

Here are some strategies for overcoming prom pressure.

Your Money

With a little bit of planning and creativity, prom doesn't have to cost a fortune. Here are a few less expensive options:

- Try renting tuxedos or dresses or paying for them in installments if you don't want to blow a wad of cash.
- Shop online or at thrift stores to get style on the cheap.
- Borrow clothes from older siblings or cousins.
- If you can't afford a trip to a beauty salon, team up with a friend to be each other's stylists. Treat yourselves to some new beauty supplies, then spend the afternoon getting ready.
- Instead of an expensive restaurant, meet up at a friend's place for some home cooking or opt for a romantic picnic dinner in the park.

If you're going with a date, talk beforehand about what's important to both of you. That way you'll have some idea of where you should spend your money. And one person shouldn't feel pressure to pay for everything. Lots of couples prefer to share the expenses so both people have a choice in what the plans are.

If you need to ask a parent or other family member for help with your finances, offer to make up the cash by doing chores around the house like mowing the lawn, doing the dishes, or babysitting your little brother or sister. Sometimes parents are happy to help with certain expenses. For example, parents who pool together to get a limo for the group don't have to worry about everyone getting home safely.

Your Self-Esteem

For some people, the biggest prom worry is asking and being asked: It's natural to stress out about gathering the courage to invite that special someone — and to worry you might be turned down.

Although it's tempting to avoid the possibility of rejection by not asking, who wants to be afraid of taking a chance? Ask. If the person says no, you can move on. That's what Gina did — and she was surprised when people told her how much they admired her for asking Chris in the first place. If you never ask, you may miss out on a great evening with someone who may be shy and waiting for you to make the first move.

This works the other way around, of course: If you need to decline an offer, consider the other person's feelings when you say no. Remind yourself that it took guts to ask and probably caused a lot of nervousness. Let the person down gently, rather than embarrassing him or her.

The important thing is to find someone you'll enjoy spending the evening with, whether it's a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, or the object of your secret desire. Because most people want to relax and keep their options open for fun, more and more people go to prom with a group of friends instead of a date. Who better to spend the evening with than the people who love you for who you are?

Your Looks

Planning to lose weight? Everyone can benefit from exercise and healthy eating habits a few weeks before prom, but dieting might not be the way to go.

If you've talked to your doctor about needing to lose weight, prom could be a great reason to get motivated. But avoid last-minute crash diets. People who resort to these are usually left feeling weak, cranky, and not in the mood for fun.

Because the weight lost through crash diets is mostly water weight, people usually gain the weight back after prom's over. Studies have found that frequent "yo-yo" dieters — people who crash diet and then go back to eating normally — may end up gaining more weight over time.

To lose weight for real and keep it off for the rest of the summer's fun and beyond, plan to lose 1 or 2 pounds a week through regular exercise and by eating a variety of healthy foods. Since it's almost impossible to lose more than a couple of pounds of body fat per week, set your goals early on: If you'd like to lose 5 pounds, for example, start your program at least 3 weeks before the big night.

Exercising and eating right will also help your skin look its best. Speaking of skin, we all know the problems tanning causes later in life, but lots of people don't know how tanning can mess

with prom-night looks: Some people are prone to breakouts or rashes after tanning; others notice it leaves them with dull, dry, flaky skin.

So look for alternatives to the tanning bed. Plan ahead and experiment with store-bought tanning products. Try them out several weeks in advance to find out which one works best for you. Or visit a salon for advice on spray tanning.

Other strategies for looking prom-night gorgeous? Get plenty of rest, especially on the days leading up to prom. And no matter what body type you have or how much money you spend, confidence helps you look good!

Your Health

Lots of people feel pressure from their friends to drink, do drugs, or lose their virginity on prom night. As with your other prom plans, take a minute to think in advance about how you'll avoid getting into an unwanted situation. (No one wants to spend prom night in jail or at the hospital after being pressured into drinking or doing drugs.) You'll feel more confident and in control if you're prepared.

Drugs and alcohol impair judgment in ways that can hurt you — even if you're not the one using them. Be sure you have a safe ride home, whether it's a designated driver, parent, or that chauffeur-driven limo. It's also a good idea to have cab fare or to bring a cell phone and the number of an older sibling or parent just in case your ride gets wild or doesn't show up.

"Prom Pressure." *Teens Health*. Nemours Foundation. 10 March 2009.

http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/prom.html