

## How do I know if I'm Stressed?

### - do you have any of these symptoms?

- eating on the run
- smoking or drinking excessively
- rushing, hurrying, or trying to be available to everyone
- disturbed sleep patterns
- missing breaks
- being unable to switch off
- having no time for exercise or relaxation.

### **Mental symptoms of stress**

- Constant irritability with people.
- Feeling unable to cope.
- Lack of interest in life.
- A feeling of being a failure.
- Difficulty in making decisions.
- Loss of interest in other people.
- Anxiety about the future.
- A feeling of having no-one to confide in.
- Difficulty in concentrating.
- Inability to finish one task before rushing to another.

### **Physical symptoms of stress**

- Lack of appetite or craving for food when under pressure.
- Frequent indigestion/heartburn constipation/diarrhoea/nausea.
- Insomnia or constant tiredness.
- Tendency to sweat for no good reason.
- Nail biting.
- Headaches, cramps or muscle spasms.
- Breathlessness without exertion.
- Frequent crying or desire to cry.
- Impotency or frigidity.
- High blood pressure.

### **Ailments that can result from stress**

- Hypertension.
- Migraine.
- Exacerbation of hay fever and allergies.
- Asthma.
- Menstrual difficulties.
- Skin disorders.
- Depression.

## How Can You Help Yourself?

### - learn some relaxation techniques

#### **ONE**

No matter where you are you can do this simple breathing exercise. By **breathing deeply and steadily**, you can reduce the tension. A good rhythm to use is **4 – 2 – 6**; that is, breathe in for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 2 seconds and breathe out for 6 seconds. Good breathing can help **prevent you from getting too stressed in the first place and it can also help you to regain control of** yourself more quickly once you have become stressed

## TWO

Physical stress reactions can come upon us in a split second, but because of the **hormones** they release in our bodies, it takes much longer for them to fade away. To speed that recovery up, **you must let your body relax**. If the body is allowed to recover, the mind and the physical symptoms will follow. Once you have finished a particular piece of work, stop for five or ten minutes and allow yourself to rest.

You could:

- **have something to eat.**

Sit down and put the food on a plate, even if it's just an apple or a biscuit. Eating while you are standing up or out of a packet doesn't help you to relax.

- **go somewhere quiet.**

If you are working in a busy environment, find somewhere to go and be alone for a few minutes, even if it's just to the toilet. Close your eyes for a while and let your body rest.

- **change your scenery.**

'A change of scene is as good as a rest' goes the old saying and it's true. Do not spend your whole lunch hour at your desk or in your working environment. Walk around the block if you can and do the breathing exercises.

### Back

- Lie down on the floor or a firm mattress. Loosen any tight clothing.
- Pull your knees up so that your feet are flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
- Let your hands rest on the floor beside your hips.
- Feel the lower part of your back make contact with the floor. Close your eyes.
- Stay in this position for 20 seconds.
- Bring your knees up to your chest and hug your knees to you.
- Stay in this position for 20 seconds; you will feel your lower back pressing into the floor.
- Go back to the original position and repeat the entire process twice more.

### Body

- Lie down on the floor or a bed.
- Let your arms and legs lie loosely stretched out.
- Close your eyes and tense your feet and lower legs. Hold for a count of 5. Release the tension.
- Take a deep breath through your nose, hold it for a count of 2 and then breathe out slowly.
- Now tense your thighs and buttocks, repeating the process that you did with your feet and lower legs.
- Continue working your way up your body: the tummy, chest, hands, arms and shoulders and finally your face.
- After you have finished, remain lying down for a moment.

This exercise systematically releases the tension throughout your body, helping it to relax and allowing you to sleep better.

## THREE

If we don't move our bodies very much, all the adrenalin and stress hormones that have been released into the bloodstream stay there for longer than they should. That is why some people find it difficult to relax even when the stressful time has passed.

One way to prevent a build-up of adrenalin is to exercise. This is not to say that you should be at the gym every day, working up a sweat. A brisk walk is a good way to get fresh air and exercise. Just 30 minutes of exercise each day can be beneficial. You can split it up into smaller chunks if necessary

## FOUR

While it is important to relax your body, you shouldn't neglect your mind. 'Visualisation' helps your mind to drop out of its stress mode and all you need is the ability to daydream!

- Choose a word that you associate with calmness (such as 'peace', 'quiet', 'stillness' or 'harmony').
- Sit or lie down and close your eyes.
- Repeat the word in your mind until an image or scene appears that fits that word. It can be real or imaginary.
- Bring all your senses into the image (imagine the colours, smell, touch and sounds that are part of the image). The more detailed it gets, the better the effect on your mind and body.

## FIVE

We must all accept that there will be times in our lives when we feel tense, nervous or excited. Accepting that fact is one step on the road to stress management. Here are a few techniques to help you keep stress under control.

- **Review your time and manage it as efficiently as possible.** This will mean planning time to rest and relax in your own way as well as achieving what you need to at work. Setting priorities and making yourself get on with the most urgent tasks will ensure that you don't experience stress from the worry of approaching deadlines.
- **Consider the areas where you could be more assertive.** In being assertive (not aggressive) you are learning to respect yourself and be honest with others. This will involve you being comfortable telling people positive things, but also being able to tell them less positive things in a sensitive way.
- Assertiveness means being able to stand up for your own rights and opinions without violating the rights of others.
- **Exercise often.** When exercising, you will be using up the chemicals produced by stress so that your body doesn't continue to be affected by them.
- **Make sure that you get enough sleep.**
- **Review your diet and eating patterns,** including the amount of alcohol you drink.
- **Cut down on – or better still, stop – smoking.**
- **Learn relaxation as a first-aid technique when under stress.**
- **Become more aware of yourself and your strengths and weaknesses.** Your self-image is important in keeping stress in check.

- **Develop or reinforce your support network.** We all need different kinds of support, but it is important to know that you're not alone and colleagues, friends and family are there to help, if you want them to.
- **Talk about any issues you have with the appropriate person before they escalate.** Just talking and being listened to helps you to get things into perspective and move on.

## Thoughts and feelings are not facts - don't believe everything your brain tells you.

THOUGHTS ARE  
LIKE FARTS  
— THE BYPRODUCTS  
OF AN ORGAN  
TRYING TO  
DIGEST THE  
WORLD

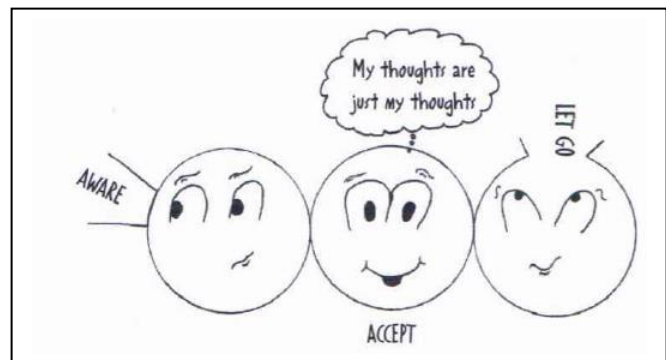


### Faulty Thinking

ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts)

Challenge them:

1. Is there evidence for what I am thinking?
2. How do those thoughts make me feel?
3. What would I prefer / best hopes?
4. How / what could I think differently?
5. How / when will I know the effect?
6. What might the positive effects be?
7. Test it out...



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## **Help and Support for Stress**

### **Out of school**

#### **Anxiety UK**

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

**Text Service: 07537 416 905**

**Infoline: 08444 775 774\***

Mon-Fri 9:30am - 5.30pm

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#### **Young Minds**

[http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for\\_children\\_young\\_people](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_children_young_people)

#### **Mood Juice**

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp>