



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

TIPS FOR MANAGING STRESS

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STRESS TIPS – UNDERSTANDING STRESS

Good Stress/Bad Stress

- *Why some Stress is Good For You*
- *The Mechanics of Stress*
- *Positive & Negative*
- *The Effects of Stress*
- *Use Stress To Your Advantage*

Why Some Stress is Good For You

Many people think of stress as another way of saying tension or pressure. Actually, stress is just the way we respond to change. Understanding stress and its effects can help you use it to your own advantage, and turn potential “stressors” into positive challenges.

The Mechanics Of Stress

Stress is defined as a response by your body to any demand made upon it. Your body responds to stress in many ways. Hormones, like adrenaline, surge. Your heartbeat and blood pressure increase. Your blood sugar rises. These effects, unchanged for thousands of years, helped prehistoric humans survive by helping them run away faster or fight harder, which is why we often call our body’s reaction to stress the “fight or flight” response.

Positive & Negative

Most people think of stressors, or things that cause stress, as negative, such as traffic, a difficult job, or divorce. Many people are aware of tense muscles, headaches or stomach-aches during, before or after such situations. But stressors can also be positive experiences. Having a baby or completing a satisfying project are all changes that can activate your stress response.

The Effects of Stress

Your body can’t tell the difference between a positive or negative stressor. In either case, your body experiences the same stress effects. If you are not able to let off steam and relax, these effects can be harmful. You may feel tired, depressed, or anxious. You may experience physical symptoms such as a clenched jaw or backache. During periods of stress, take care of yourself by getting plenty of rest, eating healthily, exercising, and relaxing without alcohol or drugs. Help your body recover from all stress, even when you feel satisfied or excited, to protect your health.

Use Stress To Your Advantage

Stress is like body temperature: if it’s too low or too high, you can’t survive, but the right balance can keep you going strong. It makes sense to use stress energy positively, to meet life’s challenges, experiences and goals. Stress is not all bad. In fact, positive stress can make life both rich and satisfying.



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THE THREE R's OF CHANGE

Recover, Refocus, Regenerate

Whether you have experienced a critical incident or a common major work and life change such as promotion, relocation, separation/relationship break-up, parenthood and numerous other events it can result in period of change and transition. Whether these changes are welcome or unwelcome, all can be extremely stressful unless we learn how to adjust to them. Taking the time to recover, refocus and regenerate following life changes can help us survive and even thrive.

Recover

After a life change, you need to regain your sense of balance and routine. Your situation may be, at least for now, stressful, challenging, or unfamiliar. You may have symptoms such as headaches, backaches, or depression. To begin your recovery, it will help to step back from your new situation. Plan a weekend get-away, or take time just for yourself. Mini breaks like going to the cinema can help you get distance and perspective. Exercise and sharing your feelings with others are excellent stress reducers, which can help you get back on track.

Refocus

If you are able to look at “the big picture”, you’ll gain greater peace of mind about the change. Take time to think about what has happened, why, and what it might mean. You might realise that your feelings are mixed. For example, if you’ve been promoted, you might be pleased with the higher salary, but uncomfortable about supervising your friends. You may feel sad or angry about having to let go of familiar people and routines. With time, those feelings will change. Talking to trusted friends, family members, a counsellor, or human resource professional may speed the process.

Regenerate

All change is stressful for your body and your body needs time to heal. Get extra rest, avoid alcohol and cigarettes, and eat properly. Try to increase your circle of support – connect with new people or reinforce old friendships. No one can escape change. Accepting the fact that change has taken place is important. When you take steps to recover, refocus and regenerate, you will find acceptance easier. These steps will help you successfully make the change part of your life.





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STRESS TIPS – BREATHING

TAKE A DEEP BREATH ... And relax

When you're under stress, your muscles tense, and your breathing becomes shallow and rapid. One of the simplest (and best) ways to stop this stress response is to breathe deeply and slowly. It sounds simple, and it is. Most of us, however, do not breathe deeply under normal circumstances, so it may help to review the mechanics of deep breathing and how it helps us to relax.

Breathing Under Stress

When prehistoric humans were in danger of attack, their muscles tensed and their breathing became rapid and shallow, as they prepared to run or fight. Their high level of tensions was a means of preparing their bodies for optimum performance. Today, the causes of our "stress" are different, but our stress response is the same. However, since we're not running or fighting, our tension has no release and our stress response builds. One way to counteract the stress response is to learn how to breathe deeply and slowly – the opposite of how we breathe when under stress.

How Deep Breathing Works

Deep breathing is not always natural to adults. Watch the way a baby breathes: the area beneath the chest goes in and out. Most adults breathe from the chest. This is shallower breathing, so less oxygen is taken in with each breath. As a result the blood is forced to move through the system quickly so that oxygen gets to the brain and organs. Higher blood pressure results.

Deep breathing can reverse these effects. Take some time to practice this kind of breathing each day, especially when you're under stress. YOU can be sitting, standing, or lying down, but it helps to wear loose, comfortable clothing. Begin by breathing in through your nostrils. Count to five, silently saying the word "in", and let your lower abdomen fill with air. Then count to five, silently saying the word "out", as you let the air escape through pursed lips. Do this deep breathing for two minutes or more each time. With practice, you will be able to count slowly to ten or higher. You can increase your relaxation if you imagine breathing in ocean air, the scent of flowers or forest air.

Effects of Deep Breathing

By helping you let go of tension, deep breathing can relieve headaches, backaches, stomach-aches, and sleeplessness. It releases the body's own painkillers, called endorphins into the system. It allows blood pressure to return to normal, which is good for your heart. Deep breathing can also allow held-in emotions to come to the surface, so your emotional health benefits from deep breathing, too. Use deep breathing any time, anywhere. It's one of the best techniques for relieving stress.



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STRESS TIPS – EXERCISES

Exercises To Relieve Headache and Tension

Traffic gets worse. It's your busy time at work. The kids are arguing. Your shoulders tense, your neck aches, you feel as if your head is gripped in a vice! The head, neck, and shoulder areas (which form the "stress triangle") are the places where we hold much of our tension. Learning how to release the tension in these muscles can help us relax and "de-stress".

Find Your Stress Triangle

Place your left hand on your right shoulder. Move your fingers halfway in toward your neck. You're at one point of the triangle. The second point is the same place off your left shoulder. The third point is on your forehead, between your eyes. This "stress triangle" is where we hold much of our tension.

Why Tense Muscles Hurt

Your muscles tighten to protect you. That was important to your prehistoric ancestors, who needed to fight or run. But usually, you don't need that protection. When your muscle shortens, and then holds that position, "metabolites" (the waste products from muscle activity) get trapped, causing pain. The pain is released when the muscle regains its natural length.

Stretch Away Tension

These simple stretches and rolls can help relieve tightness in your "stress triangle". (If you have a history of neck problems you should discuss these exercises with a physiotherapist or doctor first)

Neck roll

Stretch your right ear to your right shoulder, keeping your left shoulder pulled down. Roll your head down so your chin is on your chest. Continue on to your left side. Do rolls from side to side. Begin with eight, build up to 16.

Shoulder shrug

Draw a big circle with your shoulders, one at a time. Start with four, build up to eight times, going forward, then back.

Pick fruit

With one hand, reach up as if you were picking an apple from a tree slightly ahead and far above you. Go from one arm to the other, building up to eight times on each side.

Massage yourself

Use your right hand to work on your left shoulder and left hand on your right shoulder. Work your fingers gently but firmly, beginning with your shoulder blade, moving up towards the neck and including the scalp.

Standing body roll

Let your head roll forward until your chin is on your chest. Keep rolling down as your knees begin to bend. When your hands are hanging near your knees, rest there a moment and slowly roll back up. Work up to ten times.



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STRESS – TIPS FOR FEELING GOOD

Simple Suggestions That Work

A massage or eating a wonderful meal can be physical pleasures that make life worth living. Enjoy regular physical activity such as dancing, taking walks to uplift your spirits.

Create A Support Network

A support network is a group of people you can turn to for comfort, a sympathetic ear, or good ideas. A support network can include family members, friends, co-workers, or anyone else who cares about you. Reach out and make your network wider; you'll be glad you did.

Make Time For Fun

Making time for fun is like taking extra holidays throughout the year. What are your favourite past times? Cinema, day trips to the country, going to an amusement centre can all be fun. Get out of your chair and get going! You'll feel good before, during and after.

Help Others

Few things give more pleasure than helping others. Find out about some of the programs in your community that need your help. Try something unlike anything you've ever done. It will enrich your life with new ideas, information and feelings.

Get In The Habit

You can get in the habit of feeling good by being good to yourself and others. When you care about yourself, you'll find that life holds more meaning and pleasure.



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STRESS TIPS – POSITIVE SELF TALK

How Self Talk Affects Stress

Most people carry on a silent conversation with themselves during much of the day. These internal dialogues can actually direct your thoughts and behaviours. Understanding what self talk is and how it affects you is the first step in learning how to rewrite your own selftalk “script” and talk your way to a less stressful way of life.

Positive Or Negative?

Self-talk is very much like a self-fulfilling prophecy – something you think about so much you actually make it come true. When your self-talk is positive, “Everything will work out”, “I know I can do the job”, - you are giving yourself permission to succeed, and chances are, you will. When your self talk is negative “I know I’ll have a lousy time”, “I’m not smart enough to be supervisor”, - you are giving up on yourself and chances are you won’t even try to succeed. Often your self-talk reflects the values and behaviours you learned as a child, and the self-esteem you now have as an adult.

Thoughts And Behaviours

Self-talk can direct your thoughts and behaviours. If you think, “I know I can do the job”, you’ll be more willing to apply and have a much better chance of success. If you say to yourself, “I’ll never get hired for that position” you probably won’t even apply.

Stress Response

Negative selftalk can cause or increase your distress, and can make effects such as headaches or stomach pain much worse. Self-talk can also encourage you to behave in destructive ways which further stress your body. (“No one cares, so why shouldn’t I have another drink?”) Fortunately, positive self-talk can have the opposite effect, leading to lower stress levels.

How To Rewrite Your Script

Learn to listen to your own self-talk. Draw three columns on a sheet of paper. In the first column write several things you would like to happen. “I’d like a new car”. “I’d like to lose 10 pounds”. Then, close your eyes and listen to how you respond to each item. Write your selftalk in the second column: (Example: “we can’t afford it. “I can’t do it. I’ve done it before”) in the third column, write down a thought which is opposite of the one in column two. Look over your list. If column two is more positive than column three, you’re already on your way to thinking positively. If column two is more negative, look at column three for a more helpful, healthier response. Practice choosing positive self-talk. You’ll feel happier, more confidence, and less stressed.



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STRESS TIPS – GOOD FOODS

How Food Affects Your Moods

- Nutrition Tips To Lessen Stress
- Vitamins and Minerals
- Carbohydrates, Fats and Protein
- A Healthy Diet

Nutrition Tips To Lessen Stress

It may be no surprise that coffee picks you up, and alcohol slows you down. But many other foods and beverages affect your moods. You can improve your mental and physical health by understanding how foods affect you, and how you can eat well to manage stress.

Vitamins And Minerals

Most people can get all the vitamins and minerals they need by eating properly. If they don't, their moods can be affected. Without enough B vitamins (found in tuna, peanuts and kidney beans), you can feel depressed, grouchy, nervous. Without enough iron (found in molasses and spinach) you can feel grouchy, forgetful and nervous. Thiamin (found in soybean products) helps you feel calm, sleep well, and fight depression. Vitamin B12 (found in tuna fish) gives you energy. If you don't have enough B12, you can feel grouchy or depressed, and have problems sleeping.

Carbohydrates, Fats and Protein

Different types of food affect you in different ways. Carbohydrates, (including wheat, pasta, bread, sweets) tend to calm you down. Low fat proteins (including meat, fish, low fat dairy products) give you energy. Fats slow you down and can make you feel sluggish.

A Healthy Diet

It's important to eat a balanced diet, especially when you're under stress. A healthy diet includes low fat protein (meat, fish, beans) complex carbohydrates (vegetables, fruit, wholegrains) and small amounts of fats (olive, safflower or other vegetable oils). Avoid sugar, caffeine and alcohol, which add to your stress burden. Understand how foods affect your moods, and you'll improve your physical and emotional health.

<i>Foods to Limit</i>	<i>Foods to choose</i>
Alcohol	Fresh fruits
Chocolate	Fresh vegetables
Cola Drinks	Herb teas
Tea	Lean meat, fish, poultry
Sweets	Whole grains
“Junk” food	Water
Refined flours	Low-or non fat dairy products



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STRESS TIPS – SOCIAL SUPPORT

YOU HAVE TO HAVE FRIENDS

How Friends Help Buffer Stress

Everyone goes through periods of distress. One of the best ways to get through these periods is turning to trusted friends for support, comfort and help.

Turn To Friends For Support

Friends can support you by listening to your feelings, offering solutions, or simply spending time with you. Friends know your history, concerns and inner circle.

Friends can give you practical support. When George and Ann had their baby, their friend Tom had offered to walk their dog – a small gesture that meant a great deal to them. But don't wait for a friend to offer his or her support. The nature of friendship is being able to ask for help when you need it, too.

Friends can give you both physical and emotional support. When Martha's father died, her good friend Sharon hugged her as she cried. Human touch is an important part of the healing process.

Identify And Make Friends

Family members, co-workers, members of your church or synagogue, even the store clerk can all become friends, if you make effort. Reach out to others when you can. Then, in times of trouble, you will have people to turn to. People who are close to others stay healthy and live longer than those who stay isolated.



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STRESS TIPS – AVOIDING DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Drugs and Alcohol

- They Aggravate Your Stress
- Understand The Effects Of Stress
- Know The Effects Of Drugs and Alcohol
- How Drugs and Alcohol Affect Stress
- The Message Is Clear

They Aggravate Your Stress

Our bodies and emotions sometimes need help in recovering from stressors such as illness, divorce, a new baby, or a promotion. Unfortunately, many people turn to alcohol and other drugs to help relieve tension and pressure, failing to realise that these substances actually make stress worse. If you or someone you know uses alcohol or other drugs to “calm down”, consider the following information, and think again.

Understand The Effects Of Stress

Common responses to stress are fatigue, depression, grouchiness and sadness. People are more likely to become ill or have difficulty concentrating during or after a stressful period. This is true whether the stressor is positive or negative. If you’re promoted, you might feel excited about the challenge and extra pay. But your body will still need to recover from the added strain.

Know The Effects Of Drugs And Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol are poisonous to our systems, and can cause serious damage over time. Drug and alcohol addictions are progressive, that is, they tend not to stop on their own, but as they get more and more troublesome. People find that one drink no longer has any effect, and even when drunk, they don’t feel happy. Or the drug that helped them forget now forces them to focus all their energy on getting more drugs.

How Drugs And Alcohol Affect Stress

Some drugs speed you up. Alcohol slows you down. But all these substances share one thing in common: they put additional stress on the body. So using drugs or alcohol as a way of getting rid of stress is counterproductive: it prevents what you’re trying to accomplish. It’s like trying to do sit-ups with a 2000-pound gorilla on your chest. As poisons, drugs and alcohol can harm your immune, circulatory, and nervous systems. Since drugs and alcohol can make functioning properly very difficult, other problems can arise which causes new stresses, such as losing a job, destroying a marriage, or causing a car accident.

The Message Is Clear

It’s a clear message: drugs and alcohol cant help get rid of stressors, and in the long run they will only make them worse. Seeing a counsellor, learning stress reducing techniques, reaching out to friends are all more helpful and healthy for you and for others.