competitive in the workforce,” Vivienne said.

“They’re having to go on and do further study like masters courses, costing more money and pushing them further into debt.”

“That job uncertainty is impacting on levels of stress and wellbeing.”

3. Academic pressure

The 2008 review also set a target of more student enrolments from low socio-economic backgrounds. The Orygen report suggests these students may be at an increased risk of mental health problems due to academic and financial pressures.

Related to this has been the lowering of admission requirements – students who didn’t have the marks to get into a degree can now go.

Jeremy Cass from RMIT said this change was the main reason for the increase in demand for counselling services at the university.

“We’re getting students who historically wouldn’t go but now everyone is offered a place,” he said.

“The standards are still high and some are just not coping with the complexity of the academic side of school.”

4. Lonely international students

The last decade has also seen massive growth in international student numbers. They now make up about a quarter of the total and their fees help subsidise the places of domestic students. Education is our third biggest export, worth about $20 billion.

The Orygen report found that due to culture, language and academic practices, international students are at increased risk of mental ill-health.

This is compounded by loneliness, due to loss of contact with family and friends.

Jeremy Cass said about a third of students accessing the RMIT counselling services were international students – about the same proportion as the student body.

“You’d think it might be higher, but for cultural reasons they might not access counselling.”

5. Counsellors are swamped

The student-to-counsellor ratio in Australia is a lot higher than in the United States – about 4,340 students per counsellor compared to 1,527 per counsellor. A 2016 study found no large Australian university has enough counsellors to meet international or ANZSSA recommendations.

“I am concerned,” Jeremy Cass told Hack. “Universities have increased their numbers but resources for counsellors haven’t increased. At RMIT they’ve remained the same for the past five years.”

In the 2013 ANZSSA survey, the majority of counselling services felt they did not have enough staff to meet the expected level of service delivery.

‘WE NEED MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS IN UNIS’

Among other recommendations, Orygen is calling on the Government to extend its youth mental health programs to university students.

“Currently government-funded mental health education programs are not being extended past secondary schools,” Vivienne Brown said.

“We believe that, given young people aged 18-25 years old are most at risk of an onset of mental illness, it doesn’t make sense these education programs aren’t being extended.”

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EXAM STRESS TIPS

For many young people preparing for exams can be an overwhelming experience. Here are some tips to help make exam time less stressful and your study routine more productive.

IDENTIFYING EXAM STRESS

Stress is a negative reaction to excessive pressure or other demands. Exam stress can be caused by a fear of failure; pessimism and catastrophic thinking; unrealistic expectations; feeling unprepared; and performance anxiety.

PREPARING FOR EXAMS

Study space

Create a dedicated study space that is comfortable, quiet, well lit, organised, uncluttered and has no distractions nearby such as a television or people talking; and turn your phone off!

Start early and organise

Begin studying as soon as possible. This helps you feel more prepared as exams approach, plus you will have more time to prepare and review what you need to know. If you really struggle with something you can discover this sooner and not stress at the last minute or cram the night before the exam in a panic. Stay on top of your note-taking and revision and you’ll be on track for a much less stressful exam block.

Study timetable

Use a weekly timetable to help you stay on top of your study and revision. Look at the time you are spending when not at school, work or extracurricular activities, and then block out some study time on top of those commitments.

Take good notes

Take notes during class consistently throughout the term. Write your notes in bullet point form as it makes them easier to understand and take in key information quickly and concisely. As exam time approaches, condense your study notes into more succinct revision pages or flash cards to avoid searching through textbooks or online when it comes to the end of semester.

Take breaks

Don’t sit studying for more than 40-60 minutes without taking a break to clear your mind and/or think about what you have just studied. The 45/15 rule may work well for you – 45 minutes of study and then break for 15 minutes to go for a walk, have a snack, do some yoga, play a video game, take a power nap etc. After a break the next 45 minutes of study will be more focused and efficient.

Reward yourself

Treat yourself to something that has nothing to do with studying for exams, such as an extracurricular activity or exercise. This activity should relax you and take you away from the pressure of exams.

Focus – with your phone off

Keep focused on your study – don’t let external issues like your social life distract you. When studying, switch your phone and social media off to stop the distractions.

Eat and drink well

Don’t get hungry before or during studying. Have on hand nutritional snacks to keep you going, such as fruit, nuts or dairy. Avoid junk food which brings a sudden burst of energy, leaving you to crash and lose concentration. Eat a well-balanced diet: plenty of fruit and vegetables, cereals, grains, nuts and protein for the brain and energy levels. Cut back on energy drinks as they can increase nerves. Cook in advance and stock up on healthy snacks.

Exercise routine

Running, weights, yoga, a regular walk etc – find an exercise routine that relaxes your body and clears your mind. And avoid parties during the weeks close to exams to stay well-rested and energised. Make time for friends and family, but keep things balanced.

Relaxation

Try some relaxation activities like deep breathing, a shower or bath, herbal tea, meditation or listening to music. Rest and relaxation are important, especially before bed, to slow your brain activity down.

Sleep

Stick to a routine by eating and sleeping at around the same time each day. Get a good night’s sleep to give your brain time to recharge and remember what you have learnt. Go to bed early, especially the night before your exam.

Don’t procrastinate

Once you start a study session, try and get into ‘the zone’ and keep going. Avoiding study through procrastination will only compound pre-exam stress.

Avoid drugs and alcohol

Focus on your health and wellbeing by not using things like drugs or alcohol; they can make it much harder to study.

Have a study session with fellow students

In the weeks leading up to your exams, you might like to find a ‘study buddy’ or two, or set up a study group to help if you are struggling with a particular area of coursework. Small groups can work well to keep you motivated and engaged. Study groups are an opportunity for extra discussion, a chance to test each other, or a reward for study time spent.

Confirm your course outline

Ask your teacher for a list of all the coursework you have covered in the subject to date, to check you have the correct notes. Colour code what you need to know: Green = you understand these topics; Yellow/Orange = you are unsure about this area of study; Red = you are struggling with these topics – this is the content you should focus on.

Learn what you don’t know

In the weeks before an exam it is vital to concentrate on learning what you don’t know. If you aren’t sure what that is, check with your teacher and pull out old tests, assignments, practice exam papers and learn the questions you got wrong. Ask the teacher for help and clarify anything that is still confusing. You can also go online and to find other teachers’ lessons or study notes for additional content.

Use colour and images

Most people recall visual information more quickly and easily than just text-based notes. Try highlighting, colour coding, and drawing diagrams and pictures to help you remember content. Avoid crowding the page, leave space so that notes and images are still easy to read.
Review your notes
Re-read your notes immediately after writing them. Look at them again 24 hours later. Then review your notes one day a month. This helps you to remember what you have learnt.

Use practice papers
Answering practice questions and completing practice exams is helpful to give you examples of things that will possibly be on the exam and to familiarise yourself with the layout and style of questions likely to be asked. Completing them within the allocated timeframe also focuses you on how to use time most effectively in the actual exam. Having practice tests marked also highlights what areas you still need to study.

Avoid cramming
Cramming doesn’t work – spreading out your study time, rather than doing it all in one go, will be more effective. You may also feel overwhelmed if you leave the study until the last minute, challenging your ability to remember things, as well as losing valuable sleep from all-nighters which affect your concentration and energy in an exam.

Think positively, but have realistic expectations
Positive self-talk can be used for improving your confidence and reducing stress before exams. You should set goals that are challenging but achievable; have realistic expectations and don’t push yourself too hard.

Connect with family
Stay connected with your family by sharing meals, avoid spending too much time in your bedroom. Meal times can provide an opportunity to debrief and connect socially.

Seek extra help when needed
If your stress is serious and starting to affect your mental or physical health or wellbeing, seek support from a number of different places, starting with your family. You can also talk to your school/university welfare officer. A good person to contact is your GP. Organisations such as ReachOut, Beyond Blue and Lifeline are also ready to assist you.

Apps may help with stress management
There are a number of apps listed in this book which can assist in managing exam/study stress.

Avoid stimulants
Avoid taking stimulants such as energy drinks, soft drinks, caffeine, no-doze, amphetamine or any other drugs to lift your study performance; these short-term fixes inevitably lead to poor performance in the long run.

ON EXAM DAY
- Organise the things you need to bring with you on exam day and get them ready the night before.
- Eat a healthy, light breakfast to enhance your energy and concentration.
- Go to the toilet before the exam starts.
- If you feel yourself getting worried before your exam, spend some time focussing on your breathing.
- When you sit down to do your exam, take time to slow your breathing and relax.
- Read through the exam paper carefully; underline keywords and instructions.
- Work out how long you have for each question or section.
- Make time to re-read answers through and make changes.
- Work on the questions that you find easiest first.
- When you get stuck on an exam question, think about the important concepts and key topics.

SOURCES

Compiled by The Spinney Press.
EXPLORING ISSUES

WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES

The Exploring Issues section comprises a range of ready-to-use worksheets featuring activities which relate to facts and views raised in this book.

The exercises presented in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond. Some of the activities may be explored either individually or as a group.

As the information in this book is compiled from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Is the information cited from a primary or secondary source? Are you being presented with facts or opinions?

Is there any evidence of a particular bias or agenda? What are your own views after having explored the issues?

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Brainstorm, individually or as a group, to find out what you know about stress and young people.

1. What is stress? List at least six (6) signs that may indicate someone is experiencing stress. Include examples of behavioural, emotional and physical signs in your answer.

2. What is the ‘fight or flight’ response, and how does it relate to stress?

3. What is mindfulness, and how can it be used in relation to stress?

4. Provide an explanation of how some stress can be positive. Include examples in your answer.

5. What does the term ‘stress audit’ mean, and when can a ‘stress audit’ be helpful?
Complete the following activities on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

“By learning to recognise what is normal stress and when something is abnormal, action can be taken to manage the changes needed. Learning how to respond appropriately will help to ‘stress down’, build personal resilience and improve health.”

Lifeline, *Overcoming Stress.*

Consider the above statement and in the spaces below write one to two paragraphs explaining ways you could manage stress in the following situations. Provide examples of possible stress-related responses, symptoms, and actions that could be taken to manage the stress experienced. Identify specific aspects of stress responses and assess if they have negative and/or positive impacts in each situation.

**PRESENTING A SPEECH**

**HAVING AN ARGUMENT WITH A FRIEND**

**COMPETING IN A SPORTING EVENT**

**ATTENDING A JOB INTERVIEW**
Complete the following activities on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

“Two-thirds of young people are now experiencing “worrying levels” of exam stress, a study by youth service ReachOut has found. A national survey of 1,000 young people aged between 14 and 25 revealed those experiencing worrying levels of exam stress had increased from 51.2% in 2017 to 65.1% in 2018.”

Use this book, library resources and the internet to research effective approaches to managing common stressors in relation to exam stress. Under the headings below, identify at least three (3) related techniques you feel could assist in managing or coping with exam-related stress.

Keep in mind that everyone responds to stress in different ways; for this project, identify ways that would personally assist with your own stress management. Compile and present your findings in a few paragraphs in the space below. Cite your sources with references, and explain the reasons why the techniques you have identified could help you to positively respond to exam stress.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING (exercise, nutrition, relaxation)

PLANNING AND TIME MANAGEMENT (goals, schedules, preparation)

SOCIAL (friends/family, study groups, professional help)
Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of the next page.

1. One of the biggest causes of stress in teenagers is not getting enough sleep. Which of the following is the approximate amount of sleep recommended for teenagers?
   a. 3 hours  
   b. 5 hours  
   c. 7 hours  
   d. 9 hours  
   e. 11 hours  
   f. 13 hours

2. Stress can affect which of the following bodily systems? (Select any that apply)
   a. Respiratory system  
   b. Behavioural system  
   c. Muscular system  
   d. Cardiovascular system  
   e. Endocrine system  
   f. Environmental system  
   g. Digestive system  
   h. Immune system  
   i. Reproductive system

3. Which of the following are positive tips for exam preparation? (Select any that apply)
   a. Create a study timetable  
   b. Cram  
   c. Procrastinate  
   d. Study with your phone off  
   e. Eat well  
   f. Regular exercise  
   g. Use relaxation techniques  
   h. Drink alcohol  
   i. Organise study sessions

4. Which of the following could be used as calming, relaxation techniques? (Select any that apply)
   a. Meditation  
   b. High-intensity interval training  
   c. Focussed breathing  
   d. Mindfulness  
   e. Yoga  
   f. Tai chi  
   g. Colouring in  
   h. Partying

5. What is the name given to the type of therapy, often used for anxiety-related problems, that teaches people to change unhelpful thinking patterns and develop personal coping strategies?
   a. Unhelpful thinking therapy  
   b. Cognitive behavioural therapy  
   c. Stress therapy  
   d. Exam therapy  
   e. Hormone replacement therapy  
   f. Anxiety therapy
6. What is a ‘mind map’?
   a. Another term for a brain scan
   b. A way to collect ideas and thoughts
   c. A medical drawing of your brain
   d. A diagram displaying your weekly schedule
   e. Another term for a portrait

7. Which of the following foods contain potassium, which is known to assist with improving mental fatigue, anxiety and mood? (Select any that apply)
   a. Apples
   b. Lettuce
   c. Broccoli
   d. Bananas
   e. Pineapple
   f. Potatoes
   g. Cranberries

8. Respond to the following statements by circling either ‘True’ or ‘False’:
   a. Anxiety and stress are the same thing. True / False
   b. Children who receive help with their homework from their parents perform worse than those who do it on their own. True / False
   c. Mindful eating is the process of sitting down at a table to eat a meal without engaging in any other activities – no phone, book, TV, radio, music, or talking – and paying full attention to the food you are eating. True / False
   d. Cortisol is a natural body chemical that puts your body on extra alert; regular release of cortisol over a long time can weaken your immune system. True / False
   e. Boys generally suffer greater academic anxiety than girls. True / False
   f. Roughly one in five students drop out of university in Australia in their first year. True / False

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS

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Stress is a process, not a diagnosis. We experience stress when there is an imbalance between the demands being made on us and our resources to cope with those demands. The level and extent of stress a person may feel depends on their experience of a particular situation. (Better Health Channel, *Stress: a fact sheet*). (p.1)

Stress in the workplace is common and is caused by many different factors, including excessive hours, conflicts with others and feelings of isolation (*ibid*). (p.3)

Dealing with stress effectively can be complicated, but usually involves general measures to improve your overall wellbeing, and specific steps to deal with particular challenging situations (myDr, *Mental health: stress*). (pp. 4-5)

If not addressed, prolonged chronic stress can lead to structural and functional changes inside the brain. These changes can play a role in the development of or trigger several physical and mental illnesses including: depression, anxiety, schizophrenia; autism spectrum illnesses; hypertension; cardiovascular diseases; endothelial dysfunction; and sleeping problems (Black Dog Institute, *Stress and its impact on you*). (p.6)

When we feel stressed and under pressure the nervous system releases stress hormones including adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. These hormones produce physiological changes in our bodies to physically help us cope with a perceived threat or danger, known as the ‘fight-or-flight’ response or ‘stress response’ (Holly Blake/The Conversation, *Stress and your physical health*). (p.8)

Some of the things that cause stress in teenagers include study worries, social media, caring for other family members, friendships, family conflict, body image, work, bullying, discrimination, alcohol and other drug use, tension between cultural worlds, high personal expectations or high expectations from parents, teachers and friends (Raising Children Network, *Stress in teenagers*). (p.10)

One of the reasons why people have a hard time ending stress is that they are not addressing the core issues within their lives. Following are six categories of stress which may be combined in people’s lives: work/study-related stress; relationship/family-related stress; environment-related stress; psychological stress; financial stress; and health-related stress (The Spinney Press, *Anxiety versus stress*). (p.12)

Burnout can have serious consequences, including reduced work performance and life satisfaction, and has been associated with other mental health conditions. For instance, it has been linked to depression, as both conditions share a number of symptoms such as fatigue, social withdrawal and decreased work performance (Gabriela Tavella & Gordon Parker/The Conversation, *Extinguished and ashamed: what is burnout and what can we do about it?*). (p.13)

Signs of stress are usually experienced as physical, mental, emotional or behavioural changes from what’s normal for us. Some of these signs may include: lack of motivation; moodiness, increased or erratic emotions; increased irritability or frustration; inability to sleep or too much sleep; difficulty concentrating; headaches; anxiousness or feeling overwhelmed; not coping with demands and responsibilities; reliance on alcohol or other substances to cope; increased eating, drinking or nervous habits (Lifeline, *Overcoming stress*). (p.16)

Here are some practical tips for managing stress and maintaining your health and staying resilient: talk to someone you trust; have a health check with your general practitioner; take up regular physical exercise; try to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet; find time to do activities you enjoy (*ibid*). (pp. 18-19)

Although the cause of the anxiety won’t disappear, you will probably feel more able to deal with it once you’ve released the tension in your body and cleared your thoughts. Many relaxation techniques combine breathing more deeply with relaxing muscles. Don’t worry if you find it difficult to relax at first. It’s a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice (healthdirect, *Relaxation techniques for stress relief*). (p.28)

68% of Australian teenagers said they feel very anxious about tests even if they are well prepared, compared with an average of 35.5% of students across OECD countries. 47% of Australian students say they get very tense when they study, higher than the average of 37% (The Spinney Press/OECD, *Wellbeing report results for Aussie school students*). (p.33)

To reduce stress and prepare for exams, ensure that you’re as organised as you can be, learn more about planning and looking after yourself and about staying focused in order to be as ready for the exam as you can be (headspace, *How to reduce stress and prepare for exams*). (p.35)

Starting university is a common cause of heightened stress. There are many new challenges to overcome, such as adjusting to a new learning environment that has less personalised assistance and greater emphasis on independent learning. It’s also challenging to be in a course with hundreds of other students you don’t know (Vivian Wuthrich/The Conversation, *Early intervention is key to support students with anxiety about starting university*). (p.43)

Transitions to university are difficult for most, but stress should be temporary. If your child has anxiety or had difficulties coping with Year 12, it’s important to seek help to prepare them for the challenges of university before they begin (*ibid*). (p.44)

Of Australia’s 1.4 million university students approximately three in five are aged between 15 and 24 years and at least one in four of these young people will experience mental ill-health in any one year. Students with an experience of mental ill-health have been shown to be more likely to leave, consider exiting, or exit their course early (ABC News/Hack, *Rent, debt, jobs, study: why uni students are feeling more stressed*). (p.47)
Acute stress
Brief period of stress related to a specific situation caused by an unexpected stressor, that causes an immediate and dangerous increase in stress response. Episodic acute stress occurs when a person suffers acute stress more frequently.

Adrenaline
Hormone responsible for physiological changes associated with the alarm response. It increases the concentration of sugar in the blood, raises blood pressure and heart rate, and increases muscular power and resistance to fatigue.

Anxiety
Sustained or traumatic stress can develop into an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders differ from everyday anxiety because they are more severe, can persist and interfere with daily life. They include panic disorder, specific phobias, agoraphobia, social anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, acute stress disorder and generalised anxiety disorder.

Burnout
State of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. Burnout occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained and unable to meet constant demands.

Chronic stress
Chronic, or ongoing stress, is caused by continual pressures or demands that go on for long periods and which can wear people down. Chronic stress is slower to build than acute stress but is more enduring. It is often more harmful because we are unaware of the build-up of the stressors and our response to them. When treating a person with chronic stress, health professionals typically consider wide-ranging lifestyle changes.

Coping
Cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage external or internal demands that are evaluated as challenging or exceeding the resources of a person.

Cortisol
Steroid hormone released from the adrenal cortex in response to stress. Stressors which can stimulate the release of this hormone can include drastic changes in temperature, heavy exercising or even falling in love.

Distress
Distress is bad stress, and occurs when the normal eustress (good stress) chemicals produced by the body reach overload levels, but are unable to be dispersed. In a state of distress, the body starts sending out alarm signals in the form of aches, pains, illnesses and mental and emotional disorders. In time, if not dealt with, the immune system begins to break down. The brain puts up all manner of defences and the chronic stress sufferer can experience serious physical, mental and emotional effects.

Eustress
Also known as beneficial stress, eustress comes from facing a positive challenge, which can cause nervousness or excitement, and improve motivation and performance. Eustress is ‘good stress’ as it produces a natural high and does not cause ill health, while distress is damaging and can have serious effects.

Mental health
State of emotional and social wellbeing in which you realise your own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and are able to make a contribution to your community.

Psychological distress
General term used to describe unpleasant feelings or emotions that impact your level of functioning.

Resilience
Ability to cope or ‘bounce back’ after encountering negative events, difficult situations, challenges or adversity and to return to almost the same level of emotional wellbeing; the capacity to respond and adapt to difficult circumstances and still thrive.

Self-talk
Self-talk is the voice inside our heads that tells us how we are going. Negative self-talk includes pessimistic thinking that focuses on the worst and blaming yourself, and exaggerating what is wrong and ignoring what is right. Positive self-talk includes optimistic thinking about your circumstances and efforts, being grateful for the positives, and recognising your personal strengths and being realistic about your levels of responsibility.

Stress
Our body’s response to a demand placed on it. Often confused with anxiety, stress is not actually a diagnosable mental illness. Stress is a normal condition which we all experience at various times and to differing degrees. Stress involves an emotional, physical or mental response to events that cause bodily or mental tension. It can be thought of as a state of readiness – the ‘fight-or-flight’ response. A small amount of stress from time to time is not problematic, and can actually motivate us to get things done. But when stress is intense and ongoing, it can impact physical and mental health.

Stress response
The fight-or-flight response (also called hyperarousal, or the acute stress response) is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack, or threat to survival.

Stressors
A stressor is the source of an individual’s stress; the factor or situation which in some cases can have a positive effect on you and motivate you, but at other levels will affect you negatively.

Treatment for stress
Approaches which may effectively treat and reduce stress include cognitive behavioural stress management (CBSM), stress inoculation training (SIT), mindfulness-based stress reduction, and a range of relaxation-based approaches.
Websites with further information on the topic

Australian Psychological Society  www.psychology.org.au
Be You  www.beyou.edu.au
Better Health Channel  www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Beyond Blue  www.beyondblue.org.au
Black Dog Institute  www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
Head to Health  www.headtohealth.gov.au
Headspace, National Youth Mental Health Foundation  www.headspace.org.au
Heads Up  www.headsup.org.au
HealthDirect  www.healthdirect.gov.au
Kids Helpline  www.kidshelpline.com.au
Lifeline  www.lifeline.org.au
Orygen, National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health  www.orygen.org.au
Parenting and Child Health  www.cyh.com
ParentLink  www.parentlink.act.gov.au
Raising Children Network  www.raisingchildren.net.au
ReachOut Australia  www.reachout.com.au
Student Wellbeing Hub  www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au
This Way Up  www.thiswayup.org.au
Way Ahead (Mental Health Association NSW)  www.wayahead.org.au
Youth BeyondBlue  www.youthbeyondblue.com

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