

STRESS MANAGEMENT TIP SHEET

Stress is a normal part of life, and can be thought of as an emotional and physical response when we are faced with high demands. The stress response results in chemicals being produced by the body, which increase our ability to focus and elevate our heart rate and blood pressure. This helps us to maintain performance when faced with especially challenging situations for a short period of time. Some stress can be useful in motivating and assisting us to get things done.

When stress is ongoing, and is a regular occurrence, it can become a problem. If stress is unrelenting, the chemicals produced in the body can start to cause unhelpful changes to our physical and mental health. There are many causes of stress, and what is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another. Stress can come from a number of areas of life including, work, family life and our relationships with others.

There are a number of things you can do to effectively manage your stress levels

1. Look after yourself

- Self-care is especially important when you have a high level of demand in your life - then you have the energy to give to what you need to accomplish.
- Build into your week activities you enjoy and find relaxing, such as sport, spending time with friends, and other enjoyable activities.
- Make sure to continue to meet your nutritional needs. Eat fresh and healthy foods that keep you going on the tasks you have to complete.
- Remember to exercise every day as this helps you to keep focused and energetic

2. Rest when you need to

- Make sure you take time to have a break. When we continue to push through and don't take breaks, our productivity plummets!
- When you have a break, do something physical or fun, such as going for a short walk.
- Relaxation is important, especially before bed to slow brain activity down. Slow and deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, taking a shower or a bath, and drinking non-caffeinated herbal tea can all be helpful.

- Switch off your screens before bed (smart-phones, TV, computer, tablets etc.). Do this at least 30 minutes before bedtime – the activities we do using these screens tend to keep our mind active and don't allow us to slow down. Also, our bodies process the light emitted by these devices as a signal that it is still daytime – so it tends to impair our ability to fall asleep.

3. Take the time to plan

- Prepare a plan and write down your goals for each day / week. By planning out the week, we can make sure we use our time effectively so that we also get time to relax and recharge.
- Make sure your plans are balanced with other important things in your life - that way it will be easier to stick to.
- Some people find that breaking down larger goals into smaller goals can be helpful. One way to do this is to frame these smaller goals as “SMART goals”.

SMART stands for:

Specific: Not vague - something you can strike off a list.

Measurable: The goal can be measured, e.g. the goal of “go for a 20 minute walk each day” can be measured – at the end of the day, either we did it or we didn't.

Achievable: The goal can be done with the time and resources available – so we don't set ourselves up to fail.

Relevant: The small goal we set is actually related to the bigger goal (e.g. the small goal of “go to the gym for an hour on Tuesdays and Thursdays”, is relevant to the bigger goal of “Getting fit”).

Time-bound: The goal is bound in time – e.g. “Complete an hour of gardening on Saturday from 9am until 10am”. By being specific about the time, you can also reschedule if this isn't achieved in the timeframe specified.

4. Seek assistance

- Spending time with friends or family is important in maintaining balance in your life. Talking to your friends or family about your stress may be a helpful place to start managing your stress more effectively.
- If your stress is becoming too much to manage, a health professional such as your GP or a psychologist may be able to help you learn more effectively strategies to approach daily stress.

If you would like to seek support from a psychologist, contact Strategic Psychology or book a session by visiting our website strategicpsychology.com.au