

Stress

Sometimes everything seems to go wrong at once. Maybe you have got behind with school work, fallen out with a friend, lost something you really liked and you're in trouble at home too. It's like building a line of dominoes then giving one a tap and they all fall down one after the other.

As more things happen we get more stressed, which means we get too tired and can't think properly, which means more things go wrong!

What happens when you feel stressed?

When you get worried or stressed out about something it affects your body in a number of ways.

- Your heart beats faster.
- Muscles tense.
- Your stomach feels tight or you feel sick.
- Your breathing gets faster.
- You sweat more.
- It is hard to get to sleep, or you wake up feeling like you didn't really sleep because you still feel tired.
- It's hard to concentrate on any one thing.

What can you do if you feel stressed?

- Think about what it is that's making you feel bad.
- Talk over your problem with a friend or a trusted adult.
- Get help to deal with the problem if you need it.
- Plan your work if you are getting behind.
- Set yourself some goals to work your way through the problem.
- Make sure that you are getting enough exercise.
- Organise your time so that you can fit everything in.
- Don't take on too much. You can always do that sport or activity next term or next year. You don't have to do everything at once.
- Don't say 'yes' when you'd rather say 'no', and then you won't be worrying.
- Learn to relax.

Relaxation

There are different things you can do to relax.

Exercise is great and it can help you sleep if you are doing some as part of your day.

Exercise which gets you to move about (dancing, running, jumping, walking and bike riding) is very good, but if you are not an active person then here are some ideas for you.

You can also do Isometrics exercises, which use your muscles against something that doesn't move, eg like trying to pull your hands apart when your fingers are holding on to each other.

Why not put on your music and really groove? Pretend you're a real dancer and really go for it. Apart from great exercise dancing is great fun too.

Rest and relaxation

If you are getting stressed out or you are having problems sleeping, maybe it's time to change your life a bit by doing something different.

- Try a new hobby or interest.
- Take up a new activity or stop one that you are not enjoying (stopping going to school is not an option here!!!).

Set yourself some goals like:

- making new friends
- keeping up with school work
- getting your chores done right away
- organising your room so that you can 'find' the bed!
- talking through things, which are worrying you. (Often you find solutions while you are talking or you realise that this is not such a big deal after all).
- Making lists of what you need to do, and ticking off tasks as they are done.
- learn how to relax by doing relaxation exercises.

Relaxation exercises

You can do these sitting in a chair but they are really good if you are lying down on the floor, or especially if you are in bed and trying to sleep.

You can play some quiet, restful music or have no sound at all.

This is what you do:

- Find a quiet place.
- Sit or lie down (on your back or your tummy, whichever is most comfortable for you.)
- Close your eyes, put your arms by your sides and legs out straight.
- Breathe deeply in and out while you count to 20. Breathe in - 1, breathe out - 2... and so on.
- Let your body go loose and floppy and slow your breathing down.

Now it's time to start

- Starting with your feet, you tense (make tight) then relax all the large muscles in your body.
- So breathe in...tense your feet and hold while you count to 5 slowly.
- Breathe out, and relax your feet while you count to 5 slowly.
- Go to the next set of muscles - calf muscles, and do the same thing.
- Work your way up the body until you have tensed and relaxed every group of muscles.

You should be feeling pretty relaxed by now but you can go through the whole thing again if you need to.

When you get really good at this you can move on to the next step. When you have done your routine think of a really peaceful place, like a small stream. Imagine you are lying in a boat just floating quietly along, feeling the water rocking you gently with the sun keeping you warm and no sound except for the sound of the river.

You can choose your own safe and warm place like a nice quiet beach or in a forest.

It's your mind so you can choose.

This is a very good exercise for you to do and it will help you to relax but it may take a bit of practice, so don't give up if it doesn't seem to work too well at first.

Stress can be positive

Ask any athlete, actor, musician or other performer and they will tell you that stress can be a very positive force. When all that adrenaline is flooding the body it helps muscles to work harder and faster, speeds up reaction times and can improve performance.

The trick is learning to use all that positive energy and not allowing stress to become an uncontrolled negative force which leads to mistakes.

Practising skills makes it easier to use stress in a positive way whether you are giving a talk to the class, performing in front of an audience or trying to improve sporting abilities. In other words, if you know your stuff you can use stress to be the best that you can be.

Learning to relax is a very important skill. Soft, calming music could help you or maybe mum has some music or sounds of nature that she uses to help her relax. Maybe you could make the time to relax together. Reading a book is a good way to relax too.