

Reducing Anxiety

Stress and anxiety are common experiences for most people – here are some simple steps we can take to relieve the symptoms.

Exercise - The benefits are strongest when you exercise regularly. People who exercise regularly are less likely to experience anxiety than those who don't. There are a few reasons behind this:

- **Stress hormones:** Exercise lowers your body's stress hormones such as cortisol in the long run. It also helps release endorphins, which are chemicals that improve your mood and act as natural painkillers.
- **Sleep:** Exercise can also [improve your sleep quality](#), which can be negatively affected by stress and anxiety.
- **Confidence:** When you exercise regularly, you may feel more competent and confident in your body, which in turn promotes mental wellbeing. Try to find an [exercise routine](#) or activity you enjoy, such as walking, dancing, rock climbing or yoga.

Reduce Your Caffeine Intake

[Caffeine](#) is a stimulant found in coffee, tea, chocolate and energy drinks. High doses can increase anxiety. People have different thresholds for how much caffeine they can tolerate. If you notice that caffeine makes you jittery or anxious, consider cutting back. Although many studies show that [coffee can be healthy](#) in moderation, it's not for everyone. In general, five or fewer cups per day is considered a moderate amount.

Chew Gum

For a super easy and quick stress reliever, try [chewing a stick of gum](#). One study showed that people who chewed gum had a greater sense of wellbeing and lower stress. One possible explanation is that chewing gum causes brain waves similar to those of relaxed people. Another is that chewing gum promotes blood flow to your brain.

Spend Time With Friends and Family

Social support from friends and family can help you get through stressful times. Being part of a friend network gives you a sense of belonging and self-worth, which can help you in [tough times](#). One study found that for women in particular, spending time with friends and children helps release oxytocin, a natural stress reliever. This effect is called "tend and befriend," and is the opposite of the fight-or-flight response. Keep in mind that both men and women benefit from friendship. Another study found that men and women with the fewest social connections were more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety.

Laugh

It's hard to feel anxious when you're laughing. It's good for your health, relieves your stress response and relieves tension by relaxing your muscles. In the long term, laughter can also help improve your [immune system](#) and mood. A study among people with cancer found that people in the laughter intervention group experienced more stress relief than those who were simply distracted. Try watching a funny TV show or hanging out with friends who make you laugh.

Learn to Say No

Not all stressors are within your control, but some are. Take control over the parts of your life that you can change and are causing you stress. One way to do this may be to say "no" more often. This is especially true if you find yourself taking on more than you can handle, as juggling many responsibilities can leave you feeling overwhelmed. Being selective about what you take on — and saying no to things that will unnecessarily add to your load — can reduce your stress levels.

Deep Breathing

Mental stress activates your sympathetic nervous system, signalling your body to go into "fight-or-flight" mode. During this reaction, stress hormones are released and you experience physical symptoms such as a faster heartbeat, quicker breathing and constricted blood vessels. Deep breathing exercises can help activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which controls the relaxation response. There are several types of deep breathing exercises, including diaphragmatic breathing, abdominal breathing, belly breathing and paced respiration. The goal of deep breathing is to focus your awareness on your breath, making it slower and deeper. When you breathe in deeply through your nose, your lungs fully expand and your belly rises. This helps slow your heart rate, allowing you to feel more peaceful.

Learn to Avoid Procrastination

Another way to take control of your stress is to stay on top of your priorities and stop procrastinating. Procrastination can lead you to act reactively, leaving you scrambling to catch up. This can cause stress, which negatively affects your health and sleep quality. Get in the habit of making a to-do list organized by priority. Give yourself realistic deadlines and work your way down the list. Work on the things that need to get done today and give yourself chunks of uninterrupted time, as switching between tasks or multitasking can be stressful itself.

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness describes practices that anchor you to the present moment. It can help combat the anxiety-inducing effects of negative thinking. There are several methods for increasing mindfulness, including mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, yoga and [meditation](#). A recent study in college students suggested that mindfulness may help increase self-esteem, which in turn lessens symptoms of anxiety and depression.

5 Foods That Help Reduce Anxiety

Salmon

Salmon may be beneficial for reducing anxiety. It contains nutrients that promote brain health, including **vitamin D** and the **omega-3 fatty acids**. Additionally, studies show these fatty acids can reduce inflammation and prevent brain cell dysfunction that leads to the development of mental disorders like anxiety. Consuming adequate amounts oily fish may also promote your brain's ability to adapt to changes, allowing you to better handle stressors that trigger anxiety symptoms. **Vitamin D** has also been studied for the positive effects it may have on improving levels of calming neurotransmitters.

Chamomile

Chamomile is an herb that may help reduce anxiety. It contains high amounts of antioxidants proven to reduce inflammation, which might decrease the risk of anxiety. Several studies have examined the association between chamomile and anxiety relief.

Dark Chocolate

Incorporating some dark chocolate into your diet may also be helpful for easing anxiety. Dark chocolate contains flavonols, which are antioxidants that may benefit brain function. They do this by improving blood flow to the brain and promoting its ability to adapt to stressful situations. These effects may allow you to adjust better to the stressful situations that can lead to anxiety and other mood disorders. For example, in a study of highly stressed individuals, participants reported significantly lower levels of stress after consuming 40 grams of dark chocolate every day over a two-week period.

Yogurt

If you suffer from anxiety, yogurt is a great food to include in your diet. The probiotics, or healthy bacteria, found in some types of yogurt can improve several aspects of your well-being, including [mental health](#). Studies have shown that probiotic foods like yogurt may promote mental health and brain function by inhibiting free radicals and neurotoxins, which can damage nerve tissue in the brain and lead to anxiety.

Green Tea

Green tea contains L-theanine, an amino acid that has been studied for the positive effects it may have on brain health and anxiety reduction. In one small study, people who consumed L-theanine experienced a reduction in psychological stress responses that are commonly associated with anxiety, such as increased heart rate. Another study found that those who drank a beverage that contained L-theanine had [decreased levels of cortisol](#), a stress hormone linked with anxiety.

COPING WITH STRESS

Family upheaval, exams, broken friendships, new school, money worries. They are all different situations, but they have one thing in common – they bring mental or emotional strains or tension, otherwise known as stress. Most people will experience this at some point in their lives and a certain amount can be healthy, but there can be times when it seems like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. The important thing to remember is that you're not alone – according to a 2016 survey by YouGov, six in every 10 students say they experience levels of stress that interfere with everyday life – and there's no reason to be embarrassed.

What is stress?

Sometimes everything feels too much. Your parents want you to do things. Your school puts pressure on you. You want to keep up with friends. You're being pulled from different angles and the pressure mounts. Life feels out of control and situations are overwhelming. You feel... stressed.

Is feeling stressed quite common?

Feeling stressed often comes when things change – right now, it might seem that everything is changing as you drift between childhood and adulthood. Sometimes you wish you were small (and maybe safe) again, sometimes you feel strong and grown up. Your body is changing. People start asking more of you. Your feelings get more intense and can be difficult to express or control. You start discovering who you are – and who you'd like to become. None of this is easy. So, no wonder you're encountering new levels of stress in your life. **You're not alone.**

Does that mean that some stress is natural then?

It's very natural to experience some stress when you face new challenges – as you stretch yourself to take on more responsibility or try new things. Feeling stressed for a short period of time can even help by making you feel more alert and propelling you to take action. Remember, the brain actually likes solving problems. Everyone has different thresholds for stress. You may be able to cope with more than a friend, for example, but less than someone older than you. The good news is that no matter your current level, you can learn how to handle stress better. Learning to face stress and deal with it will make you more flexible and less frightened. You'll discover an innate strength and courage to be proud of.

How do I recognise if I am stressed?

Stress changes shape and it manifests in different ways – both emotionally and physically. Here are some signs that you might be feeling stressed:

- lack of focus
- disturbed sleep, constantly tired
- lots of worrying
- snappier or more tearful than usual
- more withdrawn
- feeling lonely and alone (with no one to talk to)
- feeling down on yourself
- eating more or less than usual
- not able to disconnect from social media
- more controlling or obsessive or risky behaviours

What do I do if I feel stressed?

The first thing to do is to tune into, and then voice, how you feel. Take a moment now if you're feeling stressed. Do you feel a physical sensation – or are you snappy with those around you? Are you feeling lonely and withdrawn, or are you acting out? When people come for help, it is important to explore what is troubling them and to focus on aspects of health such as getting good-quality sleep, regular exercise and cutting down on sugar. Simple breathing exercises like counting in for three seconds, and out for five seconds, can really help to calm you down if you are feeling stressed.

What if my stress doesn't ease?

If you feel your stress is long-lasting or serious, speak to a responsible adult, whether that be a relative or teacher. Listen carefully to the advice they give, even if you don't like what they have to say at first. Test their ideas out as an experiment – and come up with your own ideas. They may encourage you to see a GP who may in turn suggest seeking professional advice to help you reduce your symptoms and get to the root cause of your stress. Try to make sure you're involved with any decision-making and are comfortable with the options offered.

And what about the future?

Your young adult years are a period of amazing growth and change. It's likely to be stressful at times, but with help this can be managed and it will pass. Above all, remember that this is all part of becoming you.

Taken from Teenbreathe Issue 2

- *Words: Renée van der Vlood*



I choose.....

To live by choice, not be chance

To be motivated, not manipulated

To be useful, not used

To make changes, not excuses

To excel, not compete

I choose self-esteem, not self pity

**I choose to listen to my inner voice, not to
the random opinion of others.**



TIPS FOR A GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP

- Make sure your bedroom is cool, dark and quiet – there shouldn't be any noise to disturb your sleep. Consider introducing soothing scents to help you to relax.
- Try to go to bed at about the same time every night so your body and mind know when to get ready to slow down.
- Avoid heavy meals in the evening as a full stomach can be uncomfortable and disrupt your sleeping patterns.
- Have a relaxing bedtime routine and avoid activities that keep the mind whirring, like watching TV, using a phone or playing video games.
- A bath is a great way to unwind both mind and body.
- If you're a worrier, try writing to-do lists for the next day. Once your tasks are on paper – or in your phone – they'll be less likely to cloud your mind and keep you awake.
- Exercising during the day will help and simple breathing exercises or a mindful body scan just before going to bed are also useful
- Still can't sleep? Don't worry. Just try to keep your thoughts positive and concentrate on one or two things that brought you happiness or reassurance during the day.

