

What is stress?

Recognising Stress/Dealing with Stress/Work-Related Stress/Tackling Work Stress

Stress in itself is not necessarily harmful – we need goals and challenges in life, or we get bored. Some people can tolerate all sorts of major life changes without feeling pressured, while others find it difficult to cope when life gets stressful. However, we do know that too much can be damaging.

Stress is a well-known trigger for depression and can also affect your physical health – so it's important to identify the stress factors in your life and do everything you can to minimise them.

Any sort of loss, such as bereavement, divorce or separation, or a child leaving home, causes stress, as does long – term illness or disability. But 'good' things like marriage, moving house, a new job and holidays have quite high stress ratings too. Worrying about deadlines or about not be up to the challenges of a particular task may also produce symptoms of stress. These include tension, irritability, feelings of tiredness, sleep problems and haggard looks.

Recognising Stress

Some common signs of too much stress:

- Increased irritability
- Increased sensitivity to criticism
- Signs of tension, like nail biting
- Difficulty getting to sleep and early morning waking
- Increased use of alcohol and cigarettes
- Indigestion
- Loss of concentration

It is important to take action to relieve damaging stress before it affects your physical and mental health.

If you start to feel that things are getting on top of you, give yourself some breathing space. Take a day off from work, domestic chores, family and anything else that puts pressure on you. Spend the day doing only relaxing things that make you feel good.

It can all make the difference and reduce the threat to your wellbeing. You may also find that relaxation exercises are helpful.

Dealing with Stress

Whatever the situation that is causing you problems, the secret of managing stress is to look after yourself and, when possible, to remove some of the causes of stress.

Some ways to cope with stress:

- Accept offers of practical help
- Do one thing at a time – don't keep piling stress on stress
- Know your own limits – don't be too competitive or expect too much of yourself
- Do things you enjoy and have some fun
- Let off steam in a way that causes no harm. (shout, scream, hit a pillow)
- Walk away from stressful situations
- Try to spend time with people who are rewarding rather than critical and judgemental
- Practise slow breathing using the lower part of the lungs
- Use relaxation techniques

One response to stress can be to get angry; find out about anger management

Work – Related Stress:

Work – related stress is the second highest occupational health problem in the UK (after back problems). An estimated half a million employees say they are experiencing work –related stress, including anxiety and depression. Because there is still an unjust stigma against mental health problems, employees are often reluctant to seek help, in case they are perceived as 'not being able to cope'.

Many different situations can lead to stress at work. These include:

- Relationships with colleagues
- An unsupportive boss
- Lack of consultation and communication
- Too much interference with your private, social or family life
- Too much or too little to do
- Too much pressure, unrealistic deadlines
- Work that is too difficult or not demanding enough
- Lack of control over the way the work is done
- Poor working conditions
- Being in the wrong job
- Feeling undervalued

- Insecurity and the threat of unemployment

When people feel under pressure at work, they tend to work harder and harder to close the gap between what they are achieving and what they think they should be achieving. They stop taking breaks and often lose touch with their own needs.

Tackling Work Stress:

These are the things you can do:

- Talk to someone you can trust – at work or outside – about things that are causing you stress
- Use whatever counselling or support is available
- Work regular hours and take all the breaks and holidays you are entitled to.
- If things get too much book a day off or a long weekend
- Use flexi time, if available, to avoid rush hour travel or to fit in with childcare needs
- Look after yourself through exercise and healthy eating
- Tackle addictions to alcohol, smoking and other drugs
- Learn relaxation techniques

At Work:

- Make your work environment as comfortable and suited to your needs as you can
- Learn assertiveness – it will help you protect yourself from unreasonable demands
- Discuss any problems with your supervisor or manager. If difficulties cannot be resolved, talk to your personnel department, trade union representative or other relevant members of staff.
- Treat colleagues with the respect and consideration you would like from them
- Be aware of company policies on harassment, bullying or racism, so you know how to challenge unacceptable behaviour and what back up there is.

REMEMBER: Know your own limits – don't be too competitive or expect too much of yourself.