

Stress in everyday life

Stress is a process, not a diagnosis. Stress is experienced when there is an imbalance between the demands being made on us and our resources to cope with those demands. The level and extent of stress a person may feel depends a great deal on their attitude to a particular situation. An event which may be extremely stressful for one person can be a mere hiccup in another person's life.

Stress is not always a bad thing. Some people thrive on stress and even need it to get things done. When the term 'stress' is used in a clinical sense, it refers to a situation that causes discomfort and distress for a person and can lead on to other mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression.

Stress is a problem when a person feels they cannot cope

As a clinical problem, stress occurs when the demands made on a person exceed (or they feel they exceed) their ability to cope. A variety of factors can contribute to a person feeling 'stressed'. This may include:

- Environment (work, home, school etc.)
- Lifestyle
- Emotional and personal style issues.

An individual person's attitude, personality and approach to life will influence how they respond to stress. The following factors all play a part:

- How a person thinks about a problem
- The different ways a person copes with difficult situations
- Life experiences and life history
- A person's self-esteem
- Whether they have people around who can provide support.

Stress at work

Stress in the workplace is common and is caused by many different factors and issues, including excessive hours, conflicts with others and feelings of isolation. Many problems may never be fully resolved. The amount of stress a person experiences is often determined by whether or not they can accept that some things in life will simply never be sorted out to their satisfaction. For example, a person may feel stressed by the way they are treated by their employer or by the behaviour of a work colleague.

Sometimes this stress can be resolved by dealing with the particular behaviour. In many organisations there are processes that can be followed to deal with workplace problems like harassment, victimisation, unfair treatment etc. In many cases, the problem can be resolved if the behaviour is changed.

However, some problems will never be fully resolved and may have to be accepted. For example, if someone you think is poorly qualified is given a job you felt entitled to, you may continue to feel stressed unless you are able to let go of that grievance and move on.

How to manage stress

The old adage 'prevention is better than cure' is certainly true for stress management. It will help if you:

- **Exercise regularly** – regular exercise is a great way to manage stress. You should do some form of exercise that causes you to feel puffed afterwards – a leisurely stroll to the bus stop is not enough! Have at least 20 minutes of exercise three times a week.
- **Avoid conflict** – avoid situations that make you feel stressed as much as you can. Avoid unnecessary arguments and conflict if you find them stressful (although ignoring a problem is not always the best way to reduce stress). Assertiveness is fine but becoming distressed is not.
- **Relax** – make sure you give yourself some time to relax each day and try to spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself.
- **Eat well** – a nutritious diet is important. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and avoid sweet and fatty foods.
- **Sleep** – a good sleep routine is essential, so do something calm and relaxing before you go to bed like listening to music or reading if you have difficulty falling asleep.
- **Enjoy your life** – it's important to make time to have some fun and to get a balance in your life.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Community health centre
- Mental Health Foundation of Australia (Victoria) Tel. (03) 9427 0406

Things to remember

- Stress affects people in different ways.
- A balanced lifestyle helps you manage stress.
- Issues that cause stress cannot always be resolved but changing your expectations of a problem may help.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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