

Stress affects us in many ways

Feeling stressed is more than being alert or aroused. It is when you feel that the demands that are being made on you are greater than your ability to cope. You may feel under pressure to do something and fear you may fail. The more important the outcome, the more stressed you feel. You can feel stressed by external situations (too much work, children misbehaving etc.) and by internal triggers (the way you think about external situations).

A range of effects

Stress affects us in many ways, including:

- Emotionally - anxiety, depression, tension, anger
- The way we think - poor concentration, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, apathy, hopelessness
- Behaviourally - increased drinking and smoking, insomnia, accident proneness, weight problems, obsessive-compulsive behaviour, nervousness, gambling.

Stress triggers

How stressful any trigger is can be affected by:

- How anxious you feel generally
- How severely it affects you
- Whether you have experienced anything like this before
- Whether you can control what is happening
- How long the event affects you
- How important the outcome is to you
- Whether you have friends and social support to help you cope.

Stress can cause physical illness

When we feel under stress, our body kicks into high gear to deal with the threat. Our heartbeat, breathing rate and blood pressure all go up. The longer we feel stressed, the greater the demand on our body.

The more often we are placed under stress, the more often we have to use energy to cope. Eventually our bodies develop illnesses as a result of this stress, such as cardiovascular diseases, blood pressure, proneness to infection and chronic fatigue.

Coping strategies

To deal with stress more effectively, it helps to investigate your stresses and how you react to them. Try to:

- Understand what situations make you feel stressed
- Understand what situations you can and can't control
- Prepare for stressful events in advance, by thinking about the future
- Keep yourself healthy with good nutrition, exercise and regular relaxation
- Try to do happy things every day.

Type of help available

You should see your doctor or community health centre if:

- You feel stressed often
- Particular things stress you and you feel they are beyond your control
- You feel your reactions to stress are extreme or worry you
- You feel anxious or depressed about stress.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your community health centre
- Psychologists or counsellors
- The Mental Health Foundation of Victoria Tel: (03) 9427 0406

Things to remember

- Stress is when you feel under pressure to do something and think you will fail
- External situations and the way you think about those situations can lead to stress
- Coping strategies can help to keep stress at a manageable level.

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

Mental Health Foundation of Australia

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