



**University
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NHS Foundation Trust

Staff Psychological Support Service

Managing Stress

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Strategies to Manage Stress in Healthcare

In 2021/2022 stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 51% of all work-related ill health cases and 55% of all working days lost due to ill health.

Stress is both a psychological and physiological response to change. It does not manifest itself the same way in everyone. When your “ordinary” behaviours and responses change significantly as a result of life circumstances, chances are that you are experiencing stress.

Useful Behavioural Strategies

An awareness of your communication style is useful to begin to transform negative attitudes and behaviours into positive ones. Knowing how we impact others, and how they impact us, can affect how well we cope with stress.

Remember, the only person you can ever control, or change is yourself.

Aim for Assertiveness

Being assertive means respecting yourself and other people. It is the ability to clearly express your thoughts and feelings through open, honest, and direct communication.

Assertive people

Set healthy boundaries, give support, and accept support. They respect their own feelings, needs, opinions, and those of others, but are clear about their separateness, and they respect diversity.

The difference between assertiveness and aggression

Assertive people respect others as equals; have no intention of hurting anyone. Aggressive people come across as needing to win, attacking self-focused and not solution centred. They feed into others' fears rather than confidence and are driven by the need to dominate (their need to dominate can be driven by fear).

How do we know if our stress is becoming a problem?

Occasional stress is a normal, and even a desirable, part of life. But, if any of the following symptoms become persistent and interfere with your normal functioning, you may need to take action:

- Pounding heart, palpitations, shaking or trembling
- Inability to act effectively, to make decisions, or to think clearly
- Intense restlessness or hyperactivity
- Lethargy and inability to focus
- Changes in sleep and appetite

Potential stress triggers

- Increased responsibility
- Major life changes (marriage, divorce, relationship troubles, childbirth, death of a loved one, etc.)
- Financial pressures
- Job changes
- Natural and man-made disasters
- Relocation

Relaxation Strategies

- Meditation
- Deep, Relaxing, Breathing

- Visualization Activities
- Aromatherapy
- Massage Therapy

Exercise Activities

- Walking / Running / Jogging
- Swimming
- Dance / Zumba
- Football / Netball / Rugby
- Anaerobic Activities
- Lifting Weights
- Stretching
- Yoga / Pilates

Nutrition

- Eat a balanced diet
- Stay hydrated with plenty of water
- Avoid processed foods
- Reduce caffeine consumption
- Avoid excessive alcohol and drug use

Get Sufficient Rest

- Get plenty of sleep
- Take a few short breaks throughout the day
- Allow your mind to rest periodically

Goal Setting

- Break major projects/tasks down into achievable goals
- Set milestones for goal achievement
- Track progress toward accomplishment of goals/targets

- Reward yourself for progress
- Show yourself appreciation

Journaling

- Keeping a journal is a good way to keep stressors from building up inside yourself
- Journaling can make it easier to recognise patterns that lead to stress reactions
- Writing down stressors, or drawing them, can be a great step towards learning how to manage them effectively

Deal with Difficult Situations

- Engaging in avoidant behaviour is not an effective technique for stress management
- Ignoring problems or pretending that things are fine when they are not only leads to greater stress in the long run
- Managing stress effectively requires dealing with it and working through it

Effective Time-Management

- Take the time to get organised
- Plan ahead
- Prioritise your to-do list
- Learn to delegate
- Leave time for yourself in your schedule
- Learn how to say “no” to stress-inducing requests that are not essential

Seeking Counselling/ Psychotherapy

Professional assistance when needed is a sign of strength. Working with a qualified psychotherapist, counsellor or other qualified mental health

professional can be one of the best ways to learn how to deal with stress.

If you are feeling stressed, and have noticed a physiological change in yourself, and you have:

- Ruled out a physical cause
- Tried all the self-help measures outlined previously
- Have felt happy at home with family and friends

This maybe the time to think about seeking personal counselling or psychotherapy.

It's important to own your thoughts and feelings but try not to take responsibility for absolutely everything.

Stress Management is Important

Stress is something that everyone experiences, so learning how to cope with its effects is something that everyone needs to master, balancing their own physical and psychological wellbeing (expending/recuperation time).

Those who don't learn AND use appropriate stress management techniques can experience a variety of negative effects, including physical illness, psychological illness, damaged personal relationships, and poor work performance.

- Stress feeds off speed. Remember to slow down whenever you can
- Develop acceptance of yourself and of others

Stress Management: Bottom Line

The wide variety of stress management techniques covered herein can bring relief quickly and, if practiced regularly, permanently. Almost all of them can be started right now, be done anytime, and require little or no investment. And all can be on your own.