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Understanding stress

WHAT IS STRESS: UNDERSTANDING STRESS

How can you recognise the signs, and how does it affect your ability to function?

Stress is often viewed as something negative, but that is not always the case. Stress is a natural response of our body and mind to situations that require attention, effort, or adaptation. It helps us stay alert, face challenges, and perform effectively. A healthy amount of stress can help us meet a deadline, take an exam, or react quickly in an emergency. Stress only becomes problematic when it persists for a long time or when there are insufficient opportunities for recovery. In such cases, it can negatively affect our health and well-being.

SIGNS OF STRESS

Everyone experiences stress differently. Stress can affect us physically, emotionally, mentally and through changes in our behaviour.

Physical Signs

- Fatigue and sleep problems
- Headaches
- Muscle tension, particularly in the neck and shoulders
- Heart palpitations
- Digestive problems

Emotional Signs

- Irritability and stronger emotional reactions
- Irritability and more intense emotional reactions
- Feelings of anxiety
- Feelings of frustration

Mental Signs

- Difficulty concentrating and forgetfulness
- Excessive worrying
- Difficulty making decisions

Behavioral Signs

- Withdrawing from social activities
- Eating less or more than usual
- Procrastination
- Increased use of alcohol, nicotine, or other substances
- Taking less time for relaxation

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF STRESS

Stress can arise when we feel that the demands placed on us exceed the resources we have to cope with them. What one person finds stressful may not affect another in the same way. Personal experiences, coping skills and individual circumstances all play an important role.

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Work
Work is one of the most common sources of stress. High workloads, tight deadlines, significant responsibility, or the constant need to perform can cause prolonged tension. Changes in the workplace, such as a new role, organisational restructuring, or uncertainty about the future, can also create stress.

Personal Life
Events in our personal lives can also require a great deal of energy. Relationship problems, family conflicts, financial concerns, or caring for children, parents, or other loved ones can have a significant impact. Even positive changes, such as marriage, the birth of a child, or moving house, can temporarily cause stress because they require adaptation.

Personal Characteristics
Certain personal traits can make someone more vulnerable to stress. Perfectionists often set very high standards for themselves and experience greater pressure to avoid mistakes. Difficulty setting boundaries, always wanting to be available for others, or feeling the need to constantly perform can also contribute to stress. In addition, insecurity or a lack of control over a situation can intensify feelings of stress.

Environmental Factors
Our surroundings also influence our stress levels. A busy schedule, constant demands, noise, traffic, numerous responsibilities or a lack of time to rest can keep the body in a heightened state of alert. Today's digital world can also make it difficult to switch off. Smartphones, emails and social media mean that many people remain constantly connected, making it harder to find time to recover.

Major Life Events
Certain events can trigger a strong stress response. Examples include illness, a workplace accident, the loss of a loved one, divorce, or job loss. Such situations often require significant emotional and mental energy and can temporarily disrupt a person's balance.

IMPACT OF STRESS

Short periods of stress can be beneficial and help us face challenges. However, when stress continues for too long without sufficient rest and recovery, it can affect both physical and mental health.

Long-term stress can lead to:

- Persistent fatigue
- Reduced concentration and performance
- Increased risk of physical symptoms
- Difficulties in relationships and social interactions
- Reduced motivation and job satisfaction
- A higher risk of overload and burnout

It is therefore important to recognise the signs of stress early and allow enough time for recovery.