

Stress

We all respond to stress differently, therefore it is important to find strategies that work best for you.

Stress management can teach you healthier ways to cope with stress and build resilience. No matter how powerless you may feel in the face of stress, you still have control over your lifestyle, thoughts, emotions and behaviour.

Stress management involves changing the stressful situation when you can, changing your reaction when you can't, taking care of yourself, and making time for rest and relaxation.

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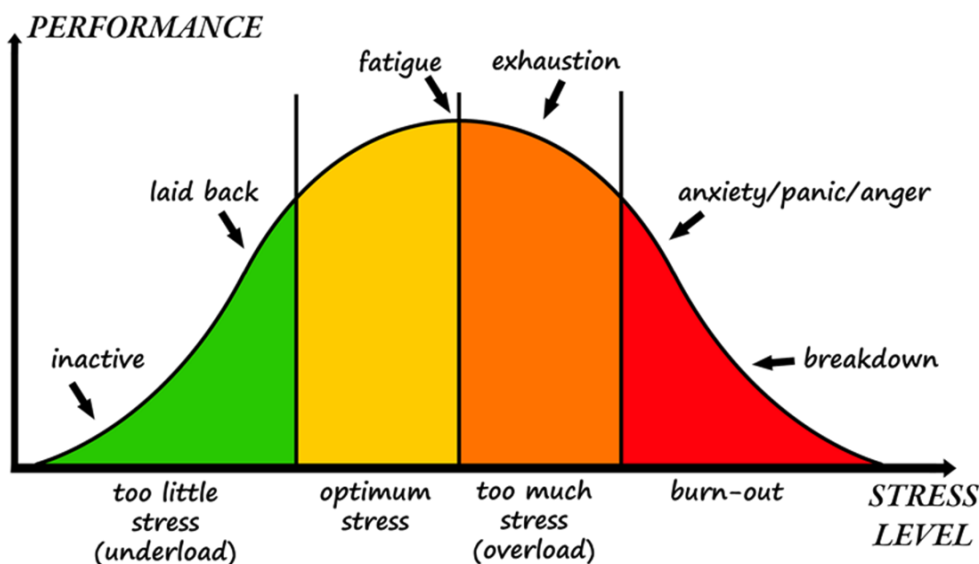
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STRESS CURVE



Are you experiencing any of the following?

- Sleep pattern change
- Appetite change
- Increase in alcohol or other drug use
- Difficulty concentrating
- Emotional distress, such as anger, irritability, anxiety and depression
- Muscular problems including tension headaches, back pain, and jaw pain
- Stomach problems such as heartburn, diarrhoea, and constipation
- Increased arousal leading to an elevation in blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, heart palpitations, dizziness, cold hands or feet, and shortness of breath

If you answered yes to two or more, you may be experiencing stress.

What can cause stress?

- Work
- Relationships
- Financial issues
- Conflict between your values and your behaviour
- Self-imposed expectations – perfectionism, impatience
- Inadequate leisure/self-care time

Stress

Different types of stress

Acute stress – is the most common form of stress and is typically caused by the daily demands encountered by all of us, such as meeting a deadline or cramming for an exam. While the word *stress* has a negative impression, *acute stress* is also associated with feelings of excitement and joy. It is experienced as short-term, provides us with motivation, improves our performance and is perceived to be within our coping capabilities.

Episodic acute stress – acute stress that is suffered too frequently is called *episodic acute stress*. This type of stress is usually seen in people who worry constantly about potential negative future outcomes, are in a rush, take on too many responsibilities, or are unable to deal with demands and pressure.

Chronic Stress – is the opposite of *acute stress* and is characterised as *dangerous* and *unhealthy*. This type of stress is brought about by long-term exposure to stressors such as an unhappy marriage, unwanted career or job, financial problems and chronic illness. These stressful situations seem to be unending and can lead a person to resort to violence, self-harm or suicide. It can also lead to serious health problems such as hypertension, stroke and heart attack.

Ideas for coping with stress

- Identify your stressors – a *stress journal* can help you to identify the regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them by recording what caused the stress, how you felt both physically and emotionally, and your response.
- Consider what you can control – while you may not be able to control what your boss does or what your in-laws say, you *can* control how you react, how you accomplish your work and how you spend your time.
- Review your daily and weekly activities and identify what you can take off your plate – ask yourself, “do my activities match up with my values and goals?”
- Time management: prioritise activities; identify your peak-energy periods (plan to complete energy-demanding activities at that time); delegate tasks and responsibilities to others when appropriate; break big tasks into smaller, manageable ones; and, be *realistic* about what you can accomplish in a given time.
- Preserve your boundaries by being assertive and learning to say “no” -- a few seconds of discomfort is worth avoiding the stress of taking on an extra activity.
- Embrace your mistakes – perfectionism is a mind-set which can exacerbate stress. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be comfortable with “good enough”.
- Worrying is not problem-solving – identify the worry, decide if anything *can* be done and -- if the answer is “no” -- practise mindfulness, distract yourself or use a *worry diary*. If the answer is “yes”, use problem-solving strategies to define the options and steps to be taken.
- Develop a personalised *self-care plan*. It’s important to maintain a healthy lifestyle including adequate sleep, a healthy balanced diet, regular physical exercise and pleasant activities.
- Review the social supports available to you and cultivate good relationships. Talk to people -- your family, friends, or colleagues.
- Make time to practise relaxation throughout the day by scheduling regular work breaks. Often, the early warning signs that stress is beginning to affect us physically (e.g. racing heart, muscle tension) and emotionally (e.g. less tolerant and easily irritable) are ignored and, rather than take effective action to manage it, we allow stress to build up.