

# COPING WITH STRESS

## WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is primarily the emotional and physical strain an individual experiences in response to pressure from the outside world.

While some stress is positive and necessary to perform work and other tasks, if it is intense, constant and the individual finds themselves unable to cope, then stress can have adverse effects.

Left untreated, stress can lead to physical illness and psychological disorders, which can have a substantial impact on our daily lives.

## SYMPTOMS

- Irritability
- Depression
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Intolerance and over-sensitivity
- Emptiness
- Difficulties in decision-making
- Poor concentration
- Poor memory
- Racing thoughts
- Negative thinking
- Difficulties sleeping
- Loss of appetite
- Withdrawal and loss of interest
- Restlessness
- Reckless behaviour
- Headaches
- Excessive sweating
- High blood pressure

- Susceptibility to illness
- Muscle aches
- Lethargy and fatigue
- Nausea

## CAUSES

Stress occurs when we are required to adapt to environmental changes and our bodies shift through physical, mental and emotional responses.

Stress can be caused by numerous factors including daily hassles, physical environment, social interactions, personality traits, negative self-talk, poor coping skills, sleep deprivation, unhealthy lifestyle or pressure placed on self to meet unrealistic expectations.

A certain amount of stress is good for you, too much can exacerbate mental health issues like depression and anxiety and can cause biochemical changes in your body, affecting the immune system leaving you vulnerable to disease.

Further chronic stress has been associated with the development of heart disease, Type II Diabetes and other physical disorders.

## TREATMENT

- Psychological intervention and/or counselling
- Coping skills training
- Relaxation and meditation education
- Support Groups

## HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

- Accept responsibility. This is your life and the initiative must come from you.
- Try to be objective. Step back and look at your situation as if it were someone else's.
- Know your inner resources. Know your strengths and weaknesses to help you become aware of your own coping mechanisms.
- Don't try and cope alone. Talk about your problems with family and friends.
- Take a positive approach. Remember problems always have solutions!
- Be realistic. Don't expect too much of yourself and set attainable goals.
- Don't strain for absolute control. Accept that there are many situations in life you can't control.
- Be flexible. If the first solution doesn't work, then try again.
- Learn effective time management practices. Set goals, make lists, and schedule activities so you don't end up feeling overloaded.
- Take one step at a time. Work in stages as handling several problems at once may overwhelm you.
- Take personal control. Avoid taking on more responsibility than you can handle.
- Learn to recognise danger signals. Troubled sleep? Drinking more? Losing your temper more?
- Stay physically healthy. A healthy lifestyle and exercise can reduce anxiety and tension.
- Learn to relax. Take up yoga or go for a daily walk.
- Seek professional help. This should be seen as a sign of strength not weakness.

## REFERRAL/SUPPORT INFO

**Drug ARM** 1300 656 800  
info@drugarm.com.au  
drugarm.com.au

**Drug ARM Central Intake**  
07 3620 8880

**Lifeline Australia** 13 11 14  
24/7 crisis support

**Or contact your local GP (General Practitioner)**

## HOW CAN FAMILY AND FRIENDS HELP?

Encourage loved ones to take care of their mental health including following the suggestions above on how to cope. If your friend or relative is suffering from extreme stress, encourage them to seek professional help and support.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013). Mental health. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4125.0main+features3150Jan%202013>



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