

Stress Management

Stress affects many of us at different times in our lives and if not dealt with, can lead to long term problems. Research has shown stress to be one of the major causes of long term sickness absence at work and it can affect our physical health, relationships and emotional/mental health.

The good news is that there are many little things that we can all do to help reduce the effects (or causes) of stress.

Here are 7 top tips to manage stress:

1. **Learn to relax.** Relaxation is actually a skill that needs to be learned. Stress symptoms are often the result of the body's fight or flight system, which is activated when we feel under threat or in danger. By learning to unwind and relax, our adrenaline level drops and we can think more clearly.
2. **Watch what you drink.** Alcohol and caffeine can exacerbate stress symptoms. We can get into a vicious circle, where we feel stressed and therefore have more caffeine or alcohol to help us cope, which can actually make symptoms worse. See www.drinkaware.co.uk for free advice on alcohol. Drinks like tea, coffee, coca cola, Irn Bru, red bull etc. all contain caffeine. Trying to cut down can help. On a positive note, keeping hydrated with water can help.
3. **Exercise.** A great way of letting off steam is to keep physically active. Going to the gym, riding a bike, going for a jog or even power walking can help burn off excess energy. We can sometimes do our best thinking when exercising, so problems are solved more easily, which can generate solutions to our stress.
4. **Learn what stresses you.** Every person responds to certain situations in different ways. What is stressful for one person might not be for another. This means we need to give ourselves a break and allow ourselves to acknowledge that we might find something stressful, which others seem to be coping with (and vice versa). For example, if you have a high ethical standard and you witness something unethical happening in the workplace, this might cause you significant distress, whereas some colleagues with a more "laissez faire" attitude will seem unconcerned by this. Giving yourself permission to find something stressful allows you to respond appropriately, without beating yourself up about how you feel because others seem to be coping fine.

5. **Plan ahead.** There is a saying that if you fail to prepare, then you should prepare to fail. Stress often occurs when many demands pile up at the same time. However, if you look ahead, you can sometimes see some things coming and make strategic choices to manage your time differently. For example, if you know there is a major project on a work, your son or daughter is getting married soon and you have an elderly relative in hospital, then perhaps that is not the right time to decided to totally redecorate your house. Even positive events (e.g. Christmas) can be stress-inducing.

6. **Learn the art of re-framing.** Some situations feel stressful because of how we think about them. For example, if you don't like criticism, and at work a colleague gives you negative feedback about a project, then this might be very stressful for you. However, to take a step back and look at it a different way can help. Perhaps there is some truth or wisdom in the feedback that could be helpful to take on board? The fact that a colleague gives an opinion perhaps shows that others are interested in your work (which is better than apathy), or even shows that they care. Ask yourself if there is another way of looking at the situation, or think what you would say to a friend going through the same situation. Perhaps you heard criticism when none was intended (which often happens if we're feeling stressed).

7. **Talk to a professional.** They say that prevention is better than cure. If you are suffering symptoms of stress, then it can help to talk to a professional sooner rather than later. Getting some coaching to help you deal with pressures in life can be more effective than getting therapy for burnout after years of trying to cope alone. Early intervention is not a weakness but can be a sign of wisdom and strength. Even if you have been stressed for a long time, a professional psychologist can help you find more positive ways of coping.

Article written by David Craigie, a Chartered Occupational Psychologist, Registered Coaching Psychologist and co-founder of the Craigie Partnership.

We hope you will find these tips to be helpful. If you would like to make an appointment with David Craigie then contact the Craigie Partnership on 0131 215 1066 or email info@craigiepartnership.co.uk



This article is part of a series of self-help articles written by Psychologists at the Craigie Partnership. The full series includes:

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- Confidence & Self-Esteem
- CVs & Interviews
- Depression
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- Stress

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