



# **stress, stress management techniques.**

<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/kb/content/special/zu1121.html>

You can do it: Coping with extreme stress is a learned skill

## **Recognize stress:**

becoming a problem, reduces productivity, increases management pressures, and makes people ill in many ways, evidence of which is still increasing. Workplace stress affects the performance of the brain, including functions of work performance; memory, concentration, and learning. Stress and stress management are directly related to personal well-being and specifically to workplace well-being.

# **signs of stress**

- sleep difficulties
- loss of appetite
- poor concentration or poor memory retention
- performance dip
- uncharacteristic errors or missed deadlines
- anger or tantrums
- violent or anti-social behaviour
- emotional outbursts
- alcohol or drug abuse
- nervous habits

# Physical Symptoms

- Constant tiredness.
- Your limbs feel heavy.
- Your facial skin feels taut.
- Breathlessness without any exertion.
- Feeling faint at times.
- Tendency to sweat for no good reason.
- Light, patchy sleep.
- Weepiness or frequent desire to weep.
- General lack of appetite.
- Frequent indigestion or heartburn.
- Feeling of wanting to be sick.
- Constipation or diarrhoea.
- Headaches/migraine.
- Disinterest in sex (impotence/frigidity).
- Craving for food when under pressure.
- Increased reliance on caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes, chocolate, sugar.
- Nervous tics, nail biting.
- Neck cramp.
- Inability to sit still without fidgeting.

# Mental Symptoms

- Reluctance to laugh/smile or make jokes.
- Patchy or non-existent concentration.
- Tendency to flit from task to task.
- Inability to finish a task properly.
- A lack of drive/motivation in your work.
- Feelings of guilt/inadequacy where work is concerned.
- Lack of interest in life, and in activities that previously gave you pleasure.
- No desire to contact people (write, phone, etc.).
- Loss of interest in your friends.
- Difficulty in making decisions.
- Constant irritability.
- A feeling of being a failure.
- A feeling of helplessness and lack of control.
- A feeling of being surrounded by busy people.
- Feelings of inadequacy in relationship to your partner.
- No real interest in the future.
- Frustration at not being able to show your true feelings.

# **Main Causes of Stress**

The main causes of stress that most of us have in common, though, tend to fall into three general categories:

- Physical Stressors
- Social Stressors
- Emotional Stressors

# **Physical Stressors**

common causes of stress on the body, as is poor nutrition. Being subjected to too much noise or overcrowded conditions can often produce stress.

And then, of course, the many and varied substances we put into our bodies can cause physical stress. For example, too much alcohol, drugs – illegal or misused prescription and over-the-counter medications, tobacco, food additives, and too much caffeine &/or sugar

# **Social Stressors**

feelings of loneliness and loss of purpose. In fact, any kind of rapid changes in life, whether good or bad, create stress.

One of the biggest causes of stress, (no big surprise here!) is our job! Unemployment, job changes, or poverty produce financial stresses which can feel overwhelming. Especially these days when so many people are working for organizations who are out-sourcing and downsizing their workforces.



# Emotional Stressors

- main causes of stress. This frequently shows up in feeling in some way “not good enough.” We don’t feel like we look as good, or work as fast, or make as much money as someone else. It is frequently the result of our own self-talk and self-criticism. Deep inside, we feel like a failure as a person and if anyone could really see inside of us, they would know we’re an impostor.
- The really sad thing is, most of that negative self-talk has its roots in negative early childhood programming. It’s the voice of a demanding or unreasonable parent that still talks in our heads. And sometimes it’s the voice of an abusive spouse or partner who tries to control us by criticizing or cutting us down.
- Emotional stress is often felt as guilt, or that double bind situation when we feel “darned if we do, and darned if we don’t.” That no matter what we do, it isn’t enough.
- Strangely enough, this kind of stress produces both the fear of failure AND the fear of success.

# General causes

- **Threat**
- A perceived threat will lead a person to feel stressed. This can include physical threats, social threats, financial threat, and so on. In particular it will be worse when the person feels they have no response that can reduce the threat, as this affects the need for a sense of [control](#).
- Generally speaking, any threat to [needs](#) is likely to lead to stress being experienced.
- **Fear**
- Threat can lead to [fear](#), which again leads to stress. Fear leads to imagined outcomes, which are the real source of stress.
- **Uncertainty**
- When we are not [certain](#), we are unable to [predict](#), and hence feel we are not in [control](#), and hence may feel fear or feel threatened by that which is causing the uncertainty.
- **Cognitive dissonance**
- When there is a gap between what we do and what we think, then we experience [cognitive dissonance](#), which is felt as stress. Thus, if I think I am a nice person then do something that hurts someone else, I will experience dissonance and stress.
- Dissonance also occurs when we cannot meet our commitments. We believe we are honest and committed, but when circumstances prevent us from meeting our promises we are faced with the possibility of being perceived as dishonest or incapable (ie. a social threat).

# Life causes

- Death: of spouse, family, friend
- Health: injury, illness, pregnancy
- Crime: Sexual molestation, mugging, burglary, pick-pocketed
- Self-abuse: drug abuse, alcoholism, self-harm
- Family change: separation, divorce, new baby, marriage
- Sexual problems: getting partner, with partner
- Argument: with spouse, family, friends, co-workers, boss
- Physical changes: lack of sleep, new work hours
- New location: vacation, moving house
- Money: lack of it, owing it, investing it
- Environment change: in school, job, house, town, jail
- Responsibility increase: new dependent, new job

# Stress at work

- The demands of the job
- The control staff have over how they do their work
- The support they receive from colleagues and superiors
- Their relationships with colleagues
- Whether they understand their roles and responsibilities
- How far the company consults staff over workplace changes.
- Other stress indicators at work include:
- Sickness absence
- High staff turnover
- Poor communication between teams
- Bullying
- Lack of feedback on performance
- Value and contribution
- Technological change

# **factors influencing the effects of stress**

- childhood experience (abuse can increase stress susceptibility)
- personality (certain personalities are more stress-prone than others)
- genetics (particularly inherited 'relaxation response', connected with serotonin levels, the brain's 'well-being chemical')
- immunity abnormality (as might cause certain diseases such as arthritis and eczema, which weaken stress resilience)
- lifestyle (principally poor diet and lack of exercise)
- duration and intensity of stressors (obviously...)

# Unhealthy ways of coping with stress

- Smoking
- [Drinking too much](#)
- Overeating or under eating
- [Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer](#)
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- [Using pills or drugs to relax](#)
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
- Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)

# Healthy methods of personal stress management and stress relief

## Change the situation:

- Avoid the stressor

- Alter the stressor

## Change your reaction:

- Adapt to the stressor

- Accept the stressor

# 1: Avoid unnecessary stress

- **Learn how to say “no”** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you’re close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress.
- **Avoid people who stress you out** – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can’t turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.
- **Take control of your environment** – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic’s got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.
- **Avoid hot-button topics** – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it’s the topic of discussion.
- **Pare down your to-do list** – Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you’ve got too much on your plate, distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts.” Drop tasks that aren’t truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.



## 2: Alter the situation

- **Express your feelings instead of bottling them up.** If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same.
- **Be willing to compromise.** When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- **Be more assertive.** Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk.
- **Manage your time better.** Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress you're under.

# 3: Adapt to the stressor

- **Reframe problems.** Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- **Look at the big picture.** Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- **Adjust your standards.** Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with “good enough.”
- **Focus on the positive.** When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

# 4: Accept the things you can't change

- **Don't try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control— particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- **Look for the upside.** As the saying goes, “What doesn't kill us makes us stronger.” When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- **Share your feelings.** Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
- **Learn to forgive.** Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

# Make time for fun and relaxation

- **Set aside relaxation time.** Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- **Connect with others.** Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.
- **Do something you enjoy every day.** Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

# Adopt a healthy lifestyle

- **Exercise regularly**. Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.
- **Eat a healthy diet**. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar**. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs**. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get enough sleep**. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.