



# Causes, symptoms and management of stress throughout our lives

Stress, if excessive and unmanaged, can manifest in real mental, emotional and physical conditions. But unfortunately stress is a part of every stage of our lives. Young and old alike have to face difficult situations and overcome obstacles.

## Teenagers

Even teenagers can get stressed out, thus they can definitely benefit from learning stress management skills, which will serve them well now and in the future.

School demands and social relationships these days are unlike anything that most parents could imagine. Technology, blurred boundaries, peer pressure, deadlines, lack of sleep, academic expectations to excel, and the daily bombardment of hyper sexualised media are just some of the stressors facing teens today.

Most teens do not have the skills needed to cope with teen anxiety and these kinds of stressors. Unchecked stress in teenagers can lead to **anxiety, depression, aggression, physical illness and drug and/or alcohol use**. But what can parents do for their teenage children and, more importantly, what can teenagers themselves do to manage their stress levels?

## Parents of teenagers

- Be a role model for your child. Try to remain calm when dealing with stressful situations; when stressed, demonstrate coping strategies and if you know a particularly stressful event is coming, talk with your teen about how to prepare and avoid getting stressed out.
- Monitor your teen to see if stress is affecting his/her health, behaviour, thoughts, or feelings and address it directly with them.
- Focus on the process instead of the outcome; how hard a child tries is more important than the grade they receive.
- Help teens monitor their activities in order to prevent “over scheduling”.

## Teenagers

- Slow down.
- Exercise, get plenty of rest and eat healthily.
- Avoid excess caffeine intake, which can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation.
- Avoid illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco.
- Discuss your problems with those who are there to support you.
- Set your priorities.

## Young adults and stress

Contrary to popular belief that considers these people a very privileged group, Millennials – those from ages 18 to 33 – are growing up during a very difficult time. A considerable amount of research conducted by various agencies suggest that Millennials are the most stressed of any generation and furthermore, are not having much success in relieving

their stress. Being a young adult is difficult at the best of times. If you consider that some major life decisions are made during this stage of your life, then add to the mix a poor economy, scarcity of jobs, safety concerns around crime and violence, and you end up with a large group of very stressed-out young people.

These are some of the factors that can cause worry and stress among young adults:

- Finding a job;
- Moving out of the family home;
- Saving for a deposit on a first apartment or a down payment on a first home;
- Finding a life partner;
- Determining when/if to have children;
- If they already have children, these children are likely to be young and needy in terms of time, energy, financial resources, etc;
- Deciding whether to pursue higher education and whether to settle into a particular career.

Even though Millennials are more used to talking about stress and are more aware of their psychological and emotional processes overall, the fact remains that they are highly stressed, and too much stress is not a good thing.

What can Millennials do to manage high stress levels?

- Minimise the use of unhealthy coping strategies. For instance, drinking excessive amounts of alcohol or turning to drugs leads to health problems and all sorts of addictions. If shopping, or so called “retail therapy”, is your coping strategy, then you may find yourself with a myriad of financial problems.
- Eating healthily and exercising is valuable at any stage of our lives.
- If you are in a demanding job that takes a lot of your time and energy, start exploring and applying the concept of work-life balance.
- If your stress levels are at an all-time high, consider speaking to a counsellor or consult your physician.



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We are all faced with varying causes, degrees and types of stress at different stages of our lives. How we manage stressful conditions and periods often determines whether we are able to lead normal, well-adjusted lives.

### **Middle-aged people and stress**

The physical symptoms of stress in general are well known, and are most evident in middle age for both men and women than in any other life stage. At this stage of a person's life, many men and women would most likely have figured out their routines, got their priorities in order and settled into jobs and careers. However, the stress of a demanding job, major life changes or adjustments (such as divorce etc.) and the possible stress of a mid-life crisis, can cause feelings of regret, hopelessness, or a desire to recapture youth. Also, the body is less resilient than it was at a younger age and bodily systems begin to naturally slow down. This is the time when physical changes to the body makes the ageing process more obvious (grey hair, bulging tummy, wrinkles on the skin, etc.) and many people develop aches and pains and other physical symptoms that form part of the normal ageing process. Another cause of stress in adult populations is diet and unhealthy habits that may have started in their youth.

For other people this can be a period of renewed accomplishment, on the other hand many older adults may find themselves regressing or developing dependencies.

### **What can middle-aged people do to manage their stress levels?**

Middle age is a very sensitive stage in one's life as far as stress and physical health is concerned. Unmanaged, excessive stress will raise your blood pressure and can exacerbate pre-existing health conditions. At this age men and women need to be looking after themselves by:

- Eating healthy foods;
- Exercising and avoiding excessive stress;
- Taking up a new hobby, rather than succumbing to the temptations of a mid-life crisis;
- Communicating with a partner or friends, as they too may share your feelings;
- Doing relaxation techniques, such as meditation and deep breathing, which can alleviate many physical symptoms of stress;
- Going for regular medical check-ups if you have anxieties about developing health conditions;
- Most importantly, maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

### **The elderly and stress**

It has been said that stress accelerates the ageing process. Stress comes in two forms, emotional and physical, and both can have damaging effects for elderly people. Some of the causes of prolonged stress in the elderly can come from chronic illness, diminishing finances, disability, or the loss of a spouse. Other sources of stress may involve a change in living situation, family problems, fatigue, loss of memory and concentration, inability to fight off or recover from illness, the challenges of retaining their independence and increased risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer.

Stress should not be allowed to rob anyone of what could be the most wonderful years of their lives. The best thing to do is recognise it and take steps to manage it.

Many seniors still manage to navigate through their later years with considerably much less stress and these "successful agers" tend to have a few things in common:

- They stay connected to friends and family;
- They exercise and keep active;
- They find ways to both reduce and manage the stress in their lives.

Maintaining a positive outlook is important. Researchers say people with more positive attitudes deal with stress better and have a stronger will to live. In the end, anything that reduces unnecessary stress will make your later years in life more enjoyable. Some people simply need to stop trying to do too many things at once. Others may want to find a spiritual outlet to gain a better perspective on their lives, both past and present.