

## **What is Stress?**

Stress is the physical and mental response of the body to demands made upon it by everyday life, especially if we are struggling to cope with pressured or difficult tasks or circumstances. We don't all become stressed by the same things. What is stressful for one person may be perfectly manageable for another.



Not all stress is bad. We need some stress to get everyday things done and feel motivated, especially when we are busy or in a pressured situation. Too little stress can lead to boredom and too much can lead to exhaustion.

Many people experience problematic or excessive stress at some point in their lives. There is no need to feel embarrassed about it and it does not mean that you are weak. If you are feeling stressed, it can be helpful to tell someone about it as they may be able to offer help and advice.

### **What causes stress?**

Different things cause stress in different people. Some examples include:

- Problems at work
- Unemployment
- Exams
- Debts or money worries
- Poor housing
- Relationship problems

- Sensory overstimulating environments (e.g. noisy, or crowded places)
- Leaving things until the last minute
- Deadlines
- School or college
- Major life changes (e.g. moving house)
- Having too much to do
- Family problems
- Bereavement



Certain thought patterns can also lead to stress. For example:

- Unrealistic expectation (such as being a perfectionist)
- Pessimism (all ways focusing on the negative)
- Difficulty coping with uncertainty
- Worrying about the future
- Lack of assertiveness (e.g. difficulty saying “no” to people)
- Having negative thoughts about yourself (e.g. “I’m stupid, I’m no good”)

### **How do I recognize stress?**

When you are feeling stressed, you may notice certain physical feelings (in your body).

- Your heart might beat faster

- You might sweat more
- You might feel tense
- You might find that you are breathing more quickly
- Your senses become more sensitive
- You become more alert

You may also notice certain psychological feelings (in your mind).

- Feeling nervous
- Feeling worried
- Feeling like you have too much to do
- Feeling like you can't cope
- Feeling like you will get into trouble
- Feeling like you are a failure



The reason for these physical and psychological feelings is due to chemicals being released into the body. These chemicals include adrenaline, nor-adrenaline, glucose and cortisol. These chemicals make us feel energetic and alert, but when they are produced in excessive amounts (for example by too much stress and worry) or not broken down (for example, by exercise) they can lead to feelings of exhaustion, irritability and worry.

If you are not sure whether or not you are experiencing stress, try using the questionnaire below:

Please tick the boxes which regularly apply to you:

<b>Feelings</b>	<b>Tick what applies to you</b>
Tense	
Irritable	
Overwhelmed / Helpless	
Nervous	
<b>Physical signs</b>	<b>Tick what applies to you</b>
Feeling of 'butterflies' in your stomach	
Exhaustion	
Nausea	
Your heart might beat faster	
Sweating	
Rapid breathing	
Feeling hyper-alert	
Difficulty sleeping	
<b>Thoughts</b>	<b>Tick what applies to you</b>
I won't be able to cope	
There's no way I'll be able to manage all this	
I'm going to end up forgetting or missing something	
I'm losing control	
I feel like a failure	
<b>Behaviour Patterns</b>	<b>Tick what applies to you</b>

Being busy non-stop	
Being easily irritated or frustrated	
Finding it difficult to concentrate	
Being easily distracted	
Procrastinating or leaving things until the 'last minute'	
<b><u>Total</u></b>	

If you have ticked a lot of these boxes, it is possible that you are experiencing stress. If this is the case, please do not worry as there are techniques that can be used to help reduce stress.