**Stress : How to manage and overcome Stress**

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to a change in a situation the mind and body may find overwhelming. Well, Stress is a natural reaction, to difficult situations in life, such as work, family, relationships, money matters and others.

In today’s fast paced world and engagement, professionally and personally, it is quite possible for one to feel stressed out, at times. Also true is this, that a moderate amount of stress can help us perform better in challenging situations; but too much or prolonged stress can lead to physical problems. This can include lower immunity levels, digestive and intestinal difficulties such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or mental health problems such as depression. So, it is imperative that we manage our stress and keep it at a healthy level to prevent long-term damage to our body and mind.

We all may stress, at work, home, while travelling, performing and in situations, of different types. Stress can be due to people or due to the situation you may find yourself in. This could be because of you, as simple as like, getting late to office for an important meeting or due no fault of yours as well, like getting stuck in an unusual way, due accident on road.

Chronic stress can keep you from feeling and performing your best – mentally, emotionally and physically, too. But then, no one’s life is completely stress-free. It is important to know how to manage stress in your life. Now, managing or overcoming stress does not mean that you start to manage self, only when there is a cause for stress. However, keeping self in such a manner that you lower down the frequency and intensity of stress, is a better way of dealing with stressful situations.

## **What causes stress?**

All sorts of situations can cause stress. The most common could be work related, health conditions and relationship with partner, within family or with children or due financial situations.

Stress can be caused either by a series of minor occurrences such as getting late to office, feeling undervalued at work, arguing with a family member or [major upheavals and life events](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/articles/change-loss-bereavement), such as, unemployment, divorce, bereavement or due any other causes. 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 of heart attacks and strokes as well in case stress is not controlled.

## **Physical symptoms of stress**

Stress is people’s response in situations. Different people, react differently, to stress or when in situation, which may cause stress. Some common symptoms of stress may include, a bit of fear, sweating, change in appetite or unable to sleep properly.

While stress affects everyone differently, there are common signs and symptoms for you to look out for:

* Anxiety or feelings of constant worry
* Unable to focus and concentrate
* Low self-esteem
* Mood swings or changes in mood
* Unable to relax or change in sleeping habits
* Irritability or having a short temper
* Change in diet, either you eat less or more, than usual
* Intake of tobacco or alcohol may start or increase to relax
* Muscle tension, aches and pain
* Diarrhoea and constipation
* Feelings of nausea or dizziness
* Lost interest in day to day life

If you experience these symptoms for a prolonged period of time, and feel they are affecting your everyday life or making you feel unwell, this then is the time to speak with Counsellors at Feels Good. Our Psychologists, Counsellors help you understand how to manage self, much better.

Above symptoms are triggered by a rush of stress hormones in your body, which when released, allow you to deal with pressure 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 of heart attacks and strokes.

Humans would not feel comfortable in an uncomfortable state, so either they try to run away from it or confront it. 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 road and you cannot run away, so you can’t use up the chemicals your own body makes to protect you. Over a period of time, the build-up of these chemicals and the changes they produce can be damaging to your health.

**Stress causes behavioural and emotional effects**

When in stress, 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 thinking about the same things or events in your thoughts. 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, which you have no or less control on.

## **First step, when in stress?**

When you are feeling stressed, first step is to identify and understand what is the cause behind your present state :

* **Develop awareness & understand the reason behind the cause : Try figuring out what has happened or is happening.** Try to identify the underlying causes of your present state. **Is physical tiredness normal or has been caused due to the situation you are in.** Don’t ignore physical warnings such as tense muscles, over-tiredness, headaches or migraines.
* **Understanding about the cause helps :** Is there you can do anything about the present situation to overcome, by self or with the help of others. If yes, then please do the needful.

In case the situation is such that you cannot do anything about, then there is no need to unnecessarily bother self. Distracting self from it and focussing and engaging elsewhere is always a good idea. Because, at times, the situation would become better with time, or maybe, you would be in a better situation to be able to handle people or situations, effectively and confidently.

* **Re-review your way of looking at things and overall lifestyle : At times, a change in perspective, helps. Think of and practice looking at same situation or people, the other way, which you have not done so far. Reorganizing thoughts, approach and ways to manage your personal and professional life, helps.**

## **What to do, when in stress?**

When you are feeling stressed and have understood the cause of it, you may try the below steps:

1. **Practice deep breathing**

Time and again you would have heard that deep breathing, helps. [Deep breathing](https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/mindfulness-meditation-improve-your-quality-of-life) is a great way to reduce the activation of your sympathetic nervous system, which controls the body's response of fight or flight, to a perceived threat. Deep breaths, taken in for a count of five seconds, held for two seconds and released for a count of five seconds, can help activate your parasympathetic nervous system to rest and digest, which helps reduce the overall stress and anxiety you may be experiencing.

1. **Try these immediate relief providers**
2. In mind, count up to 10, before you speak or react.
3. Take a break, by breaking the pattern of your stay. You may go to pick up water, to go to wash room, listen to music, if possible; do whatever works for you.
4. Rest is always a good. Rest here is given to the mind. Maybe a few moments of silence would be a good idea. You may meditate as well, even when in office. This brings in peace and for you to be able to think with a renewed perspective.
5. If it’s not so urgent, then sleep on it and respond later or tomorrow. It is basically to delay reactions and once you delay, you may be able to respond appropriately, than react, which may worsen the scenario.
6. **Re-review the situation, altered thinking**

Maybe the situation or concern is not big enough, but you have made it so and have become stressful. Try breaking it down, so that you address them all appropriately. Many a times, it is not the situation, but the way we look at it, worsens it all.

1. **Physical exercise is a great stress-buster**

Get on to doing things you enjoy, is a natural way to relieve stress and find your happy time and place. It is fine even when feeling low, you may find pleasure in simple things like going for a walk, catching up with a friend or reading a good book, listening to music.

When in stress, do what makes you, feel good.

### Some of these stress-relieving activities may be :

* Go out for a walk in nature
* Get into doing exercise
* If you love gardening, then that can be a good idea to get engaged in
* Go for a ride, drive or why not to clean your Bike or Car
* Try Yoga or Meditation
* Play with your kids or pets – outdoors, if possible.
* Go out and meet up your friend
* Watch TV, your favourite web series, movie or songs
* Read a book, short story or magazine

1. **Bring in, positive Self talk**

Do pay attention to your internal conversations. Hope they are not tuned in to the negative side of thinking, perceiving and feeling, which may further add on to your level of stress. Negative self-talk increases stress. Positive self-talk can help you calm down and manage stress. With practice, you can learn to shift negative thoughts to positive ones.

1. **Continue physical exercise and maintain good nutrition**

Simplest and effective are [physical exercise and nutrition](https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/establishing-healthy-behaviors-that-stick). Only when your body is healthy, your mind can be healthy and vice versa. Physical exercise is proven to be a great stress reliever and also helps to improve your overall quality of life. Nutrition is important because, stress can deplete certain vitamins, such as A, B complex, C and E. Maintaining proper nutrition not only helps your body feel better, but your mind as well, which allows you to better combat stress.

1. **Spend time with others**

Humans are social beings. You feel good and confident when there are people around to speak with, spend time with. Finding a sense of community, whether at work, with a religious organization or through shared activities, such as organized sports, is important to your well-being. Enjoying a shared activity allows you to find support and foster relationships, that can be supportive in difficult times.

1. **Refrain from activities, which do not support :**

It is perceived to be but not true, that, smoking and drinking helps reduce stress. On the contrary, when under stress or tension, there is a tendency to increase the frequency and quantity of it, which is not going to do any good to you. Staying away from these or consuming as low as possible, keeps you in control and is fine.