

Coping with stress and anxiety

What is stress?

Stress is our body's natural response to pressures from a situation or life event. Many things can lead to stress – for example, upcoming examinations, project deadline, an upcoming competition or a recent conflict with a friend or family member.

The stress response can be appropriate at times and can help us push through situations that can be nerve wrecking such as giving a speech to a large crowd, or completing a 100m sprint. However, there are times when stress becomes excessive or persistent. Over time, this can make us feel overwhelmed or unable to cope.

Sometimes, we may not realise we are stressed.

- Are you having difficulty sleeping?
- Do you feel more easily agitated?
- Are you making more mistakes?
- Do you constantly feel tense and on the go?
- Do you find yourself not enjoying time spent with friends or family?

More “yes” answers may indicate that stress is affecting you negatively.

How can stress affect my body?

Our minds are connected to our bodies and mental stress can lead to negative effects on our bodies. Different people respond to

stress differently. Some common symptoms of stress include:

- Headaches
- Nausea or abdominal pain
- Feeling breathless
- Heart racing
- Frequent body aches and pain

What can I do to cope with stress?

1. Focus on your basic needs

- Ensure you eat healthily.
- Avoid caffeinated drinks and irregular mealtimes.
- Exercise regularly.
- Keep a healthy sleep routine. Ensure a minimum of 8 hours of sleep a night. Most teenagers need 9-10 hours of sleep each night.

2. Prioritise responsibilities

- Knock out smaller or quicker tasks off your to-do lists. This will help to clear your mind to focus on larger responsibilities.
- Having too many tasks and ‘to-dos’ can often be stressful, even if none of them are very big.
- Draw up a plan of how you are going to manage your work and decide which work requires the most immediate action.
- Learn to say no or ask for help if you cannot cope.

3. Keep a diary to track what triggers your symptoms, stress or anxiety

- Having a diary can help identify possible triggers for your symptoms. Your diary may also help you notice some things you do that make you feel better. For example, some people feel much better after exercise. Exercise is one way to relieve stress.

4. Set aside time for yourself

- Schedule in personal time to relax and engage in activities that you enjoy. This excludes online gaming or use of electronic gadgets.
- Make time to listen to music, read, play with your pet or spend time with family and friends.
- Try some relaxation techniques to help you unwind. The Clear Fear App is a good resource of such exercises.
- Make sure you build in some breaks to relax during the day.

4. Build supportive relationships

- Find close friends or family who can offer help and practical advice.
- Talking about what makes us stressed, even if they are not able to be resolved, helps to reduce our stress levels.

Seek help

It is okay, not to be okay.

Do not be afraid to seek help if you feel that you are no longer able to manage things on your own.

It is important not to ignore physical warning signs such as feeling over-tired, headaches and poor sleep. **Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.**

Some professionals you may consider approaching include:

-School counsellor

-Family service centre

-Family doctor

-If your symptoms worsen, see a family doctor or a doctor at a polyclinic so that they may refer you on to a specialist if necessary.

Useful resources suitable for young people:

1)CHAT www.chat.mentalhealth.sg

CHAT, is a national outreach and mental health check program which helps young people 16 to 30 years old in Singapore with mental health concerns.

2)Smiling Mind

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app>

This is a free mindfulness app suitable for children and young people, developed by a non-profit organization which runs youth-based mindfulness programs in Australia.

3)Clear Fear <https://www.clearfear.co.uk/>

This is a free app to help children and young people manage the symptoms of anxiety. It is developed Stem4, a charity that promotes positive mental health in teenagers in the UK.

1)Mindline

<https://www.mindline.sg/>

This website is a trusted platform with many resources to improve the emotional wellbeing of people in Singapore. You can also learn more about coping with low mood and stress through the online self-assessment tool.

Counselling helplines

-TOUCHline (TOUCH Youth)
1800-377 2252
cyberwellness@touch. org. sg

-Tinkle Friend (For primary school students) 1800 2744 4788

-The National Care Hotline 6202 6868

-SOS (Samaritans of Singapore)
1800 221 4444
Open daily, 24 hours