

so long, stress!

Homework, after-school activities, weekend soccer games... before you know it, you've got an over-booked, stressed out family on your hands. Here's how to relax—stat. by [Marygrace Taylor](#)

We all know the frenzied feeling of stress taking hold, but what's actually going on inside? "When your body perceives a threat, your nervous system reacts with a fight or flight response," says Mubina Jiwa, a naturopathic doctor and assistant professor at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in Toronto. Your body floods with adrenaline to rev you up to react. A helpful response in the past—if you were, say, being chased by a saber-toothed tiger—but as a response to daily stressors like work and school, it's a case of serious overkill. In the short term, this stress response can result in headaches, sleep problems, and irritability. In the long term? Stress can take its toll in the form of heart disease, digestive problems, and even decreased fertility, says Jiwa. Fortunately, getting a handle on how your family reacts to stress now can help avoid those issues later on.

Pregnant moms

Stress source: Major events—such as job loss or relationship problems—aren't just stressful for moms-to-be. "Increased stress can affect a baby's brain development, and possibly the baby's own stress response system," says Monique Robinson, Ph.D., a psychologist at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in Australia. But the issues don't have to be big; daily stressors (like getting stuck in traffic) can be damaging, too.

Stress solution: Get moving! Exercising at a moderate level releases endorphins, helping prevent the body's ability to detect stress-inducing threats. Two to three 45-minute sessions a week of yoga or walking are great choices for moms-to-be, though taking time for *any* activity you enjoy (that gets the okay from your doc) will help you—and your baby—relax.

Babies

Stress source: You wouldn't think someone who spends most of the time sleeping and eating could get overwhelmed, but babies experience stress, too. "Babies receive a huge amount of sensory information that they have to process," says Megan Faure, author of *The Babysense Secret*. "Their brains haven't mastered the ability to filter out information, so too many things at once can make them overly sensitive and stressed."

Stress solution: Babies recharge their sensory threshold through sleep, so getting the right amount is essential, says Faure. Help your child stick to a regular sleep schedule (find a baby sleep chart at [kiwi magonline.com/babysleep](#)), and watch for signs that she's reaching her sensory limit, like if she's sucking on her hands or crying.

Kids

Stress source: Much as we'd love to think otherwise, kids aren't carefree. "Children are aware of a lot of things we don't expect them to be—they're quick to

pick up on negative emotions and family struggles even when you don't talk about them," says Sarah Watamura, Ph.D., a psychology professor at the University of Denver. The result? Stress from worrying about the unknown.

Stress solution: Give your child a sense of reassurance and control. "If your family's going through a stressful time, acknowledge it and let your child know you have a plan to take care of it," Watamura says. Providing a heads up on upcoming events and giving your child options on how to react helps, too, says Watamura. For example, if you'll be out next Friday night, let your child choose whether he wants to watch a movie or play a board game with the sitter.

Tweens

Stress source: Between school, extracurriculars, and friends, preteens have a lot on their plates. And when there's too much to do, it's harder to accomplish *anything*.

Stress solution: Mindfulness meditation can enhance a person's ability to pay attention and minimize distractions, reports a recent Harvard Medical School study. And fewer distractions make for calmer, more focused tweens, says Kristen Race, Ph.D., a psychologist in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. The next time your tween is feeling overwhelmed, try this meditation exercise: While sitting upright, have her close her eyes and spend three minutes focusing on inhaling and exhaling. If her mind wanders, tell her to simply bring her attention back to her breath. "Taking a few minutes each day to sit and focus on breathing is a simple act, but it can yield great relaxation benefits," Race says. ●

