

Managing Stress

Stress is a physical, mental and emotional reaction to the pressures of everyday life. Stress is not necessarily harmful and mild forms of stress can act as a motivator and energizer. However, high levels of stress can affect your physical and mental well-being and performance. We tend to think of stress as something caused by external events but it is not necessarily the event which causes the stress, rather our reaction to it. People differ dramatically in the type of events they interpret as stressful and the way in which they respond to such stress.

Symptoms and signs

When you are feeling stressed you may experience one or more of the following:

Feelings

feeling anxious or scared
fear of failure
feeling irritable
feeling moody
low self-esteem

Thoughts

inability to concentrate
embarrassing easily
worrying about the future
preoccupation with thoughts
or tasks
forgetfulness

Behaviour

stuttering or other speech difficulties
acting impulsively
startling easily
laughing in a high pitch
nervous tone of voice
grinding your teeth
being accident prone

Physiology

perspiration /sweaty hands
trembling or nervous ticks
dryness of throat and mouth
tiring easily / sleeping problems
butterflies in stomach
headaches
neck or lower back pain
loss of appetite or overeating

Reducing stress

Here are some things which you can do to reduce, minimize or help to cope with stress:

- understand and be aware of your reactions to stress
- reinforce positive self-statements
- focus on your good qualities and accomplishments
- avoid unnecessary competition
- develop assertive behaviors
- recognise and accept your limits
- relax and have fun
- exercise regularly and eat a balanced diet
- talk with friends or someone you can trust about your worries/problems.

Strategies for stress reduction whilst studying

- study in short blocks, and gradually increase the length of your study periods
- manage your time, use a to-do list, have a written plan, set goals and follow through
- try to aim to be ahead of schedule and to complete work before the deadline
- when you receive an assignment work out a plan for carrying out the necessary work
- try to keep things in perspective (do not take yourself too seriously) and think positively. Humor and positive thinking are important tools in stress management.

- do not blame yourself for what you do not know. The subject matter is there to be learned during the course of study
- do not worry about your knowledge and ability. These are self-limiting beliefs
- ask yourself if the issue at hand is worth getting upset about.
- if your studies are causing you stress then try talking to your fellow students, a family member, your tutor or someone else with whom you can discuss the problems and look for solutions

Practicing relaxation techniques will help to calm you:

- when you feel tense slowly breathe in and out for several minutes (the extra dose of oxygen also increases the brain's thinking ability)
- try rolling your head loosely in a wide circle. Repeat five times. Tighten right shoulder and raise it as far up as possible and hold, then relax, slowly. Repeat with left shoulder. Repeat with both shoulders
- intersperse study with short breaks such as a walk during which you focus on pleasant things. This will help you to return to the task feeling refreshed.

Remember that stress is a normal and natural function of the body and that it is not always bad. The stress response is a natural reaction which occurs both in threatening and demanding situations but also in other, happier situations.

Stress enables our bodies to produce more energy to deal with stressful situations and the stress response can be used to advantage to increase performance by keeping you active and alert. Turn your stress into a motivator by consciously choosing to view situations in a positive light.

Visit subject Search at www.managers.org.uk/subjectsearch for more information on stress.

For more information on any aspect of study skills
contact CMI's Information Services on 01536 207400
or email mic.enquiries@managers.org.uk