

COPING WITH STRESS

Our daily working or personal life can get stressful. Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. It occurs when there is a build-up of pressure which is above the level a person can cope with. How we feel when we're under pressure up to a point can be a good thing. It can help us rise to challenges in situations where we need to be at our best. As people have different ways of reacting to stress, a situation that feels stressful to one person may be motivating to someone else. However, if too much pressure continues long-term it can result in severe stress which can be bad for your physical and emotional health.

HOW WE FEEL UNDER PRESSURE

How your body reacts to too much pressure can over time be harmful to your health, putting you at risk of heart attacks and strokes. You may also experience headaches, muscle tension or pain, or dizziness. In fact, common signs of stress include sleeping problems, sweating, loss of appetite and difficulty concentrating. You may feel anxious, irritable or low in self-esteem, and you may have racing thoughts, worry constantly or go over things in your head. Stress can cause a surge of hormones in your body. These stress hormones are released to enable you to deal with pressures or threats – the so-called "fight or flight" response.



The difference between worry, anxiety and stress

Worry is a thinking function. It is a type of repetitive thinking, often troubled and focuses on the future or the past. It is the opposite of 'be here now' and being present and centred. It is an adaptive function which is hardwired into our brains to help us solve problems or to avoid threats. It can become habitual and lower your mood.

Anxiety usually involves high levels of worry, intrusive thoughts and can be accompanied by panic attacks creating feelings of fear, apprehension or dread. It can come with physical symptoms like rapid heartbeat, pains in the chest and sweating. Anxiety can cause many different symptoms in the body. It is formed by the emotional part of our brain called the 'limbic system'.

Stress is a physical response to a threat, either real or imagined that prepares you to meet challenges. It is a physical response that your body has to a short-term stress linked to your nervous system. Over time stress can take away your resilience and becomes a negative, vicious cycle especially if the cause of your stress is because you are worrying too much or you continually feel anxious.

It is important to Amnesty that stress is managed and reduced for colleagues. Everyone has a vital role in managing and reducing stress and there are practical things that you can do to reduce stress within your team or to support someone who is already experiencing stress.

Turn over for ways to reduce stress.

10 WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS

1

Relaxation exercises

Many people find exercises that focus on breathing and muscle relaxation is helpful in relieving stress. Mindfulness courses and simple meditations across a series of weeks, can also help to reduce stress and improve mood.

2

Exercise

One of the best ways to relieve stress is doing any type of physical exercise from aerobics and running to yoga. Being active regularly can boost your feel-good endorphins and distract you from daily worries. It is meditation in motion.

3

Talking issues through

Don't ignore your own emotional wellbeing. If something is making you feel stressed, talk to someone you trust. Another person's point of view can help you deal with difficult situations. Confidential Peer to Peer Support or accessing the counselling service at Amnesty is a quick and easy way to cope with stress.

4

Find the cause of your stress

Understanding the situation and identifying the underlying causes can help you deal with stress. Sort the possible reasons for your stress into those with a practical solution, those that will get better anyway given time, and those you can't do anything about. Take control by taking small steps towards the things you can improve. Think about a plan to address the things that you can change. This might involve setting yourself realistic expectations and prioritising essential commitments. If you feel overwhelmed, ask people to help with the tasks you have to do and say no to things that you cannot take on.

5

Organise your time

If you never seem to have enough time, better time management may help you regain control of your days. Whether it's in your job or your lifestyle as a whole, learning how to manage your time effectively can help you feel more relaxed, focused and in control. Write a to do list and prioritise important tasks, and leave tasks you can do later or delegate.

6

Restful sleep

Are you finding you are struggling to sleep? This is a common problem when you're stressed. Sleep is a basic human need, much like eating and drinking, and it is crucial to our overall health and wellbeing. It is the time when your body functions get some rest too, to be able to perform more effectively while up and awake. Good quality and restorative sleep is therefore essential for your wellbeing.

7

Eat Healthily

Eating healthily can reduce the risks of diet-related diseases. There is a growing amount of evidence showing how food affects our mood and how eating healthily can improve this. You can protect your feelings of wellbeing by ensuring that your diet provides adequate amounts of brain nutrients such as essential vitamins and minerals, as well as water.

8

Don't be too hard on yourself

Try to keep things in perspective. Remember that having a bad day is a universal human experience. Act as if you were your own best friend: be kind, supportive and compassionate to yourself and others. Take a few minutes each day to appreciate yourself.

9

Take time to relax

Strike the balance between responsibility to others and responsibility to yourself, this can really reduce stress levels. Tell yourself that it is okay to prioritise self-care. Are you needing time out but saying 'I just can't take the time off', if so know that taking a break is important for good mental health.

10

Emotional Resilience

Having emotional resilience is about having inner strength – the ability to bounce back from the stresses and challenges that life, family, work and the world throws at you. Make yourself more resilient by improving your diet, physical activity and quality of sleep.

