

What is stress?

Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Pressure turns into stress when you feel unable to cope. People have different ways of reacting to stress, so a situation that feels stressful to one person may be motivating to another. Many of life's demands can cause stress, especially work, relationships and money problems. When you feel stressed, it can affect everything you do.

Symptoms of stress

Symptoms can often build up gradually before you start noticing them. Stress can affect how you feel, how you think, how you behave and how your body works. It affects people in different ways but if you are stressed you may have some of the following symptoms:

You may feel:

- irritable
- anxious
- low in self-esteem
- have a low mood

You may find that you:

- have racing thoughts
- worry constantly
- imagine the worst
- go over and over things

You may notice you're:

- having temper outbursts
- drinking or smoking more
- having problems sleeping
- on the go all the time
- talking more or faster
- changing your eating habits
- feeling unsociable
- being forgetful or clumsy
- being unreasonable
- struggling to concentrate

You may be suffering from:

- headaches
- muscle tension and pain
- stomach problems
- sweating
- feeling dizzy
- bowel or bladder problems
- breathlessness
- dry mouth
- sexual problems

Coping with stress

If you're stressed, the first step to feeling better is to identify the cause.

Some people may find some of the following suggestions useful:

- **Be Active**: exercise can help to clear your thoughts and enable you to deal with your problems more calmly.
- **Avoid Unhealthy Habits**: Don't rely on alcohol, drugs or smoking to feel better; these will just create new problems.
- **Take Control**: think through some of the potential solutions to your problem.
- **Connect With People**: having a good support network of colleagues, friends and family can help you to cope with the difficult times and to see things in a different way.
- **Have Some "Me" Time**: we all need to protect some time for ourselves for socialising, relaxation or exercise.
- **Challenge Yourself**: Setting yourself some goals and challenges such as learning a new language or a new sport can help to build confidence, which in turn will help you deal with stress.
- **Do Volunteer Work**: people who help others through activities such as volunteering or community work become more resilient.
- **Manage Your Time**: Make a plan to manage your time well rather than just working longer hours.
- **Be Positive**: look for the positives in life. Write down three things at the end of each day which went well or for which you're grateful.
- **Accept The Things You Can't Change**: changing a difficult situation isn't always possible. If this proves to be the case, recognise and accept things as they are and concentrate on everything that you do have control over.

When to seek help

If you've tried self-help techniques and they aren't working, it may be useful make an appointment to see your GP. They may suggest other coping techniques or recommend some form of counselling. If your stress is causing serious health problems, such as high blood pressure, you may need medication or further tests.

Counselling can be an effective way to combat stress, by identifying the root cause and talking through ways to cope and / or change the situation.

If you feel you may benefit from counselling or would like to know more please contact us on **01224 633131**.