Stress and Stress Management
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Effectively coping with stress, managing stress and finding ways to reduce unnecessary or unhealthy levels of stress are important life skills, and skills that everybody needs.

Negative stress, tension and anxiety are extremely common problems in modern life. Most people will suffer from potentially dangerous or debilitating symptoms of stress and stress-related issues at some point in their lives.

This chapter provides an introduction or overview to negative stress, together with some of the most common causes of stress and the consequences of inappropriate levels of stress.

Stress is a response to an inappropriate level of pressure.

You may encounter stress from a number of sources including:

- Personal stress, which may be caused by the nature of your work, changes in your life or personal problems.
- Stress in family or friends, which in turn may affect you.
- Stress in your colleagues, which also may affect you.
WHAT CAUSES STRESS?

Stress can be described as the distress that is caused as a result of demands placed on physical or mental energy.

Stress can arise as the result of many factors, including:

**Anxiety**

Anxiety is caused when life events are felt to be threatening to individual physical, social or mental well-being. The amount of anxiety experienced by an individual depends on:

- How threatening these life events are perceived to be;
- How effective your individual coping strategies are for you; and
- How many stressful events occur in a short period of time.

**Tension**

Tension is a natural reaction to anxiety. It is part of a primitive survival instinct where physiological changes prepare the individual for ‘fight or flight’. This sympathetic response, as it is known, results in a chemical called adenosine triphosphate (ATP) being released in the body and causes muscles to tense ready for action.

Blood vessels near the skin constrict to slow bleeding if injury is sustained, and to increase the blood supply to the muscles, heart, lungs and brain. Digestion is inhibited, the bladder relaxes, the heart rate and breathing speed increase, the body sweats more. The person affected becomes more alert, their eyes dilate and a surge of adrenaline gives rise to an increase in energy.

These responses are extremely useful in situations of physical danger but, unlike for primitive humans, many of the anxieties of modern life are not ones that can be solved by a ‘fight or flight’ reaction or by any physical response.

Modern stressful situations tend to continue for much longer periods of time and an immediate response does not relieve the anxiety-provoking situation. Prolonged time spent in a state of anxiety can lead to symptoms of stress, which prevent the individual from returning to his or her normal, relaxed state. Prolonged stress can therefore be detrimental to health and wellbeing.
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