



# Maine Source

Mission: A collaborative community effort to increase overall community capacity for advocacy, education, guidance, and resources for families to promote drug and alcohol-free youth

Winter 08-09 Issue

## Teens and Stress What to Look for, How to Help

'Tis the season to be...stressed out. How do you cope with stress? How about your teen? Stress is something we all live with, but even people who normally cope well can reach their limit around the holidays. Families with high school seniors may be under extra stress with college deadlines looming.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), stress is the body's physical and psychological response to anything - good or bad - perceived as overwhelming. Stress has physical as well as emotional effects. Teens have less experience in coping with stress and fewer proven strategies than adults.

Today, there is tremendous pressure to fit in and succeed. In addition, teens are dealing with developmental changes. No wonder they're at special risk for feeling overwhelmed! A certain amount of stress may help keep teens motivated, but too much may have the opposite effect and interfere with their relationships and physical health.

Many teens find healthy ways of coping. However, if stress becomes unmanageable, and without guidance from a parent or other caring adult, their coping mechanisms might include smoking, drinking or using other drugs.

**Recognize when your teens are testing their limits.** Do your teens get enough sleep and eat well-balanced meals – or do they stay up late, drag themselves out of bed, skip breakfast and run? Does their schedule offer breaks to restore their energy, or do they run from one class, extracurricular activity, chore, or job to another from morning to night?

**Stress has physical as well as emotional effects. Teens have less experience in coping with stress and fewer proven strategies than adults.**

Kids usually have more energy and resiliency than adults, but we all have physical and emotional limits. If they exceed these limits, it may show up through chronic moodiness, irritability, anxiety and/or long bouts of sadness.

**Watch for physical symptoms of stress** including nightmares or other sleep problems, chronic tiredness, stomach aches and other gastrointestinal problems, headaches, dizziness, and changes in appetite.

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## When Legal Drugs Are Abused

Painkillers, steroids, weight loss and ADD/ADHD drugs, depressants prescribed for anxiety or insomnia, over-the-counter medications for nasal congestion, and other available medication can lead to many problems if abused. This is true for people of any age, but prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications can mean even more health dangers for teens.

**Prescription and over-the-counter drug use can be tempting for teens because they are often more readily accessible than illegal drugs. They are right in our own homes.**

According to the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, physical signs that your teen might be abusing prescription and/or over-the-counter drugs include

constricted pupils, slurred speech or flushed skin. Parents should also be alert to: secretiveness, changes in personality or appearance, mood swings, irritability, excessive energy, sleepiness or avoiding sleep, sweating, loss of appetite, forgetfulness, or clumsiness.

In addition, watch for signs around the house such as missing pills, unfamiliar pills, or empty cough and cold medicine bottles or packages. If your teen takes prescribed medication, keep control of the bottle. Be alert to your teen running out of pills quickly, losing pills, or requesting refills.

Drug interactions, such as with alcohol, can intensify some effects and the dangers of abuse. For more information and practical help - including a panic button - visit [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com).



### Fast Fact: Alcohol + Stimulants

Alcohol is a depressant, but teens that use alcohol and stimulants together are likely to drink more before feeling the effects of alcohol because of the stimulant. The result? When the stimulant effects wear off, the full force of the alcohol consumption kicks in.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup><http://www.oregoncounseling.org/ArticlesPapers/Documents/ETOHBIOfx.htm>

**Teens and Stress** (from pg. 1)

Allergic reactions can be attributed to stress. Some people have to get physically ill in order to feel they have permission to take a break.

Sometimes a rest break helps, while other times a run, swim or other aerobic workout can do more to reduce stress. Even 20 minutes can make a difference. Don't make exercise one more thing on his or her overscheduled plate, however. A nap, run or whatever they choose is their time for self-care. It's a skill they'll need as adults, and one worth developing now.

**Be on the lookout for emotional symptoms** including anxiety or nervousness, constant worry or being easily upset, anger, or difficulty making decisions. If your teen reports feeling trapped, powerless, lonely or rejected,

suspect stress. Conversely, if your teen angrily denies emotional problems, this too may indicate stress. Depression and its many conflicting symptoms, including loss of appetite or excessive comfort eating, lethargy or insomnia, may also be signals of stress.

**Stress can be especially dangerous to teens** who are driven to meet parental or self expectations. If your teen seems seriously stressed, get him or her professional help. Check with a school counselor, social worker, or local mental health provider. Let your teens know you want them to succeed, and a successful life depends on a healthy, balanced foundation. As a parent, you are there to provide that foundation. Give them what only you may be able to give them: permission to drop an activity, slow down, or take a break. In fact, it may be time for you to join them!

**How Much Do You Know?**

If a teen is "leaning," what might he be doing?

- snorting heroin and cough medicine
- getting ready to give someone a kiss
- drinking cough syrup and soda
- getting ready to fight

The correct answer is "c".

Take the rest of the quiz at [www.theantidrug.com/RESOURCES/pdfs/teens-technology-quiz.pdf](http://www.theantidrug.com/RESOURCES/pdfs/teens-technology-quiz.pdf)

Do you have more to learn? Visit [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com) for information on the dangers of drug use and risky behaviors, including parent tips and even scripts on how to start a conversation with your teen about these issues and more. This friendly, practical site is an excellent resource to help parents stay engaged in their teen's world and raise drug-free teens.



A social norms marketing campaign to correct the misperception that "everyone drinks or uses drugs" continues at the three Maine Township High Schools. From student surveys\*, we found that **most students** make the healthy choice not to use tobacco, alcohol or other drugs.

However, when asked...

***How wrong do you think your parents feel it would be for you to drink beer, wine, or hard liquor (for example, vodka, whiskey, or gin) regularly (at least twice a month)?***

...only **57%** of students thought their parents felt it was very wrong to drink regularly.

And when asked...

***How wrong do you think your parents feel it would be for you to smoke cigarettes?***

... **71%** of students responded they thought their parents felt it was very wrong to smoke cigarettes.

When talking with your teens, send the message that underage drinking and smoking is illegal and unhealthy. State your expectations clearly that drinking under 21 and smoking are not acceptable. Establish consequences and enforce them consistently. Teenagers need guidelines to help them make good decisions, and **parents are the #1 reason** that teens decide not to use.

\*MCYAF Student Use and Perception Survey, March 2008.  
4307 Maine Township High School students surveyed

We appreciate your interest in protecting our youth and providing them the quality of life they deserve. To make a financial or in-kind donation, or to volunteer your time or talent, please contact us. Watch for our newly redesigned website coming soon at

[www.mcyaf.com](http://www.mcyaf.com).

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