

Opinion: Important to reel in teen stress

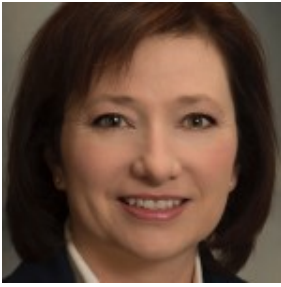
By Sonia Rupp

Any parent will tell you raising teenagers is a stressful time. Are you in that stage? Talk to your teenager about it. Your stress may be similar stress for your teen.

A recent American Psychological Association online survey shows today's teenagers experience greater levels of stress. Stressors include academic pressures, feeling overscheduled, financial pressure, and social pressures – especially with social media. In addition, bad habits teens learn to deal with stress often continue into adulthood. Stress can help some short-term situations like focusing for an exam or having a burst of energy for a sporting event. However, chronic stress can affect mental and physical well-being.

Is your teen stressed? According to the APA, common signs of teenage stress include:

- Episodes of irritability or anger
- Tired or fatigued
- Nervous or anxious
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Crying spells
- Skipping meals or overeating – changes in diet
- Upset stomach or nausea.



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Many young adults develop unhealthy behaviors to cope with stress; such as watching TV, surfing the Internet, or playing video games. Small media amounts may be a good distraction, but stress returns once the media is turned off. Also, for teens with low self-esteem, social media pressures may elevate stress. Violent video games and graphic movies increase nightmares and negative thinking. Of greater concern, your teen may develop other negative behaviors including overeating, anorexia, excessive consumption of caffeine, self-harm, smoking, and drug or alcohol use.

Teach your teen coping habits by being a good example. Help your teen replace unhealthy behaviors with healthier and productive ways to manage stress.

Exercise. Physical activity counteracts heart and blood pressure changes that occur with chronic stress. Outdoor activities help improve mood by supplying Vitamin D from the sun. Team sports also help increase socialization.

Mental exercises. Reading, meditation, puzzles and non-violent games are healthy ways to distract the brain from worries and create a more peaceful mind. Think positive thoughts and avoid being cynical. Breathing exercises also relax the body and brain by increasing oxygen and teaching the mind to focus.

Establish routines. Keep regular eating and sleeping habits and avoid overscheduling to allow time to relax.

Improve diet. Stress can affect digestion and immunity. Healthy eating can boost immunity and prevent an upset

stomach.

Get creative. Get involved with a hobby or creative interest – draw, write, play music.

Socialize. Take time to enjoy friends and family. In stressful times, talking to a loved one can help the problem not feel so big.

Journal. Write down what causes stress. Separate stressors that can be changed or decreased. Use the strategies above to help with things that can't change.

Seek support. After the best effort to manage stress and you or your teen still feel overwhelmed, don't be afraid to reach out for help through therapy, a support group, or talk to your doctor.

Take time to talk to your teenager and start showing healthier ways to deal with stress so they can have a happier and healthier future.

Sonia Rupp is a board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist who provides diagnostic evaluations and treatment recommendations for children and adolescents at Stateline Medical Center. Rupp will speak about "Stress: Its Effects on Body and Mind" on April 2 at 6pm at Lake Tahoe Community College.