

Understanding Optimum Stress

Most students experience mild to moderate stress during their final years of secondary school, particularly as they prepare for their end of year exams. In moderation, stress can be a constructive response to help enhance performance. To achieve this, it is first essential to understand optimum stress.

BALANCING STRESS

Too much stress for too long can be debilitating (chronic stress), while too little stress can also be unhelpful. A good balance of stress will ultimately relate to an individual's ability to cope.

THE STRESS RESPONSE IS CONTROLLED BY:

- SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM: Releases energy and prepares the body for fight or flight.
- PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM: Returns the body to a relaxed state.

LOW STRESS NORMAL STRESS HIGH STRESS

- Very little stress response or the absence of stress in response to stressors
- Feeling significantly less stressed than peers (e.g. during exams)
- Little to no concern for schoolwork, grades or performance
- Lack of motivation to complete tasks without fear of failure or worry over consequences
- Temporary stress in response to stressors
- Stress comes and goes
- Mostly not stressed
- Not overwhelmed by stressful situations, e.g. assignment deadlines)
- Not more stressed than peers (normal to have moderate levels of stress in HSC or during exams)

- Stress doesn't go away
- More stressed than peers
- Impacts school, friendships, family life
- Avoid doing things that peers can do (e.g. speeches)
- Unhappy/frequent distress
- Constant worry (e.g. grades, performances, making mistakes)
- Poor concentration when worrying
- Physical symptoms of headaches, stomach aches etc.
- Poor sleeping patterns

