





## How Do You Deal With Stress?

*“What a lousy day – I can’t wait to go home and have a beer.”*

*“I’m so stressed out. That’s why I get high.”*

*“It’s one of those days . . . I really need a cigarette right now.”*

Do any of these sound familiar?

People often think that having a few drinks or using illegal drugs will help them beat stress – but the truth is, drugs and alcohol often have the exact opposite effect. In most cases, people who abuse drugs and alcohol end up with more problems.

Everyone gets a little stressed out sometimes, but there are lots of safe ways to deal with it besides using drugs and alcohol.

## NOT SO BAD “Good Stress”

If you’ve ever felt nervous or anxious before a big test, a job interview or a date, you know what it’s like to be stressed out: Your heartbeat and breathing speeds up. You may start to sweat. You feel jittery and alert.

Events like planning a wedding or preparing for college can be very stressful. This biological response to stress is also known as the “fight-or-flight response.” When you’re in a stressful situation, your nervous system kicks into overdrive. Your brain releases chemicals called cortisol and adrenaline, and these chemicals travel through your bloodstream, giving you the extra energy you need to react quickly and appropriately in a challenging – or even dangerous – situation.

The fight-or-flight response is an example of “good stress” – it’s the kind of stress that keeps you alert and focused on what you’re doing. Normally, good stress subsides after the stressful event is over.



## THE CAUSES OF “BAD STRESS”

What happens, though, when that tension and anxiety doesn’t go away? Unlike the good stress that kicks in when you need an extra burst of adrenaline, “bad stress” – or stress that lingers for days, weeks or even months – isn’t helpful. In fact, bad stress can lead to a variety of physical and mental health problems, including:

- Anxiety attacks
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Weakened immune system
- Depression
- Stomach problems
- Headaches and muscle pain

As we’ve already discussed, good stress is usually caused by short-term stressors, such as a first date or a job interview. Bad stress, on the other hand, is brought on by long-term sources of stress, such as:

- Problems at school or work
- Health problems
- Relationship problems
- Moving to a new place
- Problems with bullying or peer pressure
- An overloaded school, work or activity schedule

This is just a partial list of things that can cause bad stress. The bottom line is, everyone feels stress – good and bad – at some point.

## NO QUICK FIXES

### Why Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco Can’t Really Relieve Stress

Drinking a few beers or smoking a joint might seem like an easy way to beat stress, but the truth is that when you get drunk or high, you’re not facing the causes of stress in your life. You’re just getting too wasted to care – and when you sober up, everything that was stressing you out before will still be there.

In addition, drug and alcohol abuse can actually lead to entirely new problems, such as:

- Trouble at work or school
- Relationship problems
- Overdose or alcohol poisoning
- Addiction
- Legal problems related to underage drinking, drunk driving or illegal drugs
- Greater risk of engaging in dangerous behavior

People who abuse drugs and alcohol are also putting themselves at risk for all sorts of long-term health issues. Alcohol abuse can cause liver disease, brain damage, heart problems and an increased risk for cancer and stroke. Same goes for most types of drug abuse.

## UNDER PRESSURE

### Jasmine’s Story

Everyone knew that Jasmine was destined to do great things. She was one semester away from earning a bachelor’s degree in biology, and she had just been accepted to medical school. In addition to keeping up with loads of schoolwork, Jasmine worked at a local coffee shop to pay for tuition, and she volunteered two nights a week at the local hospital.

What most of Jasmine’s friends didn’t know, though, was that even though Jasmine seemed like she could do it all, she was barely keeping it together – she had trouble sleeping, and she almost never had a chance to just kick back and relax. She was stressed out.

A few months into the spring semester, Jasmine started drinking. At first, it was just a few drinks at parties – but soon, Jasmine was drinking every night. She started experimenting with drugs, too. Her grades started to drop. When she stopped showing up for work, she got fired from her job at the coffee shop.

One night, after hitting a few bars, Jasmine was pulled over for driving erratically. She failed a field sobriety test and was arrested for drunk driving.

Jasmine might not be going to medical school next year. She’ll have to re-take a few of the classes she failed and her GPA is ruined. She dreamed of doing great things one day, but now she’s not sure if her dreams will ever come true.



## NOT WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED Prescription Drug Abuse

It’s a common misconception that prescription medications are safe for anyone to take – regardless of whose name is on the label. But it’s never a good idea to take someone else’s prescription drugs. In fact, using prescriptions that don’t belong to you (or even taking extra doses of your own prescriptions) is another form of drug abuse. You never know how a drug will interact with your body, and some drugs can have serious or even fatal effects when combined with alcohol or other drugs.

