

Stress management tip sheet

What is stress?

Stress is a common reaction when the demands on us feel greater than our resources to cope. Some stress can help us get things done, but when it is constant it can affect our mood, thinking, sleep and physical health, and may lead to problems such as anxiety or depression. Common causes include work or study pressure, money worries, relationships, caring responsibilities, health concerns and major life changes.

Common signs

Stress can show up in many ways, including:

- Feeling tense, anxious or irritable
- Poor concentration or forgetfulness
- Trouble making decisions
- Headaches, jaw clenching or teeth grinding
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Using alcohol or other substances to cope
- Losing interest in things

Things that may help

What helps with stress is different for each person. You might like to explore some of these.

Warning signs

Some people notice early signs in their body, such as headaches or a tight jaw, and triggers such as hunger, tiredness or deadlines.

Keep a daily structure

Regular times for sleep, meals, work or study, exercise and household tasks may help life feel more manageable.

Breaking problems down

Dividing big challenges into smaller steps and focusing on the next practical action may help. Some people find a list or planner useful.

Relax your body

Slow breathing, mindfulness, yoga or simply sitting quietly may help your body settle.

Noticing thinking

Some people find it helps to notice self critical thoughts and gently replace them with more balanced, supportive self talk.

Looking after health

Regular meals, movement and enough sleep can support wellbeing. Alcohol or drugs used to cope can add to stress over time.

Things that **may help** (continued)

Pacing and limits

Pacing, realistic expectations and healthy boundaries may help.

Time for enjoyment

Time with people who make you laugh, outdoors, or on a hobby can support balance and recovery.

When to get **more support**

If things are becoming unmanageable and affecting your social, family, work or study life, you may want to see your GP or a psychologist. You do not need to wait until things feel serious to reach out.

Some people find it helpful to see a GP if stress is frequent, if their reactions to stress are worrying, or if they feel anxious or low because of stress. A GP can talk with you about your physical health and support options, which may include seeing a psychologist.

Benefits of **seeking support**

- Talking with a GP or psychologist may help you make sense of what is happening.
- Support might help you feel less alone with what you are going through.
- A psychologist could offer new ways of coping that suit you.
- Support could help you find a balance that works for your life.

Need help **right now?**

If you or someone else is in danger or thinking about suicide, please reach out now.

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Emergency services, if life is in danger

13 11 14

Lifeline crisis support, 24 hours, 7 days

13 92 76

13YARN, run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 24/7

Trusted **Australian resources**

Better Health Channel betterhealth.vic.gov.au

THIS WAY UP online programs (St Vincent's Hospital and UNSW) thiswayup.org.au

healthdirect healthdirect.gov.au | 1800 022 222

This tip sheet offers general information only and does not replace advice from your GP, psychologist or other health professional.