

Stress management

What is stress?

The way you react physically or emotionally to just about everything 'good' or 'bad' that happens to you. Selye (1976) named two categories, namely good or desirable stress (eustress) and bad or undesirable stress (distress). Eustress is pleasant, or at least challenging, and can produce positive effects such as the maximisation of output and creativity. Ironically, without this positive type of stimuli, life can become stressful. In contrast, distress is evident when a person perceives himself or herself as having no ability to control a stressful event.

Causes of stress

Stress can be caused by just about anything depending on the individual. What is stressful for one person, may not be for another. Some common causes of stress include:

- Relationships
- Finances
- Change
- Extreme demands
- Work/social life
- Health
- Fears

Symptoms of stress

Because of its chronic effects, stress can be a direct causative factor, an indirect contributory factor, a precipitating factor, or an aggravating factor for various diseases. Symptoms can be mental, emotional, physical or behavioural. Some frequently reported symptoms include:

- Poor concentration
- Anger/short temper
- Anxiety
- Headache
- Insomnia
- Excessive drinking/smoking
- Nervous habits
- Illicit drug use

Chronic stress

Research has proven that these symptoms can lead to a number of diseases, disorders and problems:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Musculo-skeletal disorders
- Psychological disorders
- Workplace injury
- Suicide
- Cancer
- Impaired immune function

What can we do about stress?

1. Understand stress
2. Look after your health
3. Take time to relax
4. Effective time management
5. Effective communication
6. Conflict resolution
7. Laugh!

1. Understand stress

Event → Interpretation → Response

It is your interpretation or what you think of the event which determines your reaction or response, and you have control over this.

2. Look after your health

- Eat a well balanced diet with plenty of fresh food.
- Exercise regularly as a fit body is more able to cope with stress.
- Get adequate sleep.

3. Take time out to relax

A combination of relaxation, recreation and holidays is essential to assist in stress prevention or relief. Look at the timing of holidays and use what works for you as an individual.

4. Efficient time management

Think of time as your most precious resource.

- Prioritise tasks for the day and don't 'sweat the small stuff'.
- Breakdown priorities into manageable steps and learn to say no!
- Efficient time management also involves goal setting. This is one of the most effective ways to change our habits or behaviour.
- Ensure you have both short and long term goals and that they are realistic and measurable.

5. Effective communication

Plan what you want to say before you say it, and ensure your delivery is at the appropriate moment. Remember that listening is a vital part of communicating and try and understand the other person/s point-of-view.

6. Conflict resolution

Accept that not everyone will agree with you all the time. Be POSITIVE about conflict situations and offer to take some form of action. Remaining calm and in control will also assist others with their stress.

7. Laugh

The greatest value of humour is the way it reminds us of the limitations we all have by virtue of being human. Studies have shown that one of the most common characteristics of people who survive tough situations, is their sense of humour. So take the time to smile today and reap the rewards!

Stress at work – some facts

¼ of employees view their jobs as stressful

Stress in the workplace is a growing concern for employees and employers in Australia with significant increases in stress claims

Each year undiagnosed depression in the workplace costs \$4.3 billion in lost productivity

(Beyond Blue 2011)