

Stress Helpsheet

Stress is our bodies' way of responding to any kind of demand; be it positive such as getting engaged, or negative such as missing the bus on your way to an interview. Pressures or demands create a chemical response within the hypothalamus that starts a chain reaction throughout the whole body to enable us to deal with the pressure we are facing. Stress can create a number of responses including physical, emotional, mental, behavioural and health issues. Everyone experiences stress at some stage in their life and it is important to remember that it affects everyone differently. If you are having difficulties managing stress, or the effects of it, NHS Choices has some excellent sources of information and are on the following web page <http://www.nhs.uk/>

Effects of Stress

Physical: Increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, butterflies in stomach, muscle contraction (aches and pains), hot and cold spells (blushing/sweating) nausea, numbness and tingling, increased blood glucose, difficulty swallowing/drymouth, dilation of pupils, frequent urination, fatigue,

Emotional: Anxiety, depression, guilt and shame, moodiness, loneliness, jealousy, over-reacting, crying.

Behavioural: Difficulty sleeping/waking early, emotional outbursts, irritation/anger/aggression, excessive eating/loss of appetite, excessive drinking/smoking, accident proneness/trembling, difficulty relaxing, avoidance of particular situations, social avoidance/withdrawal, inactivity, restlessness.

Mental: difficulty concentrating, difficulty making decisions, forgetfulness, sensitivity to criticism, negative self-critical thoughts, distorted ideas, more rigid attitudes, obsessional intrusive thoughts.

Health: heart disease, stomach ulcers, migraine/headaches, asthma/hayfever, skin rashes/eczema, diarrhoea, irritable bowel syndrome, back pain, decreased immune system.

Coping with Stress

Understand your stress – recognise *your* major sources of stress and how they affect *you*. Once you have done this try to anticipate and plan for periods of stress. Try and find a comfortable level.

Adopt a problem solving approach – be specific about your problem, break it down, and approach each stage one at a time. Plan a course of action, evaluate it and then execute it.

Recognise and accept your own feelings – try and be more open with others and accept how you feel. Be aware of past experiences and how they affect you in the here and now.

Develop new behavioural skills – learn to say no, avoid procrastination, manage your time effectively, avoid being a perfectionist, practice rational thinking, delegate where possible, plan goals.

Social Support Networks – ask for help when you need it, deliberately cultivate good relationships, talk to people

Maintain a healthy lifestyle – take regular exercise and eat a healthy diet. Seek out changes of pace and new activities.

Make time – to relax, do something you enjoy, plan breaks (lunch, weekends, holidays) and develop hobbies

Reflection and Spiritual Development – allow time for reflection and meditation. Reassess your values and review your goals in life; what is really important to you? Practice Mindfulness.