



Stress - A Summary



Niamh
Mental Wellbeing



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What is stress?

Stress is difficult to measure. It may build up quickly. For example, the unexpected traffic jam. Sometimes it is ongoing. For example, a difficult job. Tell-tale signs of stress building up include: not being able to sleep properly with worries going through your mind; being impatient or irritable at minor problems; poor concentration; being unable to make decisions; drinking or smoking more; unable to relax, and always feeling that something needs to be done; feeling tense or anxious.

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Some suggestions on how to avoid or tackle stress

Try keeping a diary over a few weeks or so, and list the times, places, and people that make your stress increase. A pattern may emerge as to the main causes of your stress. If you do identify regular causes of your stress, you may be able to discuss this with a close friend or family member. It may help them and you to be aware of the reasons why you are feeling stressed.

Try practising simple relaxation techniques when you are relaxed, and then use them routinely when you are stressed, or if a stressful situation suddenly occurs. Two popular methods are:

- **Deep breathing**

Take long, definite, slow breaths in, and very slowly breathe out. If you do this a few times, and concentrate fully on breathing, you may find it quite relaxing.

- **Muscular tensing and stretching**

Twist your neck around each way as far as it is comfortable, and then relax. Fully tense your shoulder and back muscles for several seconds, and then relax completely.

Set times aside to positively relax

Don't just let relaxation 'happen' between jobs. For example: plan a long bath, or just sit and listen to some music, etc. These times are not wasteful, and you should not feel guilty about not 'getting on with things'.

Try to take some 'time out' each day

For example, getting up 15-20 minutes earlier than you need to. Take a proper lunch break, preferably away from work. Once or twice a week, try to plan some time just to be alone. For example, a gentle stroll or a sit in the park.

Regular exercise

Regular exercise is thought to help reduce your level of stress and improve sleep.

Alcohol

Don't be fooled that drinking can help with stress. Drinking alcohol to 'calm nerves' is often a slippery slope to heavier and problem drinking.

Hobbies

A hobby that involves no deadlines or pressures can take the mind off stresses. For example: sports, knitting, music, model-making, puzzles, and reading for pleasure.

See a doctor

See a doctor if stress symptoms become worse. Treatment such as anxiety management groups and anxiety counselling may be appropriate.



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