



Stress

Some Questions

How can I help someone who's under a lot of stress?

Being an understanding, non-judgmental listener is a great help. Try not to offer advice unless specifically asked. If the problem persists you may wish to suggest a visit to a doctor, member of the clergy, or therapist.

Are some people more likely to be bothered by stress?

Some people seem less able to cope well. Often this is a learned behaviour, thus it can be unlearned and replaced with healthier ways of coping. For example, overprotected children may not learn to deal with tension. As an adult this can become even more of a problem.

If stress is so common, why get concerned about it?

Because it can make you miserable and is hard on the people around you. If untreated it can disrupt your normal daily life and lead to fits of anxiety, depression, and physical ailments.

Can stress and the problems it creates be cured?

Prompt, correct treatment can help most people troubled by stress return to a sense of normalcy. Stress and tension can't be eliminated, but we can learn to cope with it when we are faced with a stressful situation.

What is Stress?

Simply put, stress is pressure from the outside that can make you feel tense inside. Stress is the mental and physical reactions we all experience daily in life. Stress is our perception of events and activities that occur daily; we may feel frightened, excited, stimulated, endangered or confused.

Stress is an unavoidable fact of life. Some stress is a part of daily life - it affects everyone. Everyone has ups and downs. Life would be dull without them. Certain kinds are actually helpful because it keeps you on your toes - alert, safe, energized, and



motivated. For example, psyching yourself up for a sports event, motivating yourself to complete a difficult school project, and keeping within your personal risk factor when trying new things like skiing, driving, or acting.

But too much stress on your mind and body can make you miserable, worried, sad, distressed, and ill. For example, losing a best friend, leaving a project until the last minute, going through the break-up of a relationship, fear of losing your job.

Why should I worry about stress?

Stress and how you handle it affects your health and happiness. If you allow it to build up, stress can sometimes produce tensions serious enough to interfere with your normal daily activities.

What are the causes of stress?

One of the main causes of stress is change - especially sudden or disagreeable change. While change is normal and to be expected, too many or too drastic changes often result in tension. Excess tension can result in anxiety and depression.

Some examples of anxiety and depressive producing situations are:

- High expectations for yourself, your partner, or children in academics, athletics, or socially. These expectations may be your own or from teachers, a partner, family members, or a boss.
- Personal loss such as the death of a loved one; loss of friends when moving; separation or divorce; constant bickering at home and loss of a sense of connectedness, all can cause depression.
- Job changes like trouble at work, getting fired, or taking a new job may result in anxiety.
- Money problems resulting in budget troubles, large debts, loss of income, etc., can create stress for the whole family.
- An unexpected major illness or accidental injury puts great stress on both patient and family.
- Family changes such as pregnancy, family responsibilities, birth, unhealthy parents, moving, can cause mood changes.
- Retirement or enforced leisure combined with reduced income may cause troubles.
- Sudden change in lifestyle due to financial gain or a big promotion is a happy event but can create anxiety.
- Lack of a personal identity or loss of the sense-of-self.



- Time pressures with too many things to do and not enough time to do them.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is that worried, "uptight" feeling. It's a vague fear that something bad or unpleasant is going to happen . . . even if there's no threat! Anxiety may result from holding back feelings we can't cope with or understand. Often it may grow out of a conflict between what we'd like to do and what we think we should do!

Everyone has a certain amount of anxiety, and to this degree it is a natural, helpful, response to a stressful or threatening situation. But prolonged anxiety can lead to serious problems such as high blood pressure, inability to enjoy life, and a problem-focused attitude toward people and situations.

What is depression?

Depression is a sad or emotionally "down" feeling. It's a feeling of sadness or disappointment that leads to apathy and withdrawal for no specific reason. Depression may result from frustration, the inability to live up to expectations, or from a disappointment.

Some depression is a normal human reaction to reality - a hope for something that doesn't come about. But prolonged depression is a serious problem. Long-lasting feelings of worthlessness and isolation can lead to suicide.

What are the signs of anxiety or stress?

- a pounding heart
- inability to slow down or relax
- abnormal eating habits
- dizziness
- trembling
- shortness of breath
- cold hands and/or feet
- extreme moodiness
- memory blank
- feeling overwhelmed - even with simple tasks
- overly worried - even about simple things
- butterflies in your stomach
- feeling out of control



- headaches

The most common signs of depression are:

- fatigue, sleeplessness
- inability to concentrate
- restlessness, boredom
- lack of interest in food, sex, or life in general
- feelings of worthlessness, or hopelessness
- prolonged depression may result in physical symptoms such as headaches, extreme weight loss or gain, and drug or alcohol abuse.

What can you do?

There are many things you can do to keep tensions within a reasonable level before they lead to trouble. First of all, don't create more stress by trying to do all of the things that follow! Pick one or two that you feel most comfortable trying and that are priorities for you - then reflect on the results.

Know where to go for help.

- Understand the causes of stress, the depression and anxiety to which they can lead. The first step in solving a problem is recognizing it exists. Or another way of putting this is "The first step toward recovery is discovery!"
- See your doctor and ask for a medical work-up. Be honest and don't minimize. A check-up is always important especially if you are busy. Your doctor can usually discover the source of aches and pains.
- Take time for yourself even if it is 5 minutes a day! Make it success oriented and not money related. Book time for yourself and protect it. A change in pace, no matter how short, gives you a new outlook on old problems.
- Specifically identify the stressors in your life, no matter how trivial they may seem, and learn to manage those that you have control over.
- Learn to relax. Just a few minutes of peace and quiet every day can make a big difference.
- If you are a couple with a new baby or children, book some couple time on a weekly basis. While a nice week away once a year is great, it is the weekly nurturing that is more important! This is not shopping for groceries without the baby, or balancing your books together. This must be special time to be alone as a couple and time to nurture your relationship (the unspoken rule here is get a babysitter!).



- Be realistic with yourself and your situation. People who expect too much of themselves can get tense if things don't work out. Set practical, success oriented goals, and expect to be successful!
- Plan your work. Tension and anxiety really build up when your work seems endless. Plan your work to use time and energy more efficiently.
- Exercise regularly. You might swim, walk, bicycle, jog, or ski. Any favourite sport will help you let off steam and work out stress.
- Develop a support system so you can talk about your tensions. Whether you are male or female your partner cannot be everything to you. It is important no matter what stage of life you are at to have one or two close friends. When tensions build up, discuss the problem with a close friend or with the people involved.
- Eat properly and regularly. Maintain a balanced diet and skip junk food. Get plenty of sleep, avoid cigarettes, alcohol and drugs. Drugs and alcohol can provide temporary relief but they usually can't cure the underlying causes. Prescription drugs should only be taken under the guidance of your doctor.
- Take time to be involved with activities that you find stimulating. Enjoy life, make new friends and develop a sense of humour.
- Develop positive self-talk and a positive attitude. Remember that positive thinking is just as powerful as negative thinking!
- You've heard the saying about all work and no play, or all play and no work? What this means is create balance in your life between work and play.
- This may seem obvious, but avoid stress. Whenever possible, plan to avoid too many big changes coming at the same time.

Where can I go for help?

If stress and its effects do get out of hand, it's time to get help. It is not a sign of weakness or self-indulgence to get professional advice, it's smart!

- Your family doctor is a key helping person. He or she can refer you to help or treat you in the office without hospitalization.
- Your employer or school counsellor can refer you to an agency or therapist that can help. Most companies have an EFAP Program so ask for a contact number or brochure.
- There are many provincial and local mental health associations. These are excellent sources for aid, advice or references. They can refer you to community services available to you under your health plan.
- Almost every place has a mental health centre that provides a wide range of professional services: in- and out-patient treatment, emergency assistance, short-term counselling, psycho-educational groups, etc. Services provided by a medical doctor or hospital may be included in your medical coverage.



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- There are many other professionals such as clergy, therapists, psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, nurses, etc. Who are concerned, informed people, experienced in helping others solve their problems.