

Fact sheet - combating stress

The best way to cope with stress is to prevent it. Some good ways to do this are:

Try to create clarity in your life

Don't avoid decision making, putting decisions off causes worry and worry causes stress.

Make a daily or weekly list of what you would like to achieve at home and at work, make sure you include some 'you time' for doing your favourite hobby.

Share the load

You don't have to do everything yourself ask others to help you with some tasks. Learn to delegate. There are always items on your 'things to do' list someone else can handle just as well.

Stressful situations won't disappear just because we've created a plan, but you can learn how to respond to them more effectively by understanding your response to stress.

Be realistic even the greatest guru on stress will still experience it! Along with the above, other useful suggestions for reducing stress are listed below. Remember your aim is to control your response to stress and to avoid getting in the third stage of the stress response, (see fact sheet on stress)

Progressive relaxation

Sit or lie down on your back in a comfortable, quiet room.

- Close your eyes. Make tight fists, hold for five seconds, then relax your hands.
- Do this three times. Pay attention to the different sensations of tension and relaxation.
- Repeat step 2 with all of your muscle groups: arms, shoulders, chest, abdomen, back, hips, thighs, lower legs and feet. Initially, this practice can take 10-15 minutes, but with practice you'll be able to do this in about five minutes.



Relief from aching muscles

- Sit up straight and inhale. Exhale as you let your head move down to your chest. You'll feel a gentle stretch on the back of your neck and your shoulders.
- Gently roll your right ear toward your right shoulder while inhaling. Drop your chin to your chest again while exhaling. Repeat to the left.
- Drop your arms to your sides and push both shoulders forward.
- Slowly raise them towards your ears and circle them back and downward to the starting point.
- After two or three rotations, change directions.

When you are under stress, tension accumulates in your neck and jaw. Take a minute to gently and slowly move your head from front to back, side to side, and in a full circle. For your jaw, stretch your mouth open and slowly move your lower jaw from side to side and front to back.

(note: if you notice any pain or if you have had any injuries to your back, neck or jaw, check with your doctor first.)

Decision making - sit down with a pencil and paper and make some lists.

- List your options.
- List the consequences of each option.
- Write your response(s) to this question: what will happen if i don't choose at all?
- If you don't make a decision, that's a decision in itself and it also has consequences.

Once you realize that something is going to happen whether you make a decision or not, you may find the decision easier to make.

Smart goal setting, also see healthy options wheel of life.

Unrealistic goals that never seem to be reached add to your stress level. Try setting one goal for yourself this week using the smart approach:

- **Specific** - pick one small goal and write it down.
- **Measurable** - can you count it or check it off a list?
- **Achievable** - is it realistic? If not, make it smaller.
- **Rewarded** - decide how to reward yourself when you reach your goal.
- **Time-limited** - set a specific, realistic date to finish or achieve your goal.

For more about well being at work and a healthy stress free lifestyle visit our website at www.smartfoundations.co.uk