

PARENTS AND TEENS: HOW TO SURVIVE SAT PREP STRESS PAGE 30

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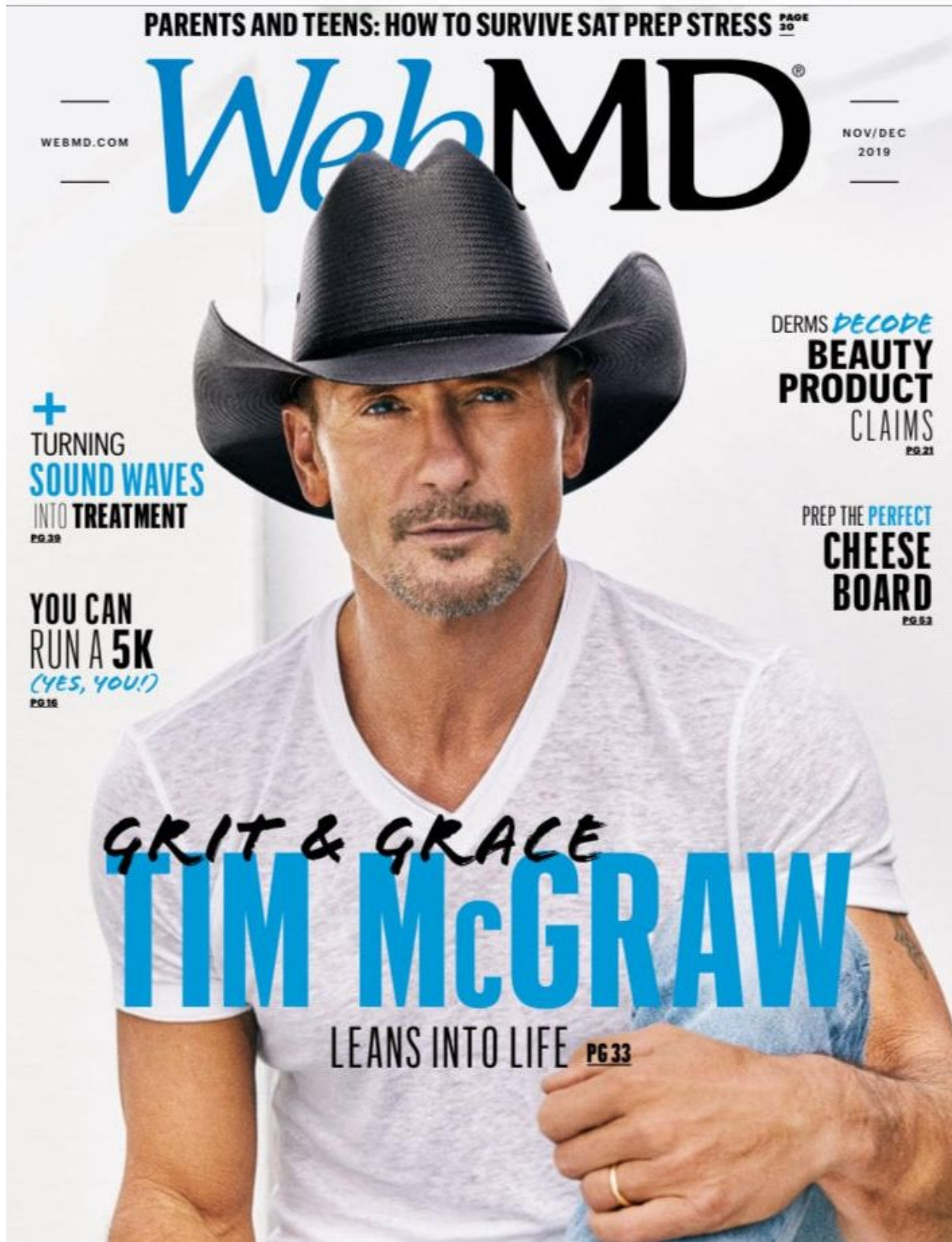
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Surviving the SATs

JUNIOR YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL BRINGS A BATTERY OF HIGH-STAKES COLLEGE ADMISSION TESTS THAT CAN STRESS OUT EVEN THE MOST LAID-BACK PARENTS AND THEIR EASYGOING KIDS

BY Lauren Paige Kennedy REVIEWED BY Roy Benaroch, MD, WebMD Medical Reviewer

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WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE SAT (SCHOLASTIC ASSESSMENT TEST) AND THE ACT (AMERICAN COLLEGE TESTING) THAT CAN MAKE SEEMINGLY SANE PARENTS GO OFF THE DEEP END? If you follow the news, you know some desperate moms and dads even resort to bribery and fraud to ensure their children get high scores.

Kids are stressed, too. The pressure some students feel comes from parents, competitive peers, and schools, says clinical psychologist Barbara Greenberg, MD, who specializes in the treatment of teens and their families.

"An important first step is sitting down with your child before junior year begins to create a schedule that works for everyone," Greenberg says. "A plan provides a clear picture leading up to big exams that are taken in the spring, which can help reduce anxiety." Such schedules may detail when to squeeze in practice tests and tutoring sessions around sports and other activities during what is considered by many to be high school's toughest academic year.

Stefanie Lob, Westchester and Fairfield counties partner at Private Prep, a national chain that provides tutoring and practice testing, agrees. "Sitting down with all parties early on and being on the same page is how we like to work," she says. "Students will buy into a schedule if you allow them to be part of the process," especially since kids often have a better understanding of the demands on their time than their parents do.

Tackling anxiety is key—for all involved, Lob adds. "We develop relationships with both parents and students," she says, "because their needs are not always the same." When it comes to the behavior of parents at this time, she'll only say, "We've seen it all."

To develop better student coping skills, the team at Private Prep partnered with a sports psychologist and mental coach to improve performance under pressure. "A student can do all the work and learn the content and strategies, but if he or she has a hard time on

4 TIPS

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST
BARBARA GREENBERG
AND PRIVATE PREP
PARTNER **STEFANIE LOB**
SHARE THEIR WISDOM.

1. APPLY THE PREMACED PRINCIPLE.

This psychological rule of reinforcement means "getting the stuff done you don't like to do first, then rewarding yourself with what you do like to do," says Greenberg. Ask your kids to spend two hours studying with a tutor. Then take them shopping or out to dinner.

2. DON'T ASSUME YOU CAN'T AFFORD PREP COURSES.

There are many different programs out there at different rates, Lob says, so parents need to educate themselves. "We provide a scholarship program offering identical services," she says. "Our challenge is to recruit enough candidates" to apply for them, she adds.

3. DON'T LIVE THROUGH YOUR CHILD.

Much of the stress kids feel is due to sky-high parental expectations. "Your kid's test result is not a reflection of you or your parenting skills," says Greenberg.

4. THERE ARE MANY ROADS TO ACHIEVEMENT.

"Some kids may take the SAT or ACT several times," says Lob, before they feel satisfied with a score. Others may do OK, but not ace either—and that's fine, too, Greenberg adds. "Not everyone gets into the Ivy League. There are many measures of success."

test day, it can all go down the drain," says Lob.

Greenberg advises parents to allow their kids to vent as pressure mounts and test day draws ever nearer. "Don't try to fix them," she says. "Just listen."

Theresa Mohan, general counsel of a New York-based tech firm and a mother of four daughters, two of whom are recent college graduates, has been down this road before—and she's gearing up to do it again with her younger set of twins.

"I think the junior year is the most stressful year for a first-time parent, and it's independent of the relationship between parents and child—it happens in the school," she says. "There's no immunity. Everybody's talking about it."

Mohan says different children can bring different—and surprising—outcomes: "For my oldest daughter, who puts a tremendous amount of pressure on herself, we did a prep course after she did really well on the PSAT. Then she took the SAT, did well, but saw nominal improvement."

Lob says it's standard for kids to take practice tests for both the SAT and the ACT to see on which exam they naturally perform better. "Then our tutors focus their efforts on one or the other," she says, noting that students typically take five or six additional practice tests before taking it for real.

"My daughter applied for early admission to a big, top-tier school—and was not accepted," Mohan says. "She eventually chose a smaller liberal arts school, which was more in keeping with what she wanted when we did college tours. My second daughter did not do as well on the PSATs. We thought a prep

course might feed her stress, so we went with a private tutor. She did just OK on the SAT—but the ACT she blew out of the water. That score changed her trajectory. Suddenly, she had higher-tier options."

Greenberg advises parents not to downplay the importance of sleep and exercise during this intense time, which is potentially life-changing. "Kids don't do well if they're exhausted or rundown," she says. "You may be tempted to let them study to all hours. But they need balance. This is no time to get sick, yet I see it in my practice a lot."

Karen Dukess, author of *The Last Book Party* and mother of two sons in college, offers this important—and often overlooked—tip: "Sign up for the exam in the location that works best for you at least a few months before the actual test. With my oldest, all the local spots were filled, and I had to drive him to another state." She also suggests budgeting extra time on test day: "Expect a sea of cars all trying to drop off kids at the same time. My youngest son had to get out of my car and run to make it on time!"

Lob agrees. "Control the 'controllables,'" she says. "Manage time, so on test day students bring their best."

Finally, there's this bit of wisdom from Mohan: "I'm in boardrooms and C-suites, and there's no uniformity to it, nor to the journey of how people got there," she says. "Try to have a mindset that it's all going to be OK. Building resilience in your kids is most important. There are many paths to get to where they want to go."