

COPING WITH STRESS

STRESS - FACTSHEET

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a natural response when feeling pressured or not being able to cope with life's challenges. It triggers the body's natural alarm system of "fight or flight" and our breathing, heart rate and metabolism speed up due to the release of adrenaline and cortisol. While everyone experiences stress from time to time, too much stress or prolonged stress can have negative effects on our physical and mental health.

The causes of stress vary from person to person and relate to one's circumstances, attitudes and expectations. Common causes include relationship problems, work or school pressures, financial issues, conflict and major life events such as the death of a loved one, divorce or loss of a job and of course, traumatic events.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M STRESSED AND WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS?

Signs of stress may be physical eg headaches, muscle tension, sweating or dizziness, stomach or bowel problems, breathlessness or palpitation, insomnia; or emotional eg irritability, feeling overwhelmed or anxious; or behavioural eg rushing around, increased eating, drinking or smoking, withdrawing from usual activities, lack of concentration or motivation, moodiness and temper outbursts.

Over time there are significant health risks from prolonged stress including heart disease, high blood pressure, severe mental health conditions and lower immune responses. Studies have shown that the first step in tackling stress is to become aware that it's a problem for you. Reading this Factsheet and other relevant information is an important step in that direction. The next step is to make a plan to take control of both the causes and effects of stress.

STRESS - FACTSHEET

STRESS PLANNING

Explore and plan ahead where possible. Be curious about your stresses and how you react to them. Write down problems in your life that may be causing you stress and list all the actions you could possibly take. Then make a plan to deal with each problem.

Plan for stressful situations which may be outside of your control by increasing your relaxation, exercise and other self-care activities. Experiment with what works well for you and try to do things that make you happy (even if they're small) every day.

For more information about stress and coping strategies, contact the EAP line on 1300 878 379

KEY TIPS FOR MANAGING STRESS

- Exercise regularly - at least 20 minutes two or three times a week (especially in nature) is excellent for stress control. It's important that you get your heart rate up a bit, so you feel puffed.
- Talk things over with someone- a friend or family member that you can trust
- Progressive muscle relaxation and mindfulness and meditation practices can help, try using an app or a guided recording or try something new eg yoga classes. It's important to practise this daily
- Sleep - a good sleep routine is essential. If you have trouble falling asleep, do something relaxing before you go to bed like listening to music or reading (see Sleep Factsheet)
- Pause before taking on more things, be realistic about what you can achieve and set priorities - time management tools may help, and say 'no' if necessary and let go of the guilt
- Eat well - healthily and mindfully; choose food that is nourishing and allow at least half an hour to sit down and eat your meal
- Limit alcohol, caffeine and nicotine as they contribute to feelings of anxiety and sleeplessness
- Take time out and recharge - relaxing and doing activities you enjoy daily and be around people that make you feel good about yourself. Plan a holiday at least once a year and try different activities or locations.

Stress is a normal reaction to life challenges and can become problematic in terms of one's health and well being if steps aren't taken to manage it. While there are simple and effective steps that can be taken to help you manage and plan for stress in your life, it's important to get professional advice or see your GP if you would like further support.