

Tips for Managing Stress

Here are some practical hints on how you can deal effectively with stress and tension.

Talk it out

When something concerns you, talk it out with someone you can trust – a good friend, colleague, partner, parent or counsellor.

Talking it out can help relieve your tension and see the problem more clearly. It can then be easier to do something about it.

Take things one at a time

Sometimes the workload or concern can seem so great that it feels impossible to cope. Don't try to do everything at once – but take it a little at a time.

Set priorities by tackling the most urgent problem or task while you set the rest aside. As you complete this task, then move onto the next urgent one, and so on. Acknowledge each completion.

Set realistic goals for yourself.

Take a breather

Sometimes it can help to take a break if things are building up. Lose yourself in an enjoyable non-demanding activity – such as reading a book, going for a walk. This can help you return to the problem with a clearer mind.

Keep a balance in life

Often when people are really stressed they neglect other aspects of their life and the importance of having a balance in **all** areas. This can lead to an increase in the stress they are feeling.

- **Make time for recreation** – many people drive themselves so hard they don't allow time for recreation, which is essential for good health. Get involved in a hobby or sport so that you have some time to forget about work or other stressors. This can also open up opportunities for meeting new friends and increasing your support networks.
- **Take time out for exercise** – regular exercise helps 'burn off' tension. It also improves fitness and physical well-being, enabling you to cope better with your stress. Sophisticated or expensive programs are not necessary. It can help though to do the activity with someone else, which can increase enjoyment and motivation. For example, arrange to go for a walk regularly with a friend or join a team sport. This way you are more likely to do it. Pick something that is realistic for you given your present level of fitness, time available and the environment in which you live. To be effective, your exercise program needs to be done regularly.
- **Practice healthy eating habits** – experiencing stress and nervous tension uses up many important nutrients which if not replaced or eaten in adequate amounts, can leave you feeling tired, run down, irritable and less able to cope with stress. When people are under extreme stress, their eating habits are often affected. Some people stop eating, others eat for comfort (and this is usually 'comfort food' like chocolate, chips, cakes etc). Try to eat from a wide range of food including fruit, vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, some dairy food and some protein (meat, fish, lentils, pulses) each day. If you are craving high fat or sugar foods to get that immediate (but temporary) lift try fruit juice instead or dried fruit, nuts, raw vegetables or a piece of fruit.
- **Get some sleep** – often sleep is affected by stress. Avoid caffeine for at least six hours before going to bed. Engage in some quiet activities to 'wind down' at the end of your day. Reading, watching TV, listening to music, meditation, or a pleasant bath or shower can help ease you into a relaxed state for sleep.