

Stress is a normal part of every day life. Not all stress is bad – getting married, having friends over for a meal or having a baby can all be sources of stress and yet are happy occasions that most of us would look forward to. However too much stress can make it hard to cope with our normal day-to-day tasks. Prolonged or chronic stress can lead to ill health.

Stress is when the demands made upon us, physically and mentally, outweigh our ability to deal with them - resulting in reduced well-being

The first thing to do is to recognize our stress and when it is getting too much. Symptoms of stress can come under several headings: physical, psychological and behavioral. Not all of us will suffer from all of these symptoms and you may notice that many of your symptoms come under one heading or they may be spread over the three headings:

Physical Symptoms may include:

- Tension headaches
- Sweaty hands
- Constipation and/or diarrhoea
- Neck aches
- Back pain
- Stomach aches, knots, cramps or nausea
- Faintness, fatigue, weariness
- Trouble sleeping
- Short/shallow breathing
- Dry mouth/lump in throat

Psychological Symptoms may include:

- Irritability or short-temperedness
- Feeling anxious & nervous
- Nightmares
- Mood swings
- Continual boredom
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty making everyday decisions
- Expecting the worst to happen

Behavioral Symptoms may include:

- Social withdrawal
- Minor Accidents
- Over/under eating
- Increased smoking/drinking
- Constant fatigue

These are just a few of the many symptoms associated with stress. It must also be said that all of these symptoms can have other causes too.

Dealing with Everyday Stress

A balanced lifestyle is the best defence against stress. For this, you don't need to buy expensive equipment, change your lifestyle dramatically or stop doing all the things you love. All you need to do is change little things and do everything in moderation. Five factors that may help prevent and/or deal with stress:

Fresh Air

This is the most basic of our daily requirements, especially if we are not feeling very well, and cannot get out very much. Even if it means sitting by an open window with your coat on and taking a few deep breathes. This is a must every day. It is also important to properly air out rooms that we are spending a lot of time in.

Nutrition

A good well balanced diet of nutritious food is essential for all of us. This includes plenty of fresh fruit & vegetables, lean meat, chicken or fish, whole meal cereals and drinking plenty of water. A little of what we fancy does us good. A good general rule of thumb can be that if we eat well 80% of the time - the other 20% won't matter so much. If we are not nourishing ourselves with a variety of quality foods, how can we expect to deal with everyday stresses?

Exercise

Exercise is very good for our physical and psychological well-being. That can mean very different things to different people. So within your own limitations, try to get a small amount of exercise 3 – 5 times a week. This may mean a walk, a swim or some yoga, or it may mean doing some stretches sitting in a chair at home. Whatever your ability, try to do a small amount of exercise every second day.

Rest

It is important to build periods of rest into your day. This does not mean throwing yourself on the couch with a bar of chocolate & a drink and watching TV for 3 or 4 hours in the evening. Rest means switching off your mind and resting your body. This may mean lying down and listening to some relaxing music, or sitting in your garden and resting while enjoying the beauty of what is around you.

Relaxation

There are a number of very good methods of relaxation that can help prevent too much stress building up and affecting our health and well-being.

Good methods of relaxation can include yoga, meditation, deep breathing, gentle stretching exercises, or progressive muscular relaxation. Many of these are taught in schools and community colleges around the country and are well worth giving a try. Different methods suit different people, so look for one that appeals to you and is enjoyable. If you enjoy what you are doing you are more likely to practice it regularly.

Dealing with Severe Stress

The ideas and suggestions above are aimed at those who may be experiencing mild or occasional stress and are not intended to replace any medical advice you are receiving. If you think you are experiencing severe stress and it is having a serious impact on your daily life you should visit your G.P. who will advise you on the best course of action.

The MS Society from time to time run workshops and seminars on stress management and also have a number of booklets that will give you some more information about recognising and managing stress. There is also a tape/CD available of Progressive Muscular Relaxation.

For Further Information

Regional Services

Each Region has a designated team that will be able to offer a range of services and facilities that may complement the information in this Information Sheet. Working from many locations around the Country, these trained professionals are experienced in the area of MS. Contact the national help line number for details of your local Regional Office.

Other Literature

www.nmss.org
Living with MS; A Wellness Guide, Demos, 1998
Or contact you local office or the National Help line on 1850 233 233 for more information.

Other Information Leaflets Available

Available now:

- Fatigue
- Diet
- Stress

Available in 2005

- Insurance
- Treatments

- Aids and Appliances
- Pain
- Exercise
- Work and Benefits
- Transport

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