



Stress Management

“Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that "demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize." Richard S Lazarus

Basically, it's what we feel when we think we've lost control of events. We have an instinctive stress response to unexpected events. The stress response inside us is therefore part instinct and part to do with the way we think. When we experience a shock or perceive a threat our body releases hormones to help us cope or survive. This is our fight-or-flight response. Not only life-threatening events can trigger this reaction. We may experience this response any time we come across something unexpected or something that frustrates our goals.

When in the fight-or-flight response we may experience negative consequences. We may become highly strung, anxious, agitated and irritable. This in turn negatively affects our ability to work with others. Due to the hormones being released we may experience physical symptoms, such as a racing heart, sweaty palms, tense muscles and difficulty concentrating. The intensity of our perception of the situation will determine the intensity of the response. If overwhelming, we are less effective to execute sound control skills to resolve the stressful situation, as we are unable to think clearly.

There are very few situations in life where this response is useful. Most situations benefit from a calm, rational, controlled and socially sensitive approach. In the short term, we need to keep this fight-or-flight response under control to be effective in our daily living. In the long term we need to keep it under control to avoid problems of poor health and burnout.

The problem with stress is that it may accumulate. At first, we may experience mild forms of stress such as a headache, nervous stomach, or the occasional sleepless night. These symptoms are the body's way of telling you to reduce stress. If you do not heed the message, then stress may cause more serious problems such as hypertension, a weakened immune system, and an increased risk of heart disease or type 2 diabetes.

Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms	
Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory problems • Inability to concentrate • Poor judgment • Seeing only the negative • Anxious or racing thoughts • Constant worrying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moodiness • Irritability or short temper • Agitation, inability to relax • Feeling overwhelmed • Sense of loneliness and isolation • Depression or general unhappiness
Physical Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aches and pains • Diarrhea or constipation • Nausea, dizziness • Chest pain, rapid heartbeat • Loss of sex drive • Frequent colds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating more or less • Sleeping too much or too little • Isolating yourself from others • Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities • Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax • Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)



How to Manage **Stress**

Stress isn't always negative. In small doses, it can help you perform under pressure and motivate you to excel. Yet while two people experience the same incident, one person will fall apart, while the other can move ahead. What is the difference between these two individuals?

It involves resilience which is our ability to bounce back. Resilience is the capacity to withstand stress and catastrophe. Resilience is a life skill which needs to be developed. It is an ongoing process which requires time and effort. It is a series of steps that are learnt to develop stress tolerance. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

Contributing factors in developing Resilience:

There are combinations of factors which contribute to our development of resilience. The primary factor to resilience is the strength of our relationships and supportive structures. Encouragement and motivation to overcome challenges by a supportive network aids in our resolve and therefore boosts our resilience.

Other contributing factors which we must develop and be aware of, which influence our beliefs and therefore perceptions of challenges in our daily work and personal life will affect our level of resilience.

Factors to be aware of and develop:

- The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out. Set SMART goals!
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities.
- Being aware of negative and self-defeating thought patterns, which lead to irrational or unrealistic thinking.
- Shifting the focus to increasing your control over yourself and your life, rather than over your environment.
- Develop skills in communication and problem solving.
- The capacity to be able to identify and manage strong feelings and impulses.
- Coping with stress in healthy ways and avoiding harmful coping strategies, such as substance abuse.
- The ability to accept help.
- Maintain a healthy routine, and making time for exercise and a healthy diet.
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery.
- Find positive meaning in your life despite difficult or traumatic events.
- Increasing your ability to relax, let go of tension, and calmly approach issues thereby reducing feelings of anxiety and stress.

