

Help with Stress Fact Sheet

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Pharmacist Support

working for pharmacists & their families

What is stress?

We all have an instinctive stress response. When we are in a potentially dangerous situation stress hormones are released into our bloodstream causing instant mental and physical changes in us, giving added strength and endurance and making us feel pumped-up. This fight or flight syndrome was vital when we used to live in the wild and were liable to attack from other tribes or wild animals and we still use it today. Our ancient physical emergencies have now been replaced by perceived modern day psychological threats. However, instead of using these stress hormones in emergencies, we now activate them all the time and often don't give our bodies or minds sufficient time to rest after each stress-filled moment. Stress in itself is not harmful; in fact we need a degree of it to survive and to function. However, if these hormones are continually released and keep on working, this can ultimately lead to ill health.

Causes of stress

There are a wide range of causes of stress and they will differ from person to person. Common causes are bereavement, divorce, illness or disability as well as getting married, moving and changing jobs. Stress at work is very common, especially if a person feels under too much pressure, has a poor relationship with colleagues or their boss or is threatened with unemployment. It is often hard for employees to ask for help in case they are then seen as unable to cope.

Signs and symptoms of stress

Stress will often have physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms. If it helps, tick the symptoms that apply to you so you can learn to recognise them. If you tick the majority of symptoms try some of the suggestions below to help you cope better or seek some professional help.

Physical symptoms

- Allergies
- Asthma or breathlessness
- Chest pains
- Constipation
- Cramps or muscle spasms
- Fainting spells
- Headaches or migraine
- Heart attack

- High blood pressure
- Indigestion
- Nausea
- Peptic ulcers
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Sexual difficulties
- Skin Disorders
- Tendency to sweat
- Tiredness
- Tremors and nervous tics

Emotional symptoms

- A loss of interest in others
- Aggression
- Anxiety
- Crying
- Denying there's a problem
- Depression
- Dread of the future
- Fearing failure
- Feeling alone
- Feeling neglected
- Increased irritability
- Heightened sensitivity to criticism
- Loss of concentration
- Loss of sense of humour
- Taking no interest in life
- Thinking you are bad or ugly
- Unable to show true feelings

Behavioural Symptoms

- Avoiding difficult situations
- Craving for food
- Difficulty getting to sleep and early morning waking
- Drinking and smoking more
- Lack of appetite
- Restlessness
- Signs of tension, such as nail-biting
- Unable to make decisions

It's important to act to relieve damaging stress before it affects your physical or mental health.

Risks of stress

In extreme cases continual stress can cause psychological problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Cumulative Stress Disorder. It is also a well-known trigger for depression and it can also affect your physical health.

How to treat stress

A simple method is to make a list:

- List the things that you need to do.
- Prioritise them
- Decide what you need to do yourself, and what you can ask someone else to do
- Make a daily, weekly and monthly timetable
- Decide what doesn't need doing and take it off your list.

Now your tasks are in some order. This will help you regain control over everything you need to do.

You can also:

- Avoid nicotine, alcohol and caffeine
- Work off stress with physical activity
- Make sure you get enough sleep
- If you're ill, rest.
- Agree with people once in a while!
- Learn to accept what you cannot change
- Learn how to say 'no'
- Manage your time
- Take a day off work, chores, family or anything else that puts pressure on you.
- Accept offers of practical help
- Do one thing at a time - don't keep piling stress on stress
- Know your own limits - don't be too competitive or expect too much of yourself
- Talk to someone
- Let off steam in a way that causes no harm (shout, scream or hit a pillow)
- Walk away from stressful situations
- Use any available counselling or support
- Use relaxation techniques

Tackling work stress

- Work regular hours and take all the breaks and holidays you're entitled to
- Make your work environment as comfortable as you can
- Discuss problems with your supervisor or manager
- Be aware of company policies on harassment, bullying or racism
- Manage your time

- Try to take tasks one at a time, until each is finished.
- If you can, vary your tasks in a day
- Once you've finished a task have a break to relax
- Be prepared to say no if demands are unrealistic
- Don't worry about what still needs to be done.
- Start a hobby or interest
- Use whatever counselling or support is available

Stress can lead to more serious disorders. If you feel that you aren't managing your stress despite using some of the techniques above, ask your GP for some help.

What to do if you have a problem?

Contact the Listening Friends Helpline
0808 168 5133

Or contact Pharmacist Support
Tel: 0808 168 2233
Web: www.pharmacistsupport.org

Further information

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
Tel. 0870 443 5252
Web: www.bacp.co.uk
Contact for details of local practitioners

First Steps to Freedom
Tel: 0845 120 2916
Web: www.first-steps.org

International Stress Management Association
Tel. 07000 780 430
Web: www.isma.org.uk

No Panic
Tel: 0808 808 0545
Web: www.nopanic.org.uk

Mind
Tel: 0845 766 0163
Web: www.mind.org.uk