Anxiety UK

Stress & Anxiety

Stress and anxiety

Stress - all of us will experience it at some point, whether it be from our job, education or as a result of other responsibilities. Some people are more prone to experiencing stress than others - we are all different.

This brief guide give practical tips and advice on the management of stress.

We hope you will find it a useful resource.

What is stress?

Stress can manifest in many different ways, causing physical and psychological symptoms.

Physical symptoms can include:

- Headaches

- Trouble sleeping

- Stomach issues such as diarrhoea or constipation

- Sweating

- Aches and pains

- Change in appetite

- Frequently becoming ill

How can stress affect me?

Stress can also affect your mood, such as:

- Depression

- Anxiety

- Feeling overwhelmed

- Becoming easily irritated or angry

- Excessive worrying

What can lead us to become stressed?

- A demanding workload
- Deadlines
- The death of a loved one
- Moving house
- Caring for a sick relative
- Losing your job
- Planning for an important event
- Debt

Is stress ever a good thing?

Like anxiety, stress is our body's internal warning system alerting us to danger by increasing our blood pressure and heart rate. In small doses, stress can have advantages. The energy it gives you can be useful for providing an extra boost to achieve targets and get stuff done.

There is a word for this; *eustress*, meaning "beneficial stress". Instead of disarming someone it motivates them forward. Examples of this would include working all night to finish at essay at school, or giving you the confidence to perform in front of a crowd. Good stress can feel invigorating, but only for a short time. Prolonged stress however is not helpful.

Task

How do you typically handle stress?

Write in here...

Take a look at what you've just written.

Are you **taking control** of the situation, or are you taking a **passive** approach?

Are you actively looking at **ways to solve the problem** or surrendering to the feeling of being **powerless**?

Are you using your thoughts and actions to help you **manage** the stress, or are you letting your stress **dictate** your thoughts and actions?

Manage Your Time

When we're feeling overwhelmed it can be tempting to avoid tackling our responsibilities. Sometimes anxiety can affect us so much that we feel genuinely paralysed when it comes to making decisions and we can end up procrastinating which over time, only makes things worse.

What's keeping you up at night?

Make a list of everything you've been avoiding. Seeing it all written down may alarm you at first, but taking an inventory of your upcoming tasks and responsibilities will help you to become as prepared as possible to manage your time and reduce your stress levels.

Remember: when it comes to managing stress, it's better to <u>act</u> now than <u>react</u> later.

When you're frozen with worry, try to keep WARM...

Worry: Think about what is bothering you. Has anything triggered the stress? Can you identify precisely where it has come from?

> Bad example: I hate my job. This is too stressful.
>
> Good example: I'm worried that I won't be able to finish the project in time and that I will be in trouble with my manager.

Assumption: What beliefs do you hold about yourself? Are you approaching the situation from a negative or positive angle?

> Bad example: I'm so stupid I can't even finish this simple thing. I'm going to get fired!
>
> Good example: Maybe I don't have all the information I need to get this done.

Resolution: What steps can you take to resolve this situation?

> Bad example: I feel so helpless, I might as well just give up.
>
> Good example: I'll send an email to my manager tomorrow morning asking for some help or to see if I can take more time on this.

Moving on: Is there anything different you could do to minimise this type of stress in the future? What self care can you put in place to reduce the symptoms of stress?

> Bad example: I'm never going to take on a project like this ever again.
>
> Good example: Now I know that I need to make a detailed plan whenever I do something like this again.

Task

Break it down

Write a list of everything you need to do today and assign it a colour-code it so you know what needs to be done first.

- What is a priority? Something that is both urgent and important
- What needs to be done soon, but isn't as important as other tasks?
- What can you ask someone else to help you with?
- What can be done at a later time?

Write in here...

Examine Your Reaction

Stress can make us think in circles, forever dwelling on a problem and imagining all the ways something can go wrong. Sometimes we need to break free of this loop and look at the situation more objectively.

Ask yourself:

- What am I achieving by worrying about this?
- What can I do to change the outcome of the situation?

If the answer to both of these questions is "nothing", then it does not deserve to occupy this much of your time!

Focus on the things you can change.

Zoom Out
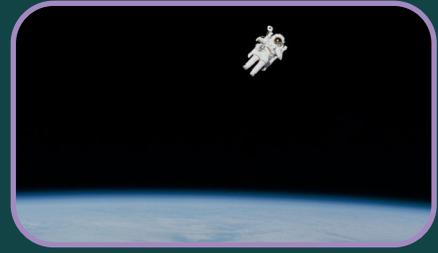
Has a specific event made you feel stressed? Perhaps you got into an argument with someone close to you? You're probably upset and replaying the situation over and over in your head. Instead, try to imagine that you're looking at the situation from a distance.

You're floating above yourself, looking down. Watch the situation unfold as if you were watching it from someone else's perspective. Did your friend really react that way, or was it just your perception of the situation? What would someone who didn't know you think?

You're floating above the area where you live. Watch the aftermath of the situation and how the world is changed by it. How much damage has this situation actually caused?

Think about how many houses there are on your street. Zoom out. Think about how many streets there are in your town. Zoom out. Think about how many people there are who live in these houses and how many of them are experiencing the same thoughts, fears and worries as you.

You're floating above the earth, a distant astronaut in a spaceship millions of miles away. Is this situation really worth worrying about? Will it matter to you in a week? A month? A year? A light-year?

Establishing Boundaries

Say "No"

Sometimes we agree to take on more than we can handle - whether it be physically (an extra shift at work) or emotionally (other people's unhappiness). This can lead us to become stressed and anxious. Are you putting unnecessary pressure on yourself? Practise saying no to things that are optional if you do not feel you're able to cope with them at present.

Ask for Help

If you feel like you're being buried under the weight of extra tasks or emotions, reach out to those around you to share some of the weight. Confide in a friend or ask a colleague to aid you on the project you are working on for an afternoon. Be honest about what you can realistically achieve and have a plan in place to manage what you feel you are unable to accomplish.

Stress Management

Physical Activity

Exercise is a great way to release the pent up tension stress and anxiety can cause. It also acts as a distraction, as you are focused on how your body is moving.
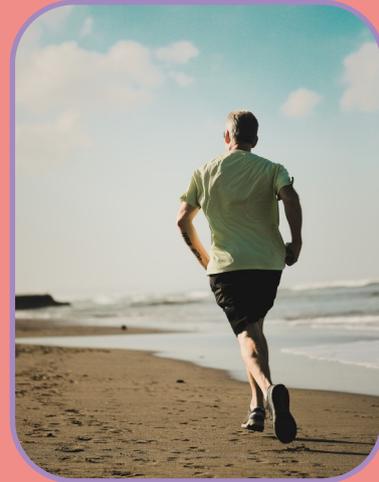
Keep A Diary

Make a note of the situations which have triggered a significant feeling of stress, as well as how you reacted to them. It's a great way to examine how to become better at managing stress and what areas of your life are causing you the most alarm.

Get Plenty Of Rest

Your body is better equipped to fight stress if you are well rested. Give yourself enough time to recharge by getting some early nights and making sure you're taking a moment to relax before bed.

Reach Out

If you're struggling, confide in close friends, family members or a partner. They might be able to you help, or at least reassure you.

Therapy Services

If you need that bit of extra support, therapy can really help. Anxiety UK members can access a range of therapy services:

♦ Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

♦ Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)

♦ Counselling

♦ Clinical Hypnotherapy

♦ Eye Movement Desensitisation & Reprocessing (EMDR)

♦ Acupuncture

Anxiety Products

Find a wide range of self-help resources and products in our online shop.

Support groups/courses

We host a range of online support groups and courses for anxiety relief and management.

Membership

Anxiety UK membership gives access to a community of support and to a range of services, including, but not limited to:

♦ Accessible, reduced-cost therapies

♦ Discounted groups and courses

♦ Subscription to Anxious Times magazine

♦ Members' only online area, message board & access to anxiety support resources

♦ Free copy of Understanding Anxiety or Caregivers Guide to Anxiety

Plus access to many more benefits!

Find out more and sign up on our website.

Anxiety UK

Helpline Services

Open Mon-Fri 09:30-17:30
(Check our website for hours of operation during bank holidays)
Call: 03444 775 774
Email: support@anxietyuk.org.uk
Text: 07537 416 905

You can also reach out to our friendly eHelper *Anxia*! Available 24/7 on our website.

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

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