

## **Back to School**

After a summer of sleeping in or doing things on your time, the alarm bell announcing that first day of school can be a rude awakening. Whether you're an anxious new freshman or a confident senior, heading back to school signals a time of transition: new classes, new teachers, new schedules, and a new social scene.

Dread it or love it, you gotta go to school. Here are some ways to make the transition from summer to school a little easier.

### **First-Day Mania**

There's no escaping the fact that the first day of school can be crazy. New kids wander around in circles. Lockers won't open. The school nurse needs your medical records. You forgot your gym shorts. Freshmen are running in all directions, looking for their homerooms.

How can you combat first-day chaos? If you're headed to a new school, try to arrange a visit before classes begin. Explore any areas that are of particular interest, such as the gymnasium, library, or science labs. Some schools offer maps. Get one and give it a read before school starts - then keep it in your backpack until you're familiar with your new surroundings.

Your first day is also the time to bring in school supplies and paperwork. It can help to pack your backpack the night before school starts so you're not scrambling around at the last minute looking for what you need. In addition to packing basic supplies (such as notebooks, pens, pencils, and a calculator), hunt down any of the school forms that were mailed to your family over the summer: immunization (shot) records, permission slips, and class schedules.

Did you try on eight different outfits before deciding what to wear? Lots of people check out who's wearing what on the first day of school. The key is to wear what makes you feel good, whether it's a brand-new outfit or a comfy old sweater. If you plan to wear a new pair of shoes, break them in a few days beforehand or your feet may scream for relief long before last period.

Each school has a different opening-day drill. Some start with homeroom or an assembly, but others may jump right into the first-period class. You'll meet your new teachers, and they'll probably give you an overview of the course syllabus, class rules, what the semester will be like, what supplies you'll need, and expectations of your performance and behavior. Some teachers will jump right into their first lesson, others may have non-coursework activities planned. It all depends on the class and teacher.

## Emotions

Here's a simple equation: new place = new emotions. Lots of people feel [anxious](#), scared, or excited about school. Although people who are coming back as seniors may be happy they're in their final year and can't wait to visit with friends, most freshmen or new kids are likely to be tense or worried.

It's perfectly normal to feel nervous the first day of school. Getting back to the school routine and adjusting to new workloads takes some getting used to after a long summer break. If you're having a mental meltdown, think back to some previous "first days." Everything probably settled down pretty quickly once you got into the routine.

Meeting new people or getting reacquainted with classmates can feel overwhelming, especially if you're the [shy](#) or reserved type. Start small: If large groups make you nervous, try saying hi to one or two new people a day - the kid at the desk next to yours in homeroom is a good place to start. Or ask new people to sit with you in the cafeteria.

If you still feel uncomfortable after a few days, talk to the school guidance counselor, a favorite teacher, or someone else you trust about how you're feeling and what you can do. But give yourself time - most problems adjusting to school are only temporary.

## Making Your Way Through the Lunchroom

What's everyone's favorite period? Lunch, what else? With foods like tacos, pizza, or cheeseburgers staring you in the face when you're at your most hungry, it can be hard to make [healthy choices](#).

Here are some tricks to choosing the foods that will keep you focused and active throughout the day - as well as help you grow and develop throughout the school year:

- **Get a copy of the menu.** If your cafeteria provides a weekly or monthly menu, check it out. Knowing what's on the menu puts you in control: You can pick and choose which days you want to buy lunch and when you want to bring your own.
- **Head for the salad bar.** If your school offers a salad bar or juice machine, take advantage. If you'd rather pack, consider adding carrot sticks, a fruit cup, or pretzels to your lunch bag.
- **Think energy.** Some foods are better choices than others for maintaining energy during the day. Choose low-fat proteins, like chicken, beans, or low-fat yogurt and add lots of fruits and veggies to your meal. They'll provide the vitamins and minerals you need and the energy to get through the day. Foods that have a lot of simple carbohydrates, like sugary snacks, donuts, or french fries may give you a quick rush of energy but it's not sustainable - which means you'll be left wanting

more soon after you eat. The same is true of drinks filled with [caffeine](#) or sugar. You don't have to cut these out entirely - just enjoy them in moderation.

- **Stop for a [snack](#).** You can't concentrate or absorb new knowledge without a well-fed mind and body. So take along a healthy snack, like carrot sticks or trail mix, to stave off hunger between classes (don't munch during class, though, or you may face a reprimand!). Not only will this keep you going, it will also help you avoid overeating when mealtime finally arrives.

### **Having a Brain Drain?**

School seemed simple when you were younger. Everyone told you where to go, what classes to take, and how to finish your homework. Now things are different; there are so many choices and priorities competing for your time. Stretch yourself too thin and you may find yourself feeling stressed out. Here are some things you can do to help regain control:

- **Plan ahead.** Get a wall calendar or personal planner. Mark the dates of midterms, finals, and other tests. Note the due dates of term papers, essays, and other projects as they are assigned. List any other time commitments you have, like basketball practice or play rehearsals. When your calendar starts to fill, learn to say no to additional [activities](#) until things calm down.
- **Stay ahead.** Try not to fall behind. If you feel yourself falling behind and starting to feel frustrated, let your teachers know. It's better to get help early on than to wait and think you can ace the final if you spend a few nights cramming. Almost everyone struggles with a particular subject or class. If you're having trouble with a particular subject or homework project, ask your teacher for extra help after class. Taking a few minutes to address the problem right away can save time later, and if your teacher knows that you're struggling with something, he or she is likely to be more understanding of the situation.
- **Listen up.** Paying attention in class can actually pay off in the long run. Sure, it's often easier said than done, but actively listening and taking notes during lectures can make recalling information easier when it comes time to [study](#) and remember things.
- **Take notes.** If you take notes and review them before class begins (or while studying for an exam), you can ask a teacher to go over anything you don't understand. It can also be helpful to go over notes with a friend after class - as long as you're confident your friend really grasps the material! Learning good note-taking skills in high school also helps put you ahead of the curve in college, when good lecture notes are key to studying and doing well.

### **A-School What to Do?**

Nearly everyone gets sick at one time or another. If you're out sick, ask friends to take notes and pick up your homework.

If you're out for more than a day or 2, do a little work every day if you feel up to it to keep from falling behind. Some teachers post assignments and notes on the Internet - find out if they will accept faxed or emailed homework. If not, have your mom or dad drop your assignments off at school. Then be prepared to make up lab time and tests when you return.

If you're not feeling well enough to keep up with your classes, that's OK. It's more important that you take care of yourself. Again, establishing a good relationship with teachers helps them be more understanding and they'll be able to help you catch up when you make it back to school.

### **Survival Tips**

Here are some more things that can help put you ahead in school:

- The old saying "breakfast is the most important meal of the day" is never more true than when you're going to school. Students are more alert and perform better in class if they eat a good breakfast.
- Get enough [sleep](#). Studies show that teens need at least 8 1/2 hours of sleep each night to feel rested. Sleep deprivation can lead students to fall asleep in class (embarrassing if you're caught!) and can also make it hard to concentrate. It can be more productive to get the sleep you need than it is to stay up late cramming: A recent study found that people who got adequate sleep before a math test were nearly three times more likely to figure out the problem than those who stayed up all night.
- Do more at school and you'll have less to do at home. Take advantage of those times during the school day when you're not in class: Review notes, go to the library or computer lab, get a head start on your homework, or research that big term paper. You'll be thankful later while you're at the mall or a concert and other people in class are stuck at home cramming!
- One of the best ways to make friends and learn your way around is by joining school clubs, sports teams, and activities. Even if you can't kick a 30-yard field goal or sing a solo, getting involved in other ways - going to a school play, helping with a bake sale, or cheering your friends on at a swim meet - can help you feel like a part of things.

School is a time to make friends and try new things, but it's also a place to learn skills like organization and decision making that will come in handy for the rest of your life.