

## MENTAL HEALTH

# Stress and Anxiety

### WHAT ARE THE COMMON SYMPTOMS OF STRESS AND ANXIETY?

- trouble catching your breath
- butterflies in your stomach
- sweaty and/or trembling hands
- feeling lightheaded
- feeling nervous or jumpy
- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling tired all the time
- having trouble concentrating
- irritability and moodiness
- headaches
- problems sleeping
- feeling sad or depressed

### COPING WITH STRESS

- Exercise on a regular basis (try for 30 min/day about 3-4 days per week to start)
- Eat well balanced meals, 3 times per day
- Get enough sleep and set up a regular sleep routine — adolescents need 9-10 hours of sleep per night
- Avoid illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco and excess caffeine

### Healthy Thinking:

- Don't worry about things you can't control, e.g. the weather
- Look at change as a positive challenge
- Positive thoughts and positive self talk
- Set realistic goals
- Meditate

### Healthy Actions:

- Prepare well in advance for events that may be stressful, e.g. test/project
- Ask for help from friends, family, teachers, professionals
- Take breaks from daily stress for time with friends, fun activities and/or group sports
- Work to resolve conflicts without anger and losing temper
- Solve problems one at a time — take one task at a time
- Avoid overscheduling — prioritize activities
- Identify stressful situations, e.g. preparing for an exam, test taking, doing homework, writing papers, working on a project, making a public presentation, talking to other peers, asking question in class

### STRESS REDUCING EXERCISES:

Two exercises you can do to alleviate stress: deep breathing and muscle relaxation.

These take a little practice, but are exercises you can use anywhere to try to relax and reduce stress.

#### Deep breathing

Lie down on a flat surface or sit in a comfortable chair with your arms by your side and feet on the floor. Breathe in slowly through your nose over three seconds, feeling your stomach rise and your chest expand. Breathe out slowly through your nose and/or mouth over three seconds, feeling your stomach go down and your chest contract.

Repeat until you feel relaxed and can feel the tension drain out of your body.

#### Muscle relaxation

Start with one group of muscles (usually your feet), hold it tight for a few seconds and then release. Then move to the next group of muscles (e.g. lower legs) and do the same thing. Work your way up through your legs, abdomen, chest, hands, arms, shoulders, neck and face muscles. You should feel the tension drain out of your body, leaving you feeling relaxed.

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