



Stress is an all too common experience in our busy lives these days. And while stress can motivate us, it can also have some problematic side effects.

We feel stressed when we face a situation that we think we cannot manage, or where the outcome of a situation is important to us.

We can feel stressed by external situations (too much work, difficulties with children, worrying relationships) and by internal triggers (the way we think, what we feel).

A regular daily routine that includes relaxation, a nutritious diet, exercise and regular sleep can help us to stress-less.

What Is Stress?

Stress is often described as a feeling of being overloaded, tense, anxious, worried, and irritable. When we're stressed we can become forgetful, flustered, and feel unable to cope. We all experience stress, specifically when there is an imbalance between what we feel a situation demands of us and our resources to cope with these demands.

Stress is not always bad – it can help motivate us to get things done or to perform well. However, stress can be harmful if we become *overstressed*. Stress can affect our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, appetite, sleep, and our physical wellness.

Effects of Stress

Stress affects us in many ways, including:

- *emotionally* – anxiety, sadness, depression, irritability, anger, frustration, overwhelm
- *our thinking* – poor concentration, forgetfulness, confusion, indecisiveness, apathy, hopelessness
- *our behaviour* – increased drinking/smoking/drug use, disturbed sleep, changes in eating, accident proneness, obsessions and compulsions, gambling
- *physically* - increased heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure (there is growing evidence that stress may contribute to physical illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, proneness to infection, and chronic fatigue)

Understanding What Makes You Stressed

To deal with stress more effectively, it helps to understand our stressors and how we react to them. Try to:

- understand what stresses you (this could include social situations, work situations, family situations, or physical stressors such as pain)
- understand how you think, feel and behave in these stressful situations (is there a way you can think differently, feel differently or behave differently to not feel so stressed ... or even change the situation)
- understand what situations you can and can't control (and try to let go of those situations you can't control)

- prepare for stressful events in advance, by problem solving and planning for the future

Management of Stress

Some small changes in our daily routines can often help with stress. Try some of the following to see if your stress levels decrease.

- *avoid conflict* – avoid situations that make you feel stressed such as unnecessary arguments and conflict (although ignoring a problem is not always the best way to reduce stress)
- *exercise regularly* – doing some form of regular exercise that causes you to feel puffed afterwards for at least 20 minutes, three times a week is great for stress management
- *relax* – give yourself some time to relax each day and try to spend time with people who make you feel good
- *eat well* – eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and avoid foods that are processed, sweet, excessively salty, and full of saturated fats
- *sleep* – a good sleep routine is essential. If you have difficulty falling asleep, do something calm and relaxing before you go to bed like listening to music or reading
- *enjoy life* – it's important to make time to have some fun and to get a balance in your life

It's Okay To Seek Help

For most people small changes can have great results. However, if you *continue to experience* distressing symptoms, seeking professional assistance could be useful. Speak with your G.P. or health professional to discuss different options.

How Can A Psychologist Help?

Psychologists use a range of effective techniques and therapies to assist people in resolving any distressing symptoms they may have. Speak with your G.P., or call us at Awaken Psychology, if you think you could benefit from seeing a psychologist.

