

DEALING WITH STRESS

WHY AM I STRESSED NOW?

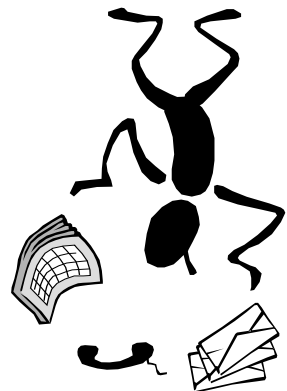
People usually feel stressed when they find that they do not have the resources to meet the demands being made on them, in their life. All forms of change involve a certain amount of stress, even positive changes create stress. Examples of life events that cause stress include: change of job, change in work demands, new relationships, separation, interpersonal conflict, moving house, falling in love, beginning or leaving education, a personal achievement, going on a diet, being in debt, moving house, sickness or injury, or a family member being unwell.

Start by making a list of things that have changed in your life in the last 12 months, and a list of the ongoing worries and difficulties that are present. EVERYONE has a limited capacity to respond to stressors.

Remember, the more stressors that we have in life, the fewer resources we have left over for the next difficult issue. And if we have fewer resources for that, it is harder to deal with. We get to the point where we have no resources left to cope with even minor demands. So if you are wondering why it is hard to cope with something now that you have coped with before (or others seem to cope with), then there is always an answer that makes sense. And when that stress gets too much, what happens in your body and mind?

Common signs of too much stress

- Having problems sleeping or finding that sleep does not refresh you
- Feeling restless and finding it hard to wind down
- Irritable mood, becoming easily frustrated
- Memory problems
- Having difficulty concentrating, feeling like you are in a fog
- Crying in response to small triggers
- Becoming fearful without any good reason
- Pain – especially in the head, neck, muscles or chest
- Tiredness
- Feeling breathless
- Significant changes in appetite
- Having difficulty getting along with others and enjoying their company
- Losing interest in activities that you previously enjoyed



Tips for dealing with stress

(i) Don't take everything on at once

Break down tasks that you need to complete into manageable portions. If you feel overwhelmed by thinking about how much you have to do, break what you *need* to do down into components and then focus on just one thing. Sometimes this means (a) taking things one day at a time, and (b) looking only at what needs to be done in the morning, the afternoon or the evening. Separate out what *others want* and *you want* and what really *NEEDS* to be done.

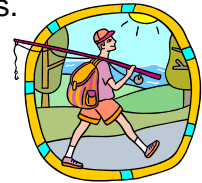
(ii) Learn to relax or meditate

There are many relaxation tapes and meditation courses available to help you learn to relax or meditate. Using relaxation or meditation has been shown to have positive effects and help people feel happier and more positive. Relaxation can calm your body, reducing muscle tension and aches, and relax your mind - helping you respond to stressful events with a clearer mind. *Anyone can learn a technique that is right for them.*



(iii) Get involved in activities that you enjoy

Make sure that you keep up hobbies and interests that you find relaxing and that give you some sense of pleasure or enjoyment. If you don't have any interests, then think about trying something new. Making a point of doing simple things that bring a sense of pleasure or joy can make a big difference. Talking with a friend on the phone, taking a long bath, putting fresh flowers around the house or preparing your favourite meal are some examples.



(iv) Stay in touch with close friends and family

Having positive relationships with friends and family can be a great source of support and encouragement throughout stressful periods of time. If you have few supportive people around, you may need to think about ways of meeting new people and developing positive supportive relationships. Harmful relationships with others can cause a great deal of stress and talking to a psychologist about your how to develop positive relationships and avoid stressful relationship patterns may help to reduce your stress levels.

(v) Look after your physical health

That means getting regular exercise and making sure you eat well to give your body the nutrients and fuel it needs to operate efficiently. Avoid skipping meals or overeating. Drink plenty of water. Watch alcohol! It might help you to relax but impairs problem-solving and is a depressant in its nature. Looking after your physical health also means making sure that you get enough time for rest and relaxation. Everyone needs rest and pushing yourself too hard, physically, mentally and emotionally takes its toll eventually. Long-term patterns of driving yourself too hard can lead to ill health and burnout.

(vi) Physical exercise

It is now well known that vigorous exercise helps the body and mind to relax and de-stress. Any exercise will work – pick something that you like so you will keep it regular. If you can exercise with a friend or a group, then you get the benefit of social interaction at the same time!

(vii) Tackle your problems head on

Many people feel overwhelmed when they think about problems in their life and try to avoid thinking about what is troubling them. When people avoid thinking about a difficult situation, their problems don't go away and they usually experience some of the physical signs of stress described above. Directly confronting your problems and trying to find possible solutions is a more effective way of coping with stress (see the steps below).

PROBLEM SOLVING STEPS

1. Of your various problems, choose one to focus on first
2. Brainstorm all possible solutions to the problem that you have selected to work on. Be creative and don't worry about whether or not your solutions are realistic, just list down anything that comes to mind.
3. After you have written out all possible solutions, choose a few that are realistic and then weigh up the pros and cons of each of these.
4. Now - select the solution that you think has the greatest chance of succeeding give it a try and see how it goes. If it doesn't work, go back to your list and try something else, you may need to try a couple of solutions before finding the right one.



For more information or to discuss this issue with a trained psychologist, call (02) 9891-1766. Basten & Associates have clinical psychologists at Westmead, Chatswood, & Sydney CBD city. We have resources on relaxation, meditation and cognitive behaviour therapy