



THE STRESS GUIDE

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Introduction

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.

Stress is a natural physical and mental reaction or response to life experiences. Everyone feels stress when they can't cope with pressures and other issues in their life. And here's the thing you might not perceive you have stress in your life. Often the most stressed people don't even realise it!

However, everything in our life such as working hours, social environment, family life, sleep and training all compound to stress and it's very important for you to understand that if too much stress exists in your life, it can cause a host of issues.

Being chronically stressed can affect your digestion, fertility, sleep, energy, mood and cause false hunger and cravings which of course can then lead to overeating and weight gain.

In order for you to be able to train hard, recover well, perform at your best in everyday tasks, digest your food and to control your appetite you need to have your stress load under control.

Chronic stress, if not managed, can wreak havoc on your health and particularly your body's ability to drop body fat.

The main stress hormone cortisol is released by the adrenal gland in response to physical and psychological stress.

The purpose of cortisol is to release energy quickly from either the liver, fat cells or muscle to give you the energy you need to fight or survive the perceived stress.

Short term this is fine as stress triggers the fight or flight response that would be needed in a life or death situation.

However if this fight or flight response persists and becomes chronic or prolonged then this can massively affect your health, compromise your immune system and impair your body's ability to drop body fat.

Chronic stress and elevated cortisol levels can increase your risk of heart disease, diabetes and other harmful diseases.

How Stress Effects The Body!



Mood swings, reduced cognitive function, increased anxiety, concentration issues.



Increased blood pressure, heart rate & risk of heart attack



Loss of libido, lower sperm production & increased period pain



Reduced immune & system health



Stomach cramps, reflux and nausea



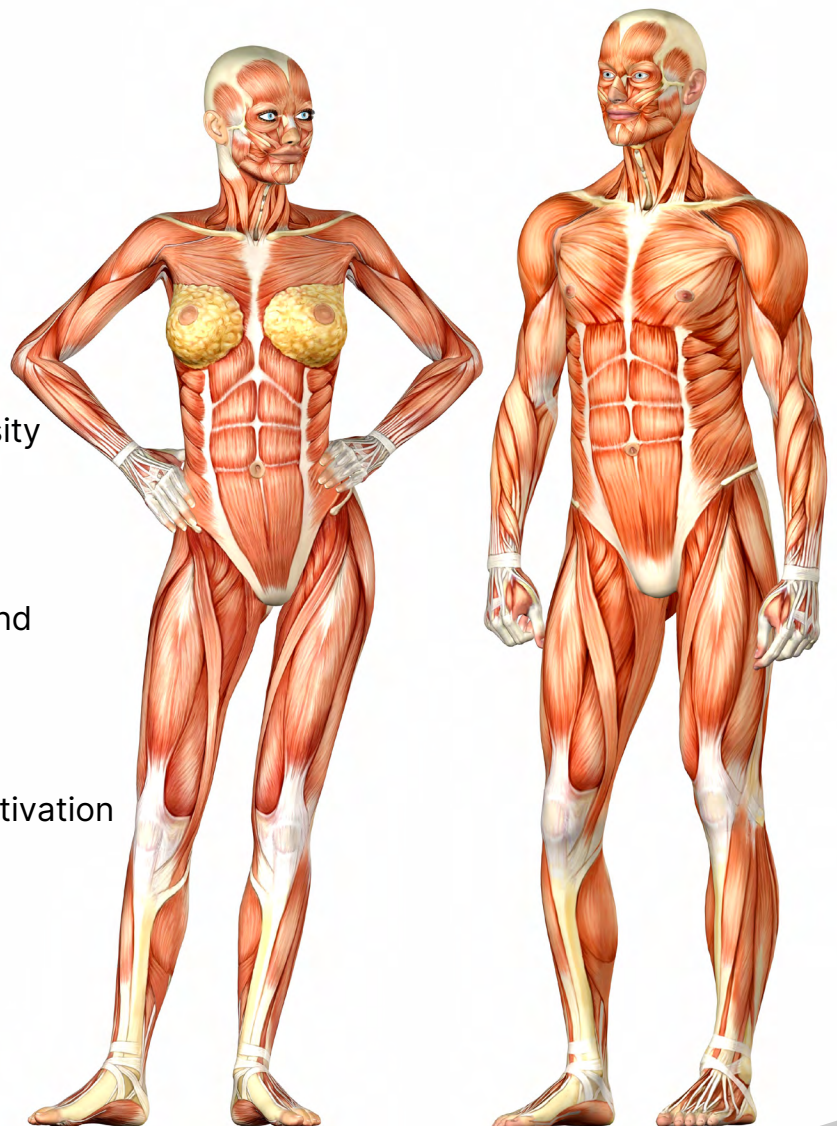
Reduced bone density



Increased muscle and joint pain



Low energy and motivation





Common Signs Of Stress

- Physical.
- Emotional.
- Behavioural symptoms develop.

Emotional And Mental Symptoms Of Stress?

- Anxiety or irritability.
- Depression.
- Panic attacks.
- General sadness.

Physical Symptoms Of Stress?

- Aches and pains.
- Chest pain or a feeling like your heart is racing.
- Exhaustion or trouble sleeping.
- Headaches, dizziness or shaking.
- High blood pressure.
- Muscle tension or jaw clenching.
- Stomach or digestive problems.

What Are Psychological And Emotional Signs Of Stress?

- Depression or anxiety.
- Anger, irritability, or restlessness.
- Feeling overwhelmed, unmotivated, or unfocused.
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Racing thoughts or constant worry.
- Problems with your memory or concentration.
- Making bad decisions.

Feelings of stress are normally triggered by things happening in your life which involve

There might be one big thing causing you stress, but stress can also be caused by a build-up of small pressures. This might make it harder for you to identify what's making you feel stressed, or to explain it to other people.

Why do certain things make us feel stressed?

We're all different, so a situation that doesn't bother you at all might cause someone else a lot of stress. For example, if you're feeling confident or usually enjoy public speaking, you might find that giving a speech in front of people feels comfortable and fun. But if you're feeling low or usually prefer not to be the centre of attention, this situation might cause you to experience signs of stress.



Common Causes Of Stress

The amount of stress you feel in different situations may depend on many factors such as:

- Your perception of the situation – this might be connected to your past experiences, your self-esteem, and how your thought processes work (for example, if you tend to interpret things positively or negatively)
- How experienced you are at dealing with that particular type of pressure, this can often lead to feeling overwhelmed and cause added stress.
- The amount of other pressures on you at any given time and then amount of support you are receiving.
- Facing big changes.
- Not having much or any control over the outcome of a situation.

Do You Suffer From Stress?

Answer these questions below:

- Is your sleep frequently broken?
- Do you find yourself dependant on caffeine?
- Do you find no matter how much you eat that you never feel full?
- Do you find yourself never recovering from training properly?
- Do you work long hours and find it hard to switch off after work?
- Do you constantly worry and over think about money, relationships and family issues?
- Do you find yourself constantly chasing your tail?

If you answered “yes” to 4 or more of the above questions then stress needs to be addressed.

It is very important to be mindful of our stress in order for us to try to control it rather than the stress control us.

This is very much easier said than done at times.



I Don't Know Why I'm Stressed

This is very common.

Try to view stress as a warning signal in the body that some aspects of your life might need changing.

In order to beat stress, you'll need to work out what these aspects are.

If you're unsure about what is causing your stress try to keep track by:

- Carrying a notebook with you and making notes.
- Using notes in your phone to keep data.
- Record everything you do throughout the day and note down any triggers.
- Write down how stressed you feel on a scale of 1 to 10 for each listing.

After a few days, some patterns should begin to emerge and give you some clarity.

Are your ratings always higher when you are working to a deadline, dealing with a certain person, or are you just trying to cram too much into your day?

How Can I Feel Less Stressed?

Starting the move towards coping with stress is much easier said than done. Whilst the power of positive thinking can be helpful it won't fix everything overnight.

What you can do is build some healthy habits that become a part of your self care. Finding the right coping mechanisms for you as an individual is important.

This may be trial and error. But this will ultimately help to reduce your stress over time. Unsure where to start?

Here are a few suggestions:

Ok, so we do it all the time, but very few of us do it properly. Manage your breathing! Retrain your breathing patterns and you could soon see an improvement in anxiety and tension levels.

How To Manage Stress

1. Sleep 6-8 hours a night.
2. Strength training. Strength training 3-4 times a week increases muscle building and other anabolic hormones such as naturally occurring testosterone and growth hormone.
3. Eat balanced healthy meals every throughout the day. This will help prevent low blood sugar and minimise sugar cravings.
4. Remove processed food, plan your meals in advance favouring a high protein diet, healthy fats and vegetables.
5. Limit caffeine, alcohol and other stimulants.
6. Supplement with magnesium.
7. Get outdoors! By going for walks and being around nature more you will increase your vitamin d levels and lower your cortisol levels.
8. Perform more parasympathetic exercise such as yoga to help bring a state of calm in the body.
9. Meditate or use “grounding”. Deep breathing techniques and mindfulness has been shown to lower stress, anxiety and lower inflammation. Try using apps like Headspace.
10. Listen to music, podcast or audio books that help to bring a state of calm.



Stress And Exercise

From minor challenges to major crises, stress is part of our everyday lives, and while you can't always control your circumstances, you can control how you respond to them.

Exercise is one of the most effective stress relievers there is!

The physical response from exercise releases chemicals in the brain that are the body's natural mood elevators. Choose the right exercise and you'll feel both energised and relaxed.

As a general rule, yoga and tai chi are excellent for reinstalling calm by focusing on breathing and centring the mind.

But any physical exercise will reduce stress by using up adrenalin and other hormones that the body produces under stress, as well as relaxing the muscles.

Whilst many people think that exercise only has an impact on your body, it can actually have an extremely positive impact on your mental well-being too.

This is because exercise causes particular chemicals to be released, called endorphins, which are known to positively alter your mood.

Think endorphins explosion!!

There are a number of benefits to your mental well-being from exercise.

Some of the most important benefits include:

- Increased energy.
- Improved sleep.
- Less mental fatigue and feelings of tension.
- Motivation and focus on your life.
- A release of feelings of anger or frustration.
- An improved appetite.
- More social opportunities.
- A chance to have fun.

All of these things can help to make sure that you feel positive and ready to face whatever the world throws at you.

How Much Exercise Should You Aim For?

To feel the maximum benefits from exercise then you should be aiming for around 150 minutes of moderate activity each week.

This exercise doesn't have to be sweating it out in a gym for an hour. In fact, moderate exercise can come in the form of a simple 15 minute walk.

This will give you the chance to clear out your mind or a relaxing swim.

The main aim is to make yourself breathe a little heavier than normal, but not be out of breath.

You can always start up with small bursts of exercise, such as 10 minutes 3 times a day.

Slowly building up a frequency and intensity that fits with you.

Ultimately, the main aim is simply to be more active.

Set Aside Time To Switch Off And Unwind

- Schedule in technology free time.
- Read a book.
- Separate work from bed.
- Listen to a podcast.
- Use a calming app.
- Listen to music or relaxing sounds.

No matter your routine, alleviating anxious or worrisome thoughts should be your priority and good quality sleep will follow.

It's especially important to have boundaries between work and home if you're working from home.

It is very hard to shut down your brain or quiet anxious or worrying thoughts when you are on the go before bedtime.

You want to separate your day from night time.

If you find that you are still have trouble with anxious thoughts prior to bedtime, talking to a mental health professional may help you figure out strategies to cope.

High quality sleep will help improve your mood and cognition throughout the day, so be the difference for yourself by investing in a routine that works for you.

A large part of a successful routine is sticking to it.

Find out what works best for you and your body will eventually learn and associate your wind down activities with relaxation.

Another stress coping mechanism:

Actually knowing what stresses you out.

What are your triggers?

Do you actually know why you are stressed?

Many of us walk around on edge without ever taking a moment to uncover the source of our stress on a deeper level.

Let's say you often struggle to meet deadlines.

Being behind the curve at work can be anxiety-inducing.

Can you identify the underlying problems?

Maybe a chatty co-worker distracts you more frequently than you thought, or you're lured away from your tasks by social media.

Now that you have identified the root of the issue, you can work on regaining your focus to the task at hand.



Breathing Exercises For Stress Relief

This calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety and panic takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

You will get the most benefit if you do it regularly, as part of your daily routine.

You can do it standing up, sitting in a chair that supports your back, lying on a bed or lying on a yoga mat on the floor.

Make yourself as comfortable as you can and if you can, loosen any clothes that restrict your breathing.

If you are lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms up. Let your legs be straight, or bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor.

If you are sitting, place your arms on the chair arms. If you are sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you are in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it. Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Breathe in gently and regularly.

Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first. Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, only if you find this helpful.

Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.



How To Use Stress In A Positive Way

If you respond to stress by coming home, opening a packet of your favourite biscuits and flinging yourself at the couch where you will binge watch netflix until you crawl off to bed, then you are not doing yourself any favours.

When you encounter work stress and have a busy workload take a step back and create an action plan. Don't try and do Everything at once!

Act on what you can control, accept what you can't.

How often do you find yourself thinking... Ugh! I should be getting my act together!

All those "shoulds" tend to pile up on a person, creating stress. But learning to tune in to that interior monologue allows you to focus your thoughts.

Mindfulness and a practice called radical acceptance, can help.

Radical acceptance can be defined as:

The ability to accept situations that are outside of your control without judging them, which in turn reduces the suffering that is caused by them.

Radical acceptance is not an easy practice at all. In fact, it can require a lifetime of practice in order to truly get a handle on it.

Radical acceptance is most often applied in situations when you are unable to fix or change what has happened or when something has happened that feels unfair, like the loss of a loved one or losing one's job.

Radical acceptance encourages you to look at distressing events as though you are a casual observer with no stakes in the game.

Radical acceptance is a distress tolerance skill that can be used during challenging times to better cope with and process our emotions.

Radical acceptance is a helpful tool that can lead us away from the suffering and into the freedom of making choices without the emotions.

You begin by simply describing what happened in a certain scenario and your role in that scenario in the most objective terms possible. Then you assess what you had control over in that particular situation and what you didn't.

Knowing what you have control over helps you to think clearer and potentially relieve some stress allowing you to respond in a suitable manner.

Mindfulness challenges you to accept the things outside of your control.

Why stress over things that you are powerless to change?

It also helps you shift your emotional response from negative to neutral.

Or even productive...

By teaching you to channel your energies toward taking ownership of the things you do have control over, rather than simply reacting may have a more positive outcome..

Remember What You Love About Your Job

When you are stressed out, it helps to take a few deep breaths and remember what you love about your job.

Maybe the work is fulfilling, or you have great co-workers, or you're actually living the dream of being what you always wanted to be when you grew up.

It's impossible to feel both grateful and fearful or angry at the same time, so remind yourself from time to time that there are good things about your job even when the stressors are mounting.

Of course, if there's nothing to love anymore, it may be time to consider moving on and taking on a new challenge.

Work stress is a fact of life, but if coping mechanisms and strategies aren't working and you don't see a light at the end of the tunnel, it may be time to hit the job boards in search of a better fit before stress takes a serious physical or emotional toll.





How To Help Lower Stress

Talk To Loved Ones.

A positive catch up with family or friends can lift your mood and reconnect you with what's important.

Get More Better Quality Sleep.

So many neglect the power of a good night's sleep.

If you want more energy, more positivity and an all round better life start prioritising your sleep and see yourself become a bright light in all aspects of your life.

Download "Calm" Or "Headspace".

Go into the app store on your phone and download the app calm and Headspace. Both offer solutions to decrease stress and improve mood.

Practice Gratitude.

We don't realise it, but the vast majority of us are so ungrateful for the simple pleasures we have.

By practicing gratitude every morning and evening and by highlighting 3 simple positives you have such as your life, your family and your health can lead you to living a much more abundant life.

Daily Affirmations.

Start your morning by writing down and repeating a positive affirmation 3 times to yourself and say it like you mean it!

To be the person you want to be you have to learn to tell yourself you are that person.

Remember..

Don't let stress control your day.

Ask For Help When You Need It

Taking workload as an example-don't be afraid to admit when you are snowed under at work.. We have all been there! Everyone gets overwhelmed from time to time and there's no shame in asking for help when you truly need it.

We tend to view asking for help as admitting defeat. But put yourself in your manager's shoes. Would you rather an employee make excuses for not completing a project on

Time or to your satisfaction, or have that employee ask for help before disaster strikes?

There are a few caveats to asking for help. First, make certain you have put in your best effort before you seek out assistance.

Second, prepare any questions you have in advance. If you simply go to your boss with a complaint without offering any solutions, you will sound like you're whining rather than being proactive about solving a problem.

Most of all, be sure you know the answer to the question your boss is likely to ask: what do you need from me?

Final Note

When Should I Talk To A Doctor About Stress?

- You should seek medical attention if you feel overwhelmed.
- If you are using drugs or alcohol to cope.
- If you have thoughts about hurting or self harming yourself.

Your primary care provider can help by offering advice, prescribing medicine or referring you to a therapist.

It's very natural and normal to be stressed sometimes. But long term stress can cause physical symptoms, emotional symptoms and unhealthy behaviours.

Try relieving and managing stress using a few of the simple strategies outlined. But if you do continue to feel overwhelmed please do go and talk to your doctor.



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