

# coping with stress 28

## you need to know

Everyone experiences some stress every day. The more ways you can find to cope with stress, the happier and healthier you will be.

Stress can come from something little, like having a "bad hair day" or a hangnail that bothers you. When you have a test or have to go to a big family event, you may experience more stress. Even good things can cause stress. Going to a party can be stressful for some teens, even when they expect to have fun. Then there are big things that cause stress: a divorce, a serious illness, being teased or bullied, arguing with a friend, a relationship breaking up, or moving to another town. You have probably had many things happen to you that have been very stressful.

Stress causes your brain to produce a chemical called cortisol. Cortisol is one of the many brain chemicals that controls the way we feel and act. When your brain produces a little cortisol, like just before a test, you feel alert and in control. But when you have a lot of stress, your brain produces too much cortisol, and this can make you physically ill, depressed, or anxious.

Some teens hurt themselves when they feel stressed. They say that they actually feel they can control their stress more when they self-injure. But then their feelings of embarrassment or shame about hurting themselves cause stress, too, so that they end up feeling even worse and more out of control.

When you find better ways to deal with stress, you can learn to control the feelings that make you want to self-injure, and you can break this addictive habit.

## activity 28 \* coping with stress

There are many healthy ways to cope with stress, including the following:

- Talking to friends and family
- Exercise, particularly sports that involve other people
- Creative activities like music, dance, or art
- Relaxation activities

Relaxation activities are one of the best ways to cope with stress. These can include yoga, deep breathing, or just listening to restful music. Watching television or even reading a book have not been suggested as ways to cope with stress, because these activities distract you but don't really lower your stress level. Things that reduce your stress actually change the way your body works by lowering your heart rate and blood pressure and reducing the levels of cortisol in your brain while producing the chemicals that will make you feel better, such as endorphins and serotonin.

In this activity, you will think about different ways to cope with stress by relaxing. Learning to relax when you are stressed isn't that easy. Like most things you learn, it takes practice. For one week, choose a time during the day when you can take ten or fifteen minutes to relax. Then use the chart on the next page to rate how successful you were at relaxing for the entire week.

Remember that the more you practice stress-reduction techniques, the easier it will be to cope with stress.

activity 28 \* coping with stress

relaxation log

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

Day and Time	What You Did to Relax	Minutes of Relaxation	How You Felt After Relaxing (Rate on a 1-10 scale with 1 = "very stressed" and 10 = "peaceful and calm")



## activity 28 \* coping with stress

List all of the different activities that help you relax: \_\_\_\_\_

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Which of these is most helpful in coping with stress? \_\_\_\_\_

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Which of these is most fun? \_\_\_\_\_

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Looking back at your log, what did you learn about your relaxation habits?

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What can you do to make relaxation a part of your daily life?

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