

# Common Causes of Stress Among Students

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Stress is the body's natural response to challenges. When a student experiences high levels of stress or chronic stress, regardless of her age or grade, it can interfere with her ability to learn, memorize, and earn good grades -- as well as lead to poor physical, emotional and mental health. By learning about common stressors, a parent can help to mitigate negative or chronic stress in a child's life.

## Poor Sleeping Habits

Students who don't have healthy sleeping habits or don't get enough sleep at night are more likely to feel stressed than students who get plenty of sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Sleep allows a student's body and brain to recharge, and it helps to keep the immune system strong. Inadequate amounts of sleep can make a child more aggressive and limit his ability to learn, concentrate and solve problems. The National Sleep Foundation recommends that young people sleep 8.5 to 9.25 hours per night, and that they maintain a regular sleep schedule.

## Academic Pressure

In preparation for standardized tests, more and more teachers are assigning homework to children who are as young as six years old. In the "CQ Researcher," professor Wendy A. Patterson shares that education professionals suspect the state and federal academic standards placed on schools and teachers to be the cause of an increased amount of stress experienced in the classroom throughout elementary, middle and high school. According to Denise Clark Pope in a February 2005 Stanford University report, the pressure that students feel from parents and schools raises stress levels so high that some teachers regard student stress to be a "health

epidemic." To cope with the pressures, Clark Pope explains, some high-achieving students resort to cheating or "finagling the system."

## **Full Schedules**

Even those students who have not experienced an increased homework load may experience stress due to overscheduling and overstimulation, according to Tom Loveless of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. Loveless shares that full schedules can stress a child's brain and impair her ability to learn. While a teacher or parent may want to help a child succeed by planning, for example, various worksheets, projects and extracurricular activities, a child's brain benefits from "boredom," or free time, because it allows her to figure out and develop her talents and identity. In the "CQ Researcher" publication, family therapist Michael Gurian suggests allowing a child to be "bored" for one hour a day.

## **Poor Eating Habits**

Poor nutrition and unhealthy eating habits can increase a student's stress level, according to the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Foods that can increase stress levels in students include those that are high in fat, caffeine, sugar and refined carbohydrates, which is the case with many types of convenience, processed and fast foods. Examples of stress-inducing foods are sodas, energy drinks, donuts, candy bars, processed snack foods, white bread, and French fries. A healthy diet that helps to reduce stress includes foods that are low in fat and high in fiber and complex carbohydrates. Such foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and lean proteins.