

What is stress and how to manage it?

It's normal for all of us to have some stress in our lives, and often it can motivate us to reach our goals. Our bodies respond to high stress by releasing stress hormones, which activate our flight or fight survival response. This is our body's natural response to threat or danger, and in the short-term, helps us deal with stressful situations.

Stress is sometimes confused with anxiety but is in itself not a medical condition. Stress is a normal occurrence, experienced by everyone. But when stress is ongoing or intense, it can start to impact our overall health.

Signs and symptoms of stress being too high

On our **thoughts and feelings**:

- Worry or anxious thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating or feeling unmotivated
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling restless.

On our **physical health**:

- Sleeping problems
- Constant fatigue
- Headaches
- Weakened immune system.

On our **behaviour**:

- Being tense or irritable
- Drop in productivity or work performance
- Feeling physically unwell
- Having relationship trouble or avoiding people.

Causes of stress

There are many different things that can cause stress. Feelings of stress can be triggered by things or events that are happening in our life that involve:

- being under a lot of pressure
- facing big or unexpected changes
- not having much or any control over the outcome of a situation
- worrying about something
- having responsibilities that you're finding overwhelming.

There might not be one event or thing causing stress, there can be several smaller pressures that build up. Examples of stressful events include:

- big life changes (e.g. divorce, moving house, starting a new job, retirement or becoming unemployed)
- relationship difficulties
- workplace or business issues
- illness.

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Tips on managing stress

1. **Know what causes stress.** Knowing the source of your stress is important in selecting the best strategies to manage it.
2. **Develop your responses to stress.** You can look at managing external pressures, so stressful situations don't happen so often (e.g. asking for an extension on a looming deadline). Try and build emotional resilience, so you're better at coping with tough situations when they do happen.
3. **Practice relaxation.** Practices such as mindfulness meditation and other relaxation exercises have been proven to decrease stress. Use these techniques when stressful events happen so you can keep a calm mind.
4. **Look after your health.** Stress can affect your immune system and make you more prone to a range health concerns. Make sure to regularly exercise and eat healthy.
5. **Reach out for support.** Stress isn't a medical diagnosis but if you are having a hard time coping, there are treatments available that could help. To assess the best treatment for you, the first step usually is to talk to your GP.

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.