



BY SARA ROWE

You have a busy life—school, sports, after school activities and clubs, hobbies, family, and friends. Sometimes things are just too busy, the pressure to perform well is too much, and struggles in your family and friendships are overwhelming. And so enters stress.

What is *stress*, exactly?

The stress response, or fight-or-flight response, activates the nervous system and releases hormones to put the body on high alert in threatening situations. This is great when you are in a dangerous situation because it helps you think and react quickly. But when the stress response is active a lot because of perpetual tough stuff in your life, it can take a toll on your body. Your immune system is weakened, and you may feel tired and overwhelmed all the time.

If you're stressed, you aren't alone. The American Psychological Association did a survey in 2009 about the impact of school struggles and financial difficulties on the stress levels of preteens and teens. The survey found that 26% of preteens, aged 8–12, were more stressed than they were the year before, and 45% of teens 13–17 felt the same way.

Dr. Kathleen Hall, the founder of the Stress Institute says, "The top stressors in adolescents are: school work, parents, romantic relationships, problems with friends, and struggles with siblings."

STORM



See what major stressors (events or situations in your life that can cause stress) you may have in your life by using the major stressors checklist.

All of these serious life events can cause stress. Because everyone has a unique personality and unique

circumstances behind the stuff that is happening in their lives, everyone handles serious life events differently. How can you know if you may need some extra help? If you are experiencing the symptoms below, you may want to talk to someone about what's going on in your life.

Do you feel...

- ☺ Angry, worried, or sad a lot of the time?
- ☺ Like you don't want to spend time with your friends or family anymore and just want to be alone?
- ☺ Like you overreact to things that happen to you and start arguments more?

Are you experiencing...

- ☺ Headaches?
- ☺ Diarrhea, constipation, or stomach pain?
- ☺ Not being able to get to sleep at night or waking up a lot during the night?
- ☺ Weight loss or gain?
- ☺ More frequent skin breakouts?
- ☺ Tiredness or exhaustion during the day?

Major Stressors Checklist

Check any that you have experienced in the last year:

- More frequent arguments between your parents
- More frequent arguments with your parents and/or siblings
- Moving and/or starting a new school
- Parents divorcing and/or re-marrying
- Challenging school work or disappointing grades
- Death of a parent, friend, or family member
- Bullying or trouble with friends at school
- Major illness suffered by you or a close family member
- Change in your family's financial situation





Dr. Hall's Rx for Stress

Dr. Kathleen Hall says, "If these symptoms are minor, the family may be able to manage them at home. If these symptoms become [more frequent] and grow in intensity, a therapist and/or physician should be consulted."

Therapist Jody Miller believes that the first step to take if you are experiencing stress is to talk to an adult you trust, preferably a parent. But if this is not an option, she says, "I would suggest

the adolescent finds an adult mentor, whether in the family, school, a coach or club—someone they feel they can trust—and then open up to that person and ask questions, tell their problems to, discuss choices. It beats all the alternative stress relievers by a mile."

The top thing that Dr. Hall recommends to do at home to relieve stress symptoms is meditation. This is Dr. Hall's method for meditation: "First, go to a place where you can be silent for a few moments. Choose a simple short phrase or word that creates calm for you, (such as peace, happiness, and relax, or any favorite saying you love). Close your eyes, take deep cleansing breaths, to the count of 1-2-3-4. As you inhale, continue to repeat your favorite word or phrase. As worries, anxiety, or thoughts appear in your mind, continue taking deep breaths and repeat your word/words over and over again."



1 Exercising.

Get moving and you will reduce stress immediately and also fortify your body against future stress. Pick an activity that you like to do, such as walking, running, cycling, dance, or swimming. Yoga also is a great exercise for stress reduction because it can relax your tense muscles and calm your mind at the same time!

There are also many other changes you can make in your life to relieve the stress symptoms you're feeling. These are only a few examples:

2 Music.

Listening to your favorite calming music or water and nature sounds is very relaxing.



3 Have me time.

Find creative hobbies such as journaling, art or crafts, or other activities that you enjoy doing and make time for them every day. It will allow you to express yourself and your feelings in a creative way and can become a time of calm on the busiest days.



4 Friends and family.

Get support from your friends and family. Being able to connect with other people who care about you, whether face-to-face or on the phone, can release good hormones in your body and improve your mood.



5 Eat healthy.

What you feed your body can have a big impact on how it feels. To cut down on stress, always eat breakfast and eat more Omega 3s (fish, nuts) and Vitamin B6 (bananas, turkey, rice, sweet potatoes).