



STRESS
How to keep on top of things

MANAGING STRESS

Research suggests that a quarter of all adults will have a mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety, at some point in their lives. Many of these problems start with stress and this is why it is important to recognise unhealthy stress.

What is stress?

The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.

A little bit of pressure is good for us. It can be motivating, increase our productivity and even improve our performance.

However, too much or prolonged pressure can lead to stress, which is unhealthy for the mind and body. It can cause symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, sweating a lack of appetite and difficulty concentrating

So it is important to find a balance between not enough stress and too much stress.

Stressful Situations

Common causes of stress include:

- Changes in your life – like moving house or when you start at University
- Money worries
- Family, job or relationship troubles
- Bereavement (loss of a loved one)

“Stress is perceived in the mind, suffered in the human spirit, experienced via the emotions, expressed in behaviour, and “held” in the body.

Anon

”

Sometimes there are no clear causes of stress. Some people naturally feel more frustrated, anxious or depressed than others do, which can cause them to feel stressed more often.



What to Look For

These are some of the indicators that you are experiencing too much pressure.

Psychological Signs

- Inability to concentrate or make simple decisions
- Memory lapses
- Becoming rather vague
- Easily distracted
- Less intuitive & creative
- Worrying
- Negative thinking
- Depression & anxiety
- Mood swings
- Extra sensitive to criticism
- Defensive
- Feeling out of control
- Lack of motivation
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of self-esteem

Physical Signs

- Aches/pains & muscle tension/ grinding teeth
- Frequent colds/infections
- Allergies/rashes/skin irritations
- Constipation/diarrhoea/IBS
- Weight loss or gain
- Indigestion/heartburn/ulcers
- Hyperventilating/lump in the throat/pins & needles
- Dizziness/palpitations
- Panic attacks/nausea
- Physical tiredness
- Menstrual changes/loss of libido/ sexual problems
- Heart problems/high blood pressure

Emotional Signs

- Tearful
- Irritable

Behavioural Signs

- No time for relaxation or pleasurable activities
- Prone to accidents, forgetfulness
- Increased reliance on alcohol, smoking, caffeine, recreational or illegal drugs
- Becoming a workaholic
- Poor time management and/or poor standards of work
- Absenteeism
- Self neglect/change in appearance
- Social withdrawal
- Relationship problems
- Insomnia or waking tired
- Reckless
- Aggressive/anger outbursts
- Nervous
- Uncharacteristically lying

The symptoms that affect you can accumulate until you must take notice of them. Often the behavioral symptoms are most noticeable, as they are more obvious. By this time, stress may have been going on for many months.

Brain and Nerves

Headaches, feelings of despair, lack of energy, sadness, nervousness, anger, irritability, increased or decreased eating, trouble concentrating, memory problems, trouble sleeping, mental health problems (such as panic attacks, anxiety disorders and depression).

Skin

Acne and other skin problems.

Muscles and Joints

Muscle aches and tension (especially in the neck, shoulders and back), increased risk of high cholesterol and heart-attack.

Heart

Faster heartbeat, rise in blood pressure, increased risk of high cholesterol and heart-attack.

The role of stress hormones

People often refer to the flights, fight or freeze response. Flight-fight-freeze is a one off reaction to a perceived challenge or pressure and is not necessarily bad for the individual. It is good to be alerted to possible threats and to prepare to take avoiding action.

However, continually being in this state means that the body chemicals associated with flight-fight-freeze (cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline) are then constantly simulated and the result is ill-health of one type or another. This is stress.

These hormones are all produced by the adrenal glands, they invoke the flight-fight-freeze feelings that can help you to deal with a stressful situation.

The helpful evolutionary response of facing a threat is the automatic reaction of facing the threat with physical strength. However, another reaction can be to freeze - like a rabbit caught in car headlights. As with the rabbit, the result can be unhelpful. The flight response can cause us to avoid, which can be equally unhelpful at times.

Stomach

Nausea, stomach pain, heartburn, weight gain.

Pancreas

Increased risk of diabetes.

Intestines

Diarrhea, constipation and other digestive problems.

Reproductive System

For Women - irregular, more painful periods, reduced sexual desire.

For Men - impotence, lower sperm production, reduced sexual desire.

Immune System

Lowered ability to fight off or recover from illness.

Diagnosing and support for stress

Some people are unwilling to ask for help if they feel stressed. They may be embarrassed or think that they should be able to deal with stress in their own. However, it is important to speak to someone if stress is interfering with your daily life and activities. The Counselling & Mental Health Service is here to help support you and help you deal more effectively with stress.

If you decide to see your GP about stress they will diagnose based on your symptoms. Your GP may also ask you about your family history and your personal life to help determine the cause of your stress. In some cases, your GP may also want to carry out some tests to rule out any underlying health conditions. This could include a blood or urine test. In addition, there are self-help strategies including internet self-help websites, Counselling, Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), Anger management and medication.

Medication may be used if your stress leads to further problems and you are diagnosed with:

- **depression:** when you have feelings of extreme lethargy, despair or inadequacy that last for a long time
- **anxiety:** constant or situational feelings of unease, such as worry or fear, that affect your daily life. Panic attacks can also be treated with medication.

Ten Tips to get on top of stress

1. Learn to manage your time more effectively

Plan your day

Prioritise and use a diary. Use your journey to lectures or work to write notes and plan your day. Half an hour of uninterrupted work time is equivalent to one hour's work chaos in the library.

Set boundaries

Switch off your work brain when you have done a reasonable amount of work.

Do not work long hours into the night. Take a break.

A walk around the block or some deep breathing can help clear your head, keep you calm and give you a new perspective.

One job at a time!

It is easy to become overwhelmed when you have too much to do. Try to do a bit at a time, do one thing at a time and do not set unrealistic deadlines. Do the important things first and do not put off doing the unpleasant things. Avoidance causes a great deal of stress. Give unpleasant tasks a high priority and do them first.

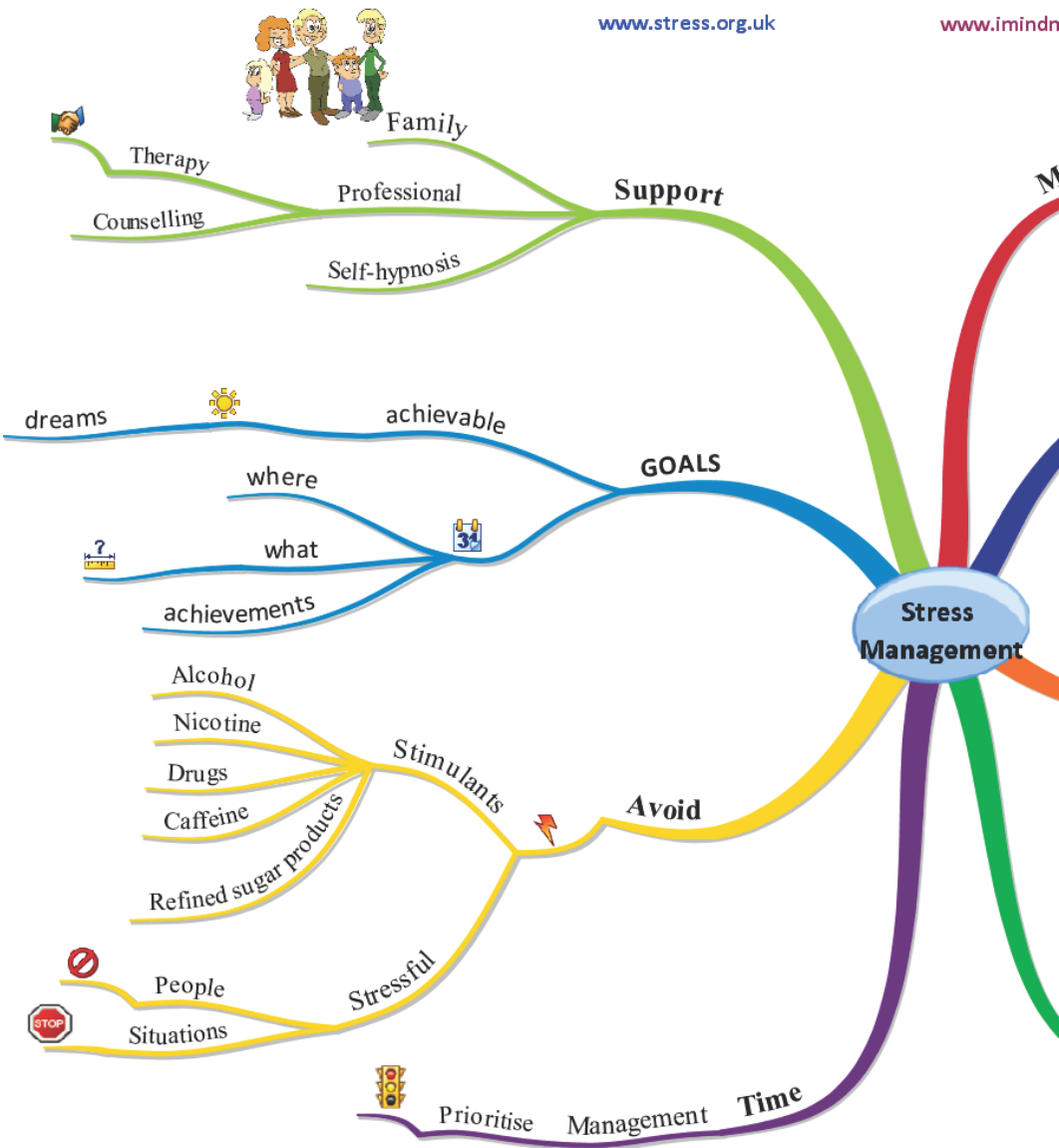
Learn to ask for help – do not be afraid to ask – it can save time in the end. It is not being a failure; it is a good strategy for learning. Learn also to say “no” if you feel someone is asking for too much of your time.

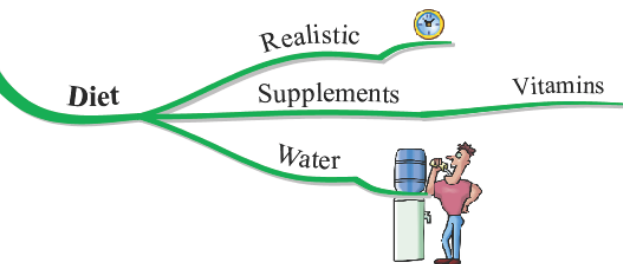
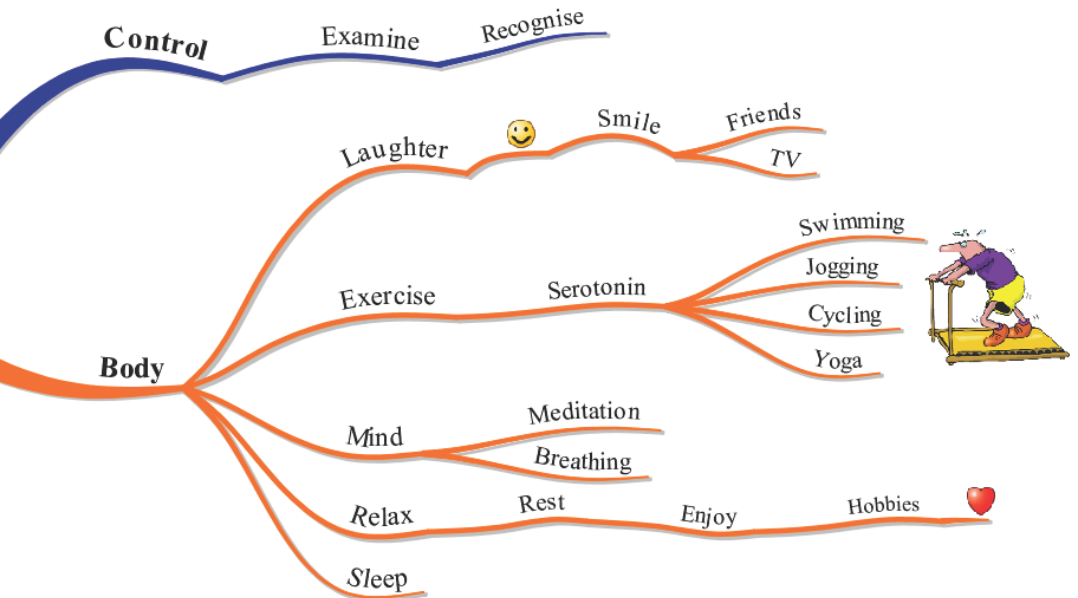
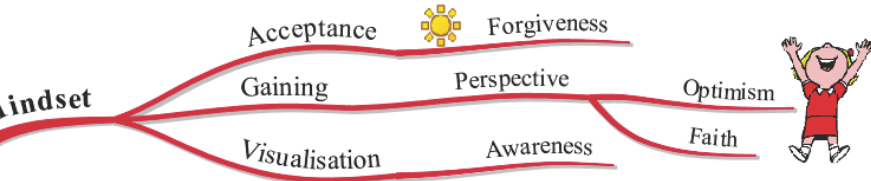
The stress mind map illustrates the different ways of coping with stress:



www.stress.org.uk

www.imind





2. Adopt a healthy lifestyle

Notice your body

Stress can take its toll on the body and skin in many ways. Learning to notice the signs of tension and adjusting your life accordingly can help reduce symptoms of stress.

Breathing

If you feel things are rushing you by, sit back and take four or five deep breaths, using your lower abdominal muscles to get an instant de-stress. After a while, your body gets so used to breathing deeply whenever it goes into stress mode that you will do it without realising.

Massage

Learning how to massage your neck and shoulders is a good idea. Having a massage could be just what you need to push all the tension away.

Do not feel guilty about taking time out for you

We all need to turn off from time to time. Do something you enjoy which fits into your life, whether it is reading, listening to music, doing yoga or meditating. It does not have to take long and is a vital part of life.

3. Know your limitations and do not take on too much

We cause ourselves a great deal of stress because we try to be liked and not let people down. We then end up doing more than we should. Learn to delegate effectively. Learn assertiveness so that you can say no without upsetting or offending others.

4. Find out what causes you stress

Take time to discover what is worrying you and try to change your thoughts and behaviour to reduce it. A stress assessment can help you understand the causes, implications to your health and how to manage, cope and make those necessary changes.

5. Avoid unnecessary conflict

Do not be too argumentative. Is it really worth the stress?

Look for a resolution to a dispute where both parties can achieve a positive outcome. Release pent-up emotions as soon as it is appropriate to do so – find a private space where you can laugh/cry/growl/scream/thump a cushion/beat a drum/ etc. Alternatively, start playing a sport or doing a hobby which allows you to release pent-up frustrations.

6. Accept the things you cannot change

Changing a difficult situation is not always possible.

If this proves to be the case, recognise and accept things as they are and concentrate on what you can control. Managing change effectively is essential to prevent frustration and reduction in performance levels.

7. Take time out to relax and recharge your batteries

Take time to have time out of the usual routine by giving yourself a proper holiday. When you are working, do not spend hours at any one thing. You will perform more effectively after even a short 10/15minute break, easily making up the time you used relaxing. Give your mind at least two “switch off” periods each day – one using your favourite music, books or TV programme, one using “clearing” techniques such as meditation or relaxation. Use deep-relaxation techniques for at least 20 minutes once a week (e.g. a relaxation tape, sauna, massage or a prolonged aromatherapy bath by candlelight).

Make time for YOU!

8. Find time to get organised and to meet friends

Having a big clear out of papers and clutter will go a long way to helping you de-stress.

Just a 15 minute tidy each day will make a difference or get yourself a rota so that your home time is organised and everyone takes turns to do the housework. Friends can ease work troubles and help us see things in a different way. The activities we engage in with friends help us relax and we will often have a good laugh. Stress depletes our immune systems; laughing boosts it.

9. Try to see things differently, develop a positive thinking style

If something is concerning you, try to see it differently.

Make time to talk and share with good listeners who care about you. Often, talking to a friend/colleague/family member will help you see things from a different and less stressful perspective. Look for the positives in life, and things for which you are grateful. At the beginning of each day, think of three things that you are looking forward to and three things for which you are grateful.

Deal with worry by writing things down, problem solving and organising when to do or not to do the things on your list. If worry becomes a bad habit, it is worth learning ways of distracting yourself from worrying thoughts. This can involve concentrating on something such as games that involve problem solving, cross-word puzzles or Sudoku.

10. Avoid using stimulants (alcohol, nicotine and caffeine) as coping mechanisms

Long term, these unhelpful coping mechanisms will just add to the problem.

For example, caffeine and nicotine are stimulants. Too much causes the body to build up the stress response by increasing or even causing anxiety symptoms. Alcohol is a depressant that makes you feel relaxed initially but causes problems with sleeping and longer-term ill effects!

Preventing stress

Have a look at your current lifestyle and see where you can help yourself.

Exercise

Exercise has numerous benefits and is known to:

- Release a chemical called serotonin, which makes you feel happier and less stressed
- Improve circulation and prevent conditions such as a stroke and heart-attack
- Allow you to take out your frustration and anger in a constructive way

Deep Breating

If you feel yourself getting stressed, try to halt those feelings by relaxing your muscles and taking deep breaths. Start by breathing in for three seconds before breathing out for a little longer.. This will remove older oxygen from your lungs and replace it with fresh oxygen, improving your circulation and alertness. Continue this deep breathing exercise until you feel calmer before returning to what you were doing.

Healthy Eating

Food and drink can have a big impact on how you feel and act. So, it's important to maintain a balanced and healthy diet. Eating at regular times and not skipping meals can make a big difference. This will allow your body to release a steady stream of energy throughout the day, which will improve your concentration and mood.

While drinking plenty of water keeps your body hydrated and working efficiently.

Good night?

One of the side-effects of stress is the inability to sleep, which just makes us even more stressed, tired, irritable and unable to live life to the fullest.

Here are some tips to help you nod off:

- Make sure your bedroom is not too hot, cold, noisy or light
- Do not eat or drink too late, as it will over-stimulate you
- Have a warm bath before bed
- If you wake in the night with a thought, write it down as it stops you thinking about it
- Set realistic expectations for sleep – know you will survive on a few hours' sleep rather than worrying about how you are not already asleep.

STRESS FOCUSED WEBSITES

<http://www.livinglifetothefull.com>

<https://studentsinmind.org.uk>

<https://www.ssmh.ac.uk>

ABERTAY UNIVERSITY WELLBEING APP

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/abertay-university-wellbeing/id1477200459>

<https://play.google.com/store/>

OTHER SOURCES OF HELP

Your GP

If you are experiencing emotional distress talking to your GP is often a good step to take. Your GP should have some understanding and will be aware of the various options available to you.

Useful Websites

www.menshealthforum.org.uk

<https://www.studentsagainstdepression.org/>

www.studentsinmind.org.uk

Give us a shout

Helplines

If you urgently want to talk to someone about your emotional difficulties and are feeling despairing or suicidal you may want to contact:

Breathing Space

<https://breathing.space.scot/>

Tel: 0800 83 85 87

The Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

Tel: 116 123

Saneline

http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/helpline

Tel: 0300 304 7000

Email: support@sane.org.uk

Give us a shout

TEXT '85258

Here for you 24/7

<https://giveusashout.org/>



Contact:

Student Enquiry Zone (SEZ), Level 1,
The Library Building,
Abertay University,
Bell Street, Dundee DD1 1HG

Tel: 01382 308805

E-mail: counselling@abertay.ac.uk