

Teens' stress levels rival those of adults, survey finds

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Top worries include post-graduation choices, financial concerns.

(HealthDay)—If paying the bills and putting food on the table put adults' nerves on edge, just imagine how today's overscheduled, frequently tested teenagers must feel.

Adolescents reported stress levels during the school year that surpassed those of adults, according to the American Psychological Association's latest *Stress in America* [survey](#).

The survey, based on an August 2013 Harris Interactive poll, is thought to be the first to focus on how stress is affecting the nation's adolescents. It included more than 1,000 teens and nearly 2,000 adults.

The findings suggest that teens' sleeping and exercise habits feed into their stress levels and the stress affects their health habits, creating a

vicious circle, said Norman Anderson, CEO and executive vice president of the American Psychological Association.

"Those who experience high levels of stress tend to report that they exercise less and they don't sleep as well, which feeds back into increasing their stress," Anderson said during a Tuesday news conference. "Conversely, those who say they exercise on a regular basis and get a good night's sleep show a decrease in stress."

Another "alarming" finding: "Teens don't appear to realize the impact stress has on their physical and mental health," Anderson said.

More than half of teens think stress has a slight or no impact, yet many reported symptoms of stress, the survey found. Forty percent said they feel irritable or angry and 36 percent said they feel tired.

What's more, the survey suggested that teens are poised to become even more stressed as they enter adulthood.

Thirty-one percent said their [stress level](#) increased in the past year, and 34 percent said they think their stress will increase in the coming year. Only 16 percent said their stress level declined in the past year.

The teens in the survey also reported many of the same [stress symptoms](#) as adults, such as feeling irritable, angry, nervous and anxious, or lying awake at night. Nearly three-quarters of the teens reported more than one symptom of stress in the past month, the survey found.

Katherine Nordal, the APA's executive director for professional practice, said during the news conference that school was the most common source of stress for teens. "Getting into a good college and deciding what to do after high school was also a significant stressor for about 69 percent of teens," she said.

Teens' financial concerns for their families also ranked among the top stressors.

"Children learn what they live, so I think that when there's a lot of stress in the household in regard to financial concerns that certainly it bleeds down to children as well," Nordal said.

The survey also found the following:

- Teens reported sleeping just 7.4 hours on school nights and 8.1 hours on non-school nights—far less than the 8.5 to 9.25 hours recommended by the National Sleep Foundation.
- One in five teens reported exercising less than once a week or not at all.
- Nearly a third of teens said they eat to manage stress, while 23 percent reported skipping a meal due to stress.

Anderson said parents can help [teens](#) by recognizing their stress levels and modeling good [stress](#)-management behaviors, such as eating a healthy diet and taking time to exercise.

Parents also need to stay plugged in to their teenagers' lives by taking every opportunity to communicate with them, Nordal said.

More information: There's more on spotting and caring for stress in kids at the [NYU Langone Medical Center](#).

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