



Tune in and Recharge

A practical guide to understanding stress, your body, and ways to feel better



A resource from Storykind Psychology



Hey There! Let's Talk About Stress

Stress is a normal part of being a teenager — school deadlines, friendships, social media, family stuff, and thinking about the future can all pile up.

The good news? Understanding how stress works in your body and brain gives you real power to handle it. This guide blends simple science, CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) ideas, and super practical tips you can actually use. No fluff, just stuff that works.


We'll cover: how to tune into your stress signals early, what happens in your brain and nervous system, why your body needs real rest (including that 'default mode' downtime), and easy evidence-based strategies like intentional music rest, walks, and guided mindfulness.

Step 1: Tune Into Your Stress

Most of us run on autopilot until stress hits hard. Tuning in means noticing the early warning signs in your body, thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. This awareness is the foundation of both mindfulness and CBT — you can't change what you don't notice.

Common Stress Signals:

- **Body:** Racing heart, tight chest/shoulders/jaw, headaches, stomach knots or 'butterflies', feeling hot or cold, trouble sleeping or constant tiredness
- **Thoughts:** Racing or blank mind, 'I can't cope', worst-case thinking, difficulty concentrating or deciding
- **Emotions:** Irritable/snappy, worried/anxious, overwhelmed, flat or numb, easily frustrated
- **Behaviours:** Avoiding tasks, procrastinating, doomscrolling, snapping at people, withdrawing, or overdoing things to distract

 Quick Tune-In Exercise (30 seconds): Sit or lie comfortably. Close your eyes. Slowly scan your body from your feet up to your head. Notice any sensations — tightness, warmth, tingling, heaviness — without trying to change them. Just observe. That's tuning in. Do this a few times a day, especially when you notice stress rising.

CBT insight: Stress often follows a pattern — *Trigger* → *Thought* → *Body Reaction* → *Behaviour*. By catching the early body signals or thoughts, you can interrupt the automatic stress spiral and give yourself choice.



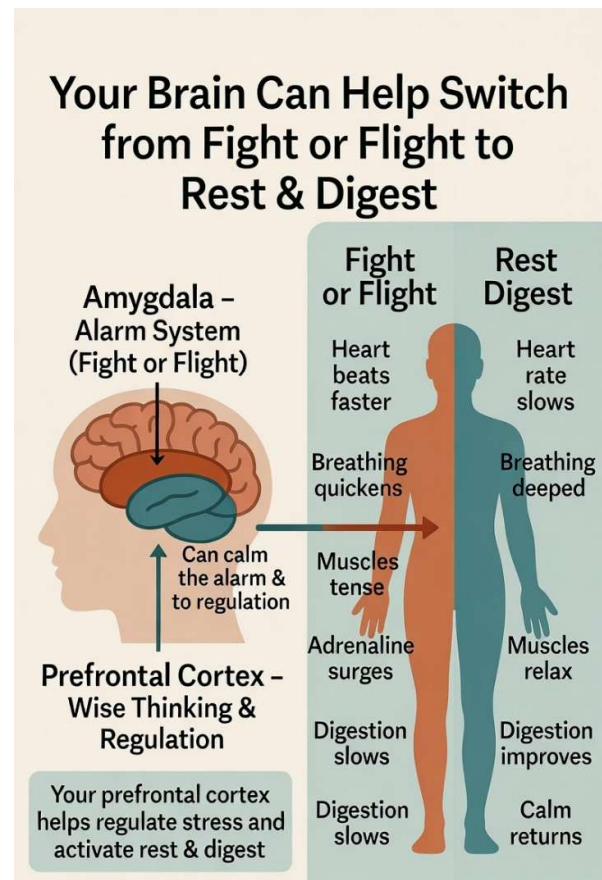
The Science: What Happens in Your Brain & Body

Your stress response is ancient and brilliant — designed to keep you alive. But in modern life it can get stuck 'on'. Here's the simple version:

Fight or Flight (Your Built-in Alarm System)

When your brain detects a threat (a real danger OR something your mind labels as stressful like a test, argument, or social rejection), the **amygdala** (your emotional alarm centre) lights up fast. It triggers the sympathetic nervous system:

- Adrenaline and noradrenaline surge → heart beats faster, breathing quickens, muscles tense, digestion slows, pupils dilate.
- This is great for short bursts (sports, quick thinking, escaping danger).
- The **HPA axis** (hypothalamus → pituitary → adrenal glands) releases cortisol to keep the system going if needed.



Why Thinking Gets Harder

Under stress, the amygdala can 'hijack' your **prefrontal cortex** — the part responsible for calm thinking, planning, problem-solving, and emotional regulation. That's why stressed-out you might say things you regret, struggle to focus, or make decisions you later question. It's not 'you being dramatic' — it's biology temporarily taking the wheel.

Good news: The more you practise noticing stress early and using calming strategies (breathing, moving your body, mindfulness), the better your brain gets at switching out of high-alert mode and letting your wise prefrontal cortex come back online.



Your Body's Finite Battery & Why Rest Is Non-Negotiable

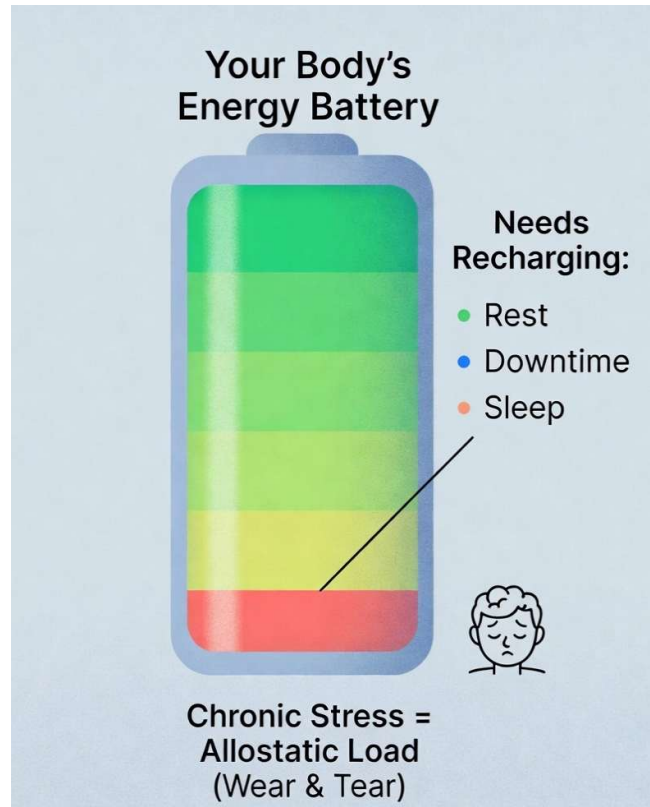
Here's something most adults don't explain well: Your body has **finite resources** for handling stress. Every time you activate fight-or-flight or sustain high cortisol, you're using up energy, nutrients, and recovery capacity. If you don't recharge properly, you build up **allostatic load** — the cumulative wear and tear that leads to exhaustion, brain fog, anxiety, low mood, getting sick more often, and burnout.

The Default Mode Network (Your Brain's Background Processing)

When you're not focused on a task, scrolling, or actively thinking, a network in your brain called the **Default Mode Network (DMN)** becomes more active. This isn't 'wasting time' — it's incredibly useful. During this 'mind-wandering' or unfocused state, your brain:

- Processes and makes sense of emotions and experiences from your day
- Consolidates memories and learning (helps with school!)
- Sparks creativity and connects ideas
- Allows true mental rest and nervous system recovery

Constant stimulation (phones, packed schedules, always 'on') starves this mode. That's why intentional 'doing nothing' — like lying in bed listening to music with no phone — is actually productive. Your brain needs this default state to stay healthy, just like your body needs sleep.



Phone Battery Analogy: Imagine your phone constantly running apps in the background with the screen on full brightness. It overheats and the battery drains fast. Your body is similar. You need proper 'low power mode' and full recharge time (good sleep + intentional downtime) or performance drops and things start glitching (mood, focus, energy).



CBT Tools: Catch It, Check It, Choose It

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is one of the most evidence-based approaches for stress and anxiety. The core idea is simple but powerful: It's often not the situation itself but **how we think about it** that influences our stress level.

Change the thinking pattern → change the emotional and physical response.

The Simple 3-Step Process

1. CATCH — Notice what's happening.

Use your tuning-in skills. 'My chest feels tight and I'm thinking about that group project non-stop.' Name the feeling, as this helps tame the feeling. This creates a tiny gap between the trigger and your reaction.

2. CHECK — Be curious with your thoughts.

Ask gentle questions (like a curious detective, not a judge):

- What am I telling myself right now?
- Is this thought helpful?
- Is this thought 100% true? What's the evidence for and against it?
- What's a more balanced or helpful way to look at this?
- What would I tell a friend in this situation?

3. CHOOSE / CHANGE — Decide on a helpful response.

You don't have to believe every thought, not all our thoughts are true. We have lots of options: we can reframe the thought, take a small action (breathe, walk, etc.), accept the feeling with self-compassion or use other helpful strategies we collect along the way!

Example for Teens: Trigger = Big test tomorrow. Automatic thought = 'If I fail, I'm a loser and my future is ruined.' Balanced thought = 'I'm nervous because it matters, but I've studied and one test isn't everything. I can do my best.' Action = 10 min walk + focused study + music rest before bed.



Your Practical Recharge Toolkit

Here are three core strategies that are practical, free, evidence-supported, and actually doable for busy teens. They directly support your nervous system shifting out of fight/flight and give your brain the rest it needs.

1. Music + Lie in Bed (No Phone) — Intentional Rest

Why it works: Listening to music you enjoy (especially slower tempos) can lower cortisol, heart rate, and blood pressure. Lying still with no phone removes constant incoming stimulation. This strongly activates the parasympathetic nervous system ('rest and digest') and allows DMN activity.

How to do it: Create a 'Rest & Recharge' playlist. Lie on your bed, dim lights, put phone in another room or on Do Not Disturb. Just listen for 10–20 minutes. Let thoughts come and go.

2. Go for a Walk — Mind Break Walks

Why it works: Physical movement helps process stress hormones. Walking (especially outdoors) engages 'soft fascination' which gives your directed attention a break and supports restorative DMN processes. Research shows time in nature reduces stress and improves mood.

How to do it: Aim for 10–20+ minutes. Phone on silent or left behind. Try without podcasts sometimes to let your mind wander. Great after school or between study blocks.

Pro Tip: Combine them! Do a 15-min walk, then come home and do 10 mins of music + bed rest. Double recharge for body and brain.

3. Guided Mindfulness & Breathing

Why it works: Regular mindfulness practice reduces stress, improves emotion regulation, and helps you respond rather than react. It's like gym training for your attention and nervous system.

Recommended Apps:

- [Smiling Mind](#) — Free, Australian, made for young people. Excellent teen programs.
- [New Horizon Meditations](#) on Spotify — More imagination focused guided sessions.
- [Insight Timer](#) — Completely free, huge library of short guided meditations.
- [Headspace](#) — Good animations and structured packs for younger users.



Quick Free Techniques:

Box Breathing: Inhale 4 → Hold 4 → Exhale 4 → Hold 4. Repeat 4 rounds. Great before tests.

7:11 Breathing: Count 7 on your in breath and 11 on the out breath. This helps slow breathing and activate rest and digest system.

Count your breaths: Count your breaths to 10, then restart and count to 10 again. This one helps our mind to concentrate and relax.

Alert and Relax: For each in breath say the word Alert, and for each out breath Relax. This can help us feel prepared yet calm.

Body Scan: Lie down and slowly scan from toes to head, releasing tension. Many guided versions in the apps above.

Pro Tip: Practise doing these when you are not stressed and regularly. This helps to train the brain so that you can more easily tune into a calmer state.

Making It Stick & Knowing When to Get Help

Start Small & Experiment

Pick **one** strategy this week and try it consistently. Notice what happens to your stress levels (use the 1-10 rating). The best technique is the one you'll actually do.

Extra Easy Wins

- **Sleep:** Your #1 recovery tool. Consistent bedtime helps enormously.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Tense then release muscle groups to release physical tension fast.
- **5-4-3-2-1 Grounding:** Name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.



When Stress Feels Too Big

It's okay to need more support. Red flags include constant worry, panic attacks, trouble functioning at school, or feeling hopeless. Reaching out early makes a huge difference.

Australian Support Options:

- **headspace** — Youth mental health centres and online (headspace.org.au)
- **Kids Helpline** — 1800 55 1800 (24/7, free, confidential)
- **Beyond Blue** — beyondblue.org.au or 1300 22 4636
- School wellbeing/counsellor or your GP

"Rest is not laziness. It's how your brain and body stay resilient. You deserve to feel okay."

Resources & Next Steps

Apps to Download Today

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Quick Reference — Your Stress First Aid Kit

1. Tune In: 30-sec body scan. Name your feeling. Rate stress 1-10.
2. Breathe: Box breathing or 7-11 (4 rounds).
3. Move: 10-15 min walk (phone away if possible).
4. Rest: Music + lie down, no phone, 10+ mins.
5. Mindfulness: Open Smiling Mind or Insight Timer.
6. Reframe: Catch the thought, check the evidence, choose a kinder view.
7. Repeat daily. Small consistent actions beat occasional big efforts.

You've got this. Start with one small recharge today.

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Finding creative solutions to life's challenges together



To discuss seeing a therapist, please get in touch via the form on the website

<https://www.storykindpsychology.com/>

Open for telehealth on Thurs and Fridays, and face-to-face work Fridays at our East Geelong Clinic

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