

# stress

Tips for identifying and managing stress



**Stay connected.**  
**We're stronger together.**

## STRESS

Stress occurs for most people from time to time and is an emotional and physical response to pressure. Pressure can arise from a range of factors including:

- > Relationships with others
- > Work/study demands
- > Illness
- > Life changes such as marriage, divorce, retirement
- > Day to day activities and tasks, juggling many roles or tasks at the same time
- > Positive events such as organising holidays, starting a new job, parenthood

Ongoing and severe stress can have a major impact upon quality of life. It is therefore important to recognise signs of stress and potential triggers in order to handle it effectively.

## SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Stress can cause changes in thoughts, emotions, physical sensations and behaviour. Common symptoms include:

- > Irritability or moodiness
- > Worrying or feeling anxious
- > Racing heart, breathing faster
- > Tense muscles, back and neck pain
- > Frequent headaches – minor to migraine
- > Upset stomach
- > Chest pains
- > Increased blood pressure
- > Changes in appetite
- > Existing health issues become worse
- > Difficulty concentrating, forgetful
- > Unable to settle, constantly on the go
- > Sleep disturbances
- > Increase in alcohol, smoking



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## STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

### 1. Identify stressors – what is causing the stress?

- > Where am I when I am feeling stressed, what am I doing, who am I with? Even if there is little that can be done about some situations there could be small things that can be changed e.g. routine, doing things differently, getting help, seeking advice etc that could make a difference.
- > What is within my control – some things will be beyond your control e.g. working in a job that has deadlines. You cannot change this without changing jobs, however some aspects such as time management, planning tasks are manageable and within control.

### 2. Prioritise general health and wellbeing

- > Incorporate regular exercise into daily life - along with providing multiple health benefits exercise is an effective way to unwind and use up adrenaline that can be caused by stress.
- > Get enough sleep and eat well.

### 3. Stay connected and take time out for recreational activities

- > Making time for those who matter and provide positive connections in life is an essential part of wellbeing. During stressful periods it is common to forget to do the things that normally make us feel good or reach out to those who matter. Spending time with love ones can also be a way of accessing additional support and resources.
- > Set aside time each week to do something enjoyable – engaging in a hobby or activity can be an effective way to unwind and create more balanced thoughts.

### 4. Problem solving techniques

- > Brainstorming possible solutions then listing pros and cons before choosing which option to put into action can be an effective way of tackling and clarifying the stressor.

### 5. Utilise relaxation techniques

- > Deep breathing, meditation and progressive muscle relaxation are all effective in slowing down breathing, lowering heart rate and creating a sense of calm.
- > It can take regular practice to find a technique and approach that works best for each person.

Sometimes practicing a breathing technique during non-stressful periods can be an easier way of feeling better equipped to automatically use the approach during a stressful period of heightened emotions.

### 6. Challenge negative thinking

- > Consider whether negative thinking is contributing to and maintaining the stress. Negative thinking tends to enhance worry, subsequently increasing stress and decreasing motivation for positive action.
- > Try some prompts to challenge response e.g. What am I reacting to? Is this fact or opinion? What's the worst that could happen? What's most likely to happen? Am I overestimating the threat?



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