

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a feeling of being under abnormal pressure, whether from increased workload, an argument with a family member, or financial worries.



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Stress affects us in lots of ways, both physically and emotionally, and in varying intensities.

Research has shown that stress can sometimes be positive. It makes us more alert and helps us perform better in certain situations. However, stress has only been found to be beneficial if it is short-lived. Excessive or prolonged stress can lead to illnesses such as heart disease and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

During situations that make you feel threatened or upset, your body creates a

stress response. This can cause a variety of physical symptoms, change the way you behave, and lead you to experience more intense emotions.



PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

People react differently to stress. Some common symptoms of stress include sleeping problems, sweating, or a change in appetite.

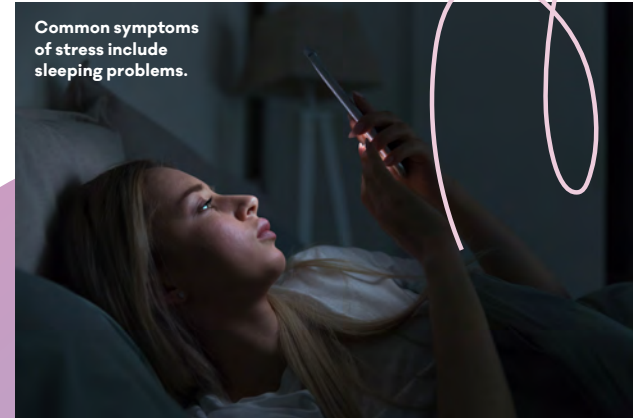
Symptoms like these are triggered by a rush of stress hormones in your body which, when released, allow you to deal with pressures or threats. This is known as the 'fight or flight' response. Hormones called adrenaline and noradrenaline raise your blood pressure, increase your heart rate and increase the amount you sweat. This prepares your body for an emergency response. These hormones can also reduce blood flow to your skin and reduce your

stomach activity. Cortisol, another stress hormone, releases fat and sugar into your system to boost your energy.

As a result, you may experience headaches, muscle tension, pain, nausea, indigestion and dizziness. You may also breathe more quickly, have palpitations or suffer from various aches and pains. In the long-term, you may be putting yourself at risk from heart attacks and strokes.



Common symptoms of stress include sleeping problems.



Humans have inherited these things from our ancient ancestors, who needed to be able to either run away from danger, or stay and fight. Once the pressure or threat has passed, your stress hormone levels usually return to normal. However, if you're constantly under stress, these hormones remain in your body, leading to the symptoms of stress. If you're stuck in a busy office or on an overcrowded train, you can't run away, so you can't use up the chemicals your own body makes to protect you. Over time, the build-up of these chemicals and the changes they produce can be damaging for your health.



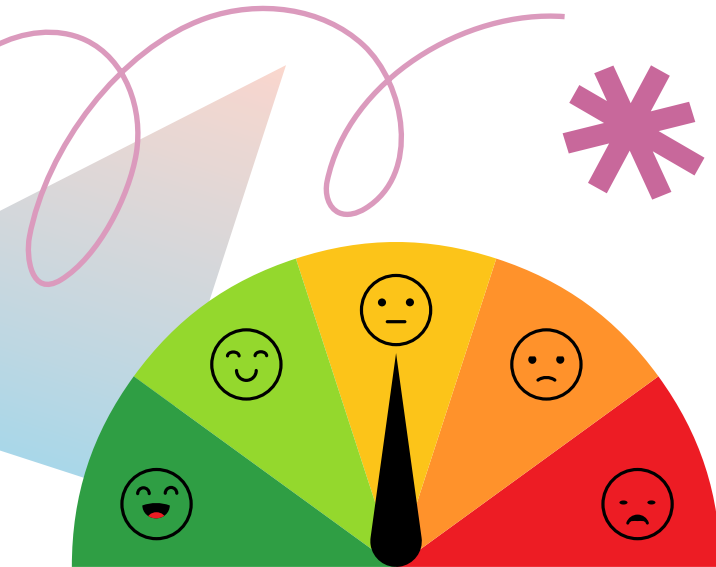
BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS



When you are stressed you may have lots of different feelings, including anxiety, irritability or low self-esteem, which can lead you to become withdrawn, indecisive or tearful.

You may have periods of constant worry, racing thoughts, or repeatedly go over the same things in your head. Some people experience changes in their behaviour. They may lose their temper more easily, act irrationally or become more verbally or physically aggressive. These feelings

can feed on each other and produce physical symptoms, which can make you feel even worse. For example, extreme anxiety can make you feel so unwell that you then worry you have a serious physical condition.



IDENTIFYING THE SIGNS OF STRESS

Everyone experiences stress. However, when it affects your life, health and well-being, it's important to tackle it as soon as possible. While stress affects everyone differently, there are common signs and symptoms for you to look out for:

- Feelings of constant worry or anxiety
- Feelings of being overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Mood swings or changes in mood