

Stress Awareness

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What is stress?

The World Health Organisation defines stress as “the reaction people may have when presented with demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope”.

Stressors

Stressors are the triggers which cause an individual to experience stress.

On-duty EAO available at 0818 008120

Monday – Thursday: 9am – 5.15pm

Friday: 9am – 5pm

**Appointments are available evening
and weekends if required**

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Stressors remain neutral – our unique response to them and the stress they trigger in us, is dependent on our perception of the event.

An event (e.g. speaking in public) which is fun and pleasing for one person can be dreaded and stressful for another.

Common triggers of personal stress:

- Demands
- Health problems (mental/physical)
- Parenting/caring
- Financial difficulties
- Relationship issues/difficulties
- Separation/divorce
- Bereavement/loss

Common triggers of workplace stress:

- Constant overload
- Mismatch between ability and work allotted
- Perceived lack of support
- Workplace interpersonal difficulties
- Exposure to aggressive behaviour

Signs of excessive stress can include:

Physical signs

- Headaches
- Muscle tension or pain
- Stomach problems
- Excessive sweating
- Feeling dizzy
- Bowel or bladder problems
- Breathlessness or palpitations
- Dry mouth
- Tingling in body
- Sleep difficulties

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Emotional signs

- Feeling irritable
- Anxious
- Low mood
- Apathy
- Low in self esteem
- Mood swings
- Confusion
- Loss of motivation
- Poor concentration

Is stress always bad?

Luckily, our stress response is not all bad news. Stress can be helpful during brief periods of pressure by improving concentration and endurance. It allows us to speed up for a little while and increase productivity. However, it is important to remember that any system that is left to run in over-drive for long periods is more susceptible to burn-out.

Stress of itself is not an illness. However, the long term effects of excessive stress can contribute to ill health. Stress can be a contributory factor in a wide range of illnesses such as:

- Depression
- Migraine
- Ulcers
- Strokes
- High blood pressure
- Increased vulnerability to common illness

Some strategies to help with stress

- **Deep breathing** – interrupts the stress response and relaxes the nervous system.
- **Physical stretching** – interrupts the accumulation of muscular tension.
- **Thought stopping** – interrupts the overreactions and negative emotions that encourage the fight-or-flight response.
- **Separating a task into small manageable pieces** – helps to redirect the attention and re-establish a sense of control, accomplishment and selfconfidence.
- **Rational thinking skills and positive self-talk** – help to temporarily distract the inner critic and interrupt negative thinking and the stress chemicals.
- **Sleep** – is vital for health and wellbeing. It is generally accepted that we should try to get sufficient sleep each night to allow the brain and body to naturally replenish.

**Civil Service Employee Assistance Service
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