



Stress Management

What is Stress?

Stress is the body's non-specific response to any demand made on it that can cause exhaustion and physical or psychological illness, heart attacks and accidents. But it is important to remember that in certain forms stress is normal and essential providing a way to express talents and pursue happiness. As our body responds to various forms of physical or psychological stress certain changes take place. These include increased heart rate, blood pressure and secretions of stimulatory hormones and they occur whether stress is positive or negative. Continual exposure lowers the body's ability to cope with additional forms of stress.

Causes of stress

- Ⓜ Physical environment - noise, bright lights, heat, confined spaces
- Ⓜ Social, interaction with people - rudeness, aggressiveness
- Ⓜ Organisational - rules, regulations, deadlines
- Ⓜ Major life events - death of a partner, friend or relative, promotion, redundancy, birth of new baby, moving house
- Ⓜ Daily hassles - commuting, misplaced objects, mechanical breakdowns
- Ⓜ Lifestyle choices - caffeine intake, lack of sleep, overloaded schedule, negative self-talk, pessimistic thinking, self-criticism, unrealistic expectations
- Ⓜ Stressful personality traits - perfectionist, workaholic, pleaser

The following are indicators that you may be experiencing

- Ⓜ General irritability, impatience, frustration, anxiety, nervousness, depression or fear
- Ⓜ Insomnia or change in sleep pattern
- Ⓜ Increased blood pressure, increased heart rate, chest pains or trembling
- Ⓜ Loss of concentration, memory or humor, indecisiveness or confusion
- Ⓜ Indigestion, nausea or changes appetite
- Ⓜ Neck and/or lower back pain, abdominal cramps or muscle aches/stiffness
- Ⓜ Changes in appetite





Managing Stress

Stress is a process that builds gradually so it is more effective to intervene early on. Try to become aware of the signs that suggest the process has begun. The following tips will help you maintain a healthier lifestyle and prepare you to cope with the stress of everyday living.

- Ⓢ Regular exercise, at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise 3 times per week
- Ⓢ Eat a well balanced diet including whole grains, nuts, fruit and vegetables, avoid fatty or sugary foods. Excess sugars cause frequent fluctuation in blood glucose levels which adds stress to the body's functioning
- Ⓢ Avoid caffeine e.g. coffee, tea, fizzy drinks and chocolate as these can all aggravate anxiety, insomnia, nervousness and trembling.
- Ⓢ Reduce alcohol and/or drug intake as these can cause headaches and swelling, decrease coping mechanisms and add to depression
- Ⓢ Get at least 7 hours of sleep every night as this is the time when the body heals itself
- Ⓢ Spend time each day completing a relaxation technique, daydreaming, prayer, yoga, meditation, self-hypnosis, whatever feels comfortable for you or regularly have a relaxing holistic treatment such as massage or reflexology
- Ⓢ Take a warm bath, light some candles, burn some incense and play some relaxing music whilst you soak
- Ⓢ Go for a walk, fresh air can do wonders or take a holiday, just to get away from the things that are bothering you for a short while. Although this will not solve the problem it will give you time to decrease your stress levels. You can then return to deal with the problem feeling more rested and in a better frame of mind
- Ⓢ Get in touch! Hug or hold hands with someone, stroke a pet. Physical contact is a great way to relieve stress
- Ⓢ Change stressful situations e.g. change jobs, leave a relationship, problem-solve, time and money management
- Ⓢ Change your thinking, look at things more positively, see problems as opportunities, ignore negative thoughts and keep a sense of humor!

It is important to note that most of the stress we have is actually self-generated. This is a paradox because many people think of external causes when we are upset like the weather, the boss, the children etc. Recognising that we create most of our own upsets is an important first step to dealing with them

This advice is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis, treatment or care from a GP. Any concerns you have should be discussed with your GP before commencing treatment.

