

Self Help Tips for Stress

Stress is a natural response to too much mental or emotional pressure which makes us feel unable to cope. Chronic stress is very harmful to our physical and mental health. Fortunately there are many things we can do to manage stress.

Spot the signs | Common signs of stress include feeling irritable, tearful, trouble sleeping, becoming withdrawn and difficulty concentrating or making decisions. Physical signs may include headaches, muscle tension, stomach problems, feeling dizzy or tired all the time. Recognising your own symptoms can help you manage your stress earlier and prevent the situation getting worse.

Identify the causes | Working out what is causing your stress is an important step. Stress can arise due to major changes, or difficulties in our work or personal lives. If you're not sure what the cause is you could try keeping a stress diary for a few weeks, then review it to spot the triggers. You could include where you were, what you were doing, who you were with, how you felt and what you were thinking.

Take control | You need to get a sense of control as far as possible, as it is the sense of not being in control that makes us feel stressed. Taking even a small amount of control will empower you and help you find the solution to your problem. Even minor changes, for example, in routine, the way things are done, thinking differently, or taking time out can make a big difference.

Know your limits | This means not making unreasonable demands on yourself because you don't want to let people down. Learning to become more assertive can help you to set boundaries and not take on too much. It can also reduce the amount of interpersonal conflict by enabling you to say no without upsetting or offending. It's okay to say no.

Manage your time | Prioritising tasks and doing the important or unpleasant ones first can make a real difference. However you do need to make sure your work/life balance is right and that you're making enough time for relaxation, fun and enjoyment.

Actively relax | Regularly practising relaxation can be a powerful antidote to stress. Active Relaxation includes deep breathing exercises, yoga, mindfulness meditation, complementary therapies, and self-massage. You actively and intentionally relax the body and mind to produce a state of rest - It's not the 'switching off' that happens when you watch TV or play computer games.

Exercise | Exercise reduces levels of stress hormones and allows muscles to relax. It can also improve your mood and get you in the right state of mind to find a solution to your stress.

Talk to friends or family | Opening up and sharing your difficulties can ease troubles, as talking things through can help you see things differently and find a solution to your problem.

Avoid unhealthy habits | The most unhelpful thing you can do is use alcohol, nicotine or caffeine as a way of coping. They might provide temporary relief, but they won't address the real problems and will create new ones.

Talking therapies | Talking through the issues is one of the key ways to tackle stress. You might want to consider seeing a counsellor. They can help you understand your feelings, deal with the causes and find coping strategies.

If your symptoms of stress are causing you concern, it is important to see your G.P. They are used to seeing people with your difficulties and will be able to conduct a thorough assessment and explain the treatment options available to you.