



What is it? How can I cope with it?

Who gets stressed?

- ◆ Young people ✓
- ◆ Adults ✓
- ◆ Males ✓
- ◆ Females ✓
- ◆ Children ✓
- ◆ Babies ✓

Stress is a normal part of life and is experienced by everyone to different degrees. A small amount of stress can be a good thing and a useful motivator but too much stress is bad for your physical and emotional health and can have dangerous consequences.

So what is stress?

Stress is the body's natural response to dealing with what it perceives to be a threat. Going back to our caveman days this might be running away from a predator but although the times have changed our reactions have not and that predator is now a whole host of other threats; failing our exams, getting into trouble at work, failing our driving test, the list is endless!

Stress can be a good thing, it drives us and motivates us and gives us a goal but too much of it can lead to problems physical and emotional problems.

So how do you recognise stress?

Here are some physical tell-tale signs of stress:

- Rapid, uneven heartbeat
- Chest pain
- Over-breathing / breathlessness
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Sweating and hot flushes
- Dry mouth
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- Muscle Aches and pains
- Restlessness, tremors and shaking
- Tingling / numbness
- Choking sensations

Sounds like a normal reaction to an interview or driving test doesn't it, but imagine you had this for prolonged periods of time! This is when stress becomes a issue and can lead to further problems.

Psychological and behavioural effects of too much stress

- Worrying
- Mind racing / going blank
- Poor concentration / memory
- Indecisive
- Irritability, impatience, anger
- sleep disturbance
- Confusion
- Restlessness
- Avoidance of situations
- Obsessive compulsive behaviour
- Discomfort in social situations
- Phobic Behaviour

What can you do to reduce stress before it hits

- Try to eat a healthy balanced diet
- Cut back on caffeine, energy drinks, tobacco and substances if applicable
- Talk to someone you can trust
- Ask for help
- Don't take on too much
- Try to improve your time management
- Break a task down to easy manageable steps
- Understand how your behaviour may be affecting others
- Try to get enough sleep for you
- Take time out to relax and recharge
- Take time to relax before going to bed, take a bath, read a book, chat to a friend, watch TV—anything you enjoy doing



If you're already in the thick of it

- Meditation—sit down in a quiet place, close your eyes and recite to yourself or out loud a positive mantra i.e. I can do this!
- Breathe Deeply—you would be amazed at the difference this can make as it forces your mind to focus on your breathing
- Spend a few minutes focussing on something, if you are eating something, really think about it, look at the nutritional info, the ingredients etc., this will change your mind-set
- Tune in to your body, if your heart is racing or your palms sweating think about this and tell yourself it is your bossy way of reacting and it's perfectly normal.
- If you have access to a heat compress place it around your neck and shoulders to relieve tensions, opening and closing your mouth focusing on moving your jaw can also help.
- Get the music on, listening to music and especially singing along is known to lower the heart rate and blood pressure.
- If possible go outside and walk for 5 or 10 minutes, this is a distraction technique but will also enable you to get fresh air and some distance from the problem.

Some further reading:

- www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/stress-guide/
- www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/stress.asp
- www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/reduce-stress.aspx
- www.nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk/Services/A-Z/StressControl/Pages/default.aspx