

STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Experiencing significant stress over a prolonged period can lead to health issues

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Stress versus pressure

Pressure is part and parcel of life and can help to keep us motivated. However, excessive pressure can lead to stress, which affects our behaviour, emotional wellbeing and likelihood of falling ill. Action is then necessary to restore control.

Although stress isn't an illness in itself, individuals who experience significant stress over a prolonged period of time are more prone to developing mental and physical health issues.

What causes stress?

Stress can result from events getting out of hand. Sometimes these will be major events such as bereavement, loss of employment, relationship breakdown, money worries, caring for dependents, changes in job role or moving house. However, stress can also result from an accumulation of more minor events.

What is considered stressful varies from person to person and depends on a number of different factors including an individual's personality, state of health, age, personal circumstances and any additional pressures.

Early warning signs

Learning to recognise the early warning signs of stress makes it easier to tackle issues as soon as possible, thus lessening the potential impact. The indicators can be physical or mental, and include:

- headaches and fatigue
- indigestion
- palpitations
- anxiety and mood swings
- insomnia and disturbed sleep patterns
- irritability and lack of concentration
- crying unexpectedly

Learn to relax

The ability to relax is an important tool in combating stress. There are many aids to relaxation including meditation techniques, yoga, Tai Chi and relaxation tapes: experiment and find the technique that works for you.

Take regular exercise

Gently rhythmic exercise such as cycling, swimming, jogging or brisk walking is an excellent way of releasing tension caused by stress. Try to exercise for twenty minutes two or three times a week. Exercise can also help to combat insomnia by inducing physical tiredness.

Develop a positive attitude

Relaxation for the mind is as important as for the body; this involves taking a philosophical view of life. When feeling stressed try asking yourself what's the worst thing that could happen and does it justify this level of anxiety? Develop a personal action plan: a structured programme designed to develop the lifestyle you want, not the one imposed on you by external circumstances. Enjoy time with your friends and family and remember there are many sources of external help and counselling available should you need them.

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