

# How to Manage Stress

The demands of modern life, particularly for those of us in inner city areas, create tensions for us all. It is an occupational hazard. From the workaholic, who just can't switch off through to people who suffer stress from doing boring and repetitive work, learning the art of relaxation can transform the way we feel about ourselves, our lives and increase our energy and efficiency levels. The first aspect of managing stress effectively is to understand what stress is, what causes it, what effect it can have on you and most important how to avoid it and that's why recruitment experts Kelly Services have compiled this fact sheet which covers the essential points.

## WHAT IS STRESS

Some of the symptoms and effects of stress include feeling tense, trapped, keyed up, nervous, not able to concentrate. It can cause aggression, irritability, being obsessive about working, and changes in eating, drinking and smoking habits. On the health front stress can mean headaches, exhaustion, upset stomachs, high blood pressure, breathing difficulties and neck and back troubles. All these are negative and debilitating.

Stress should not however be confused with pressure. Pressure can be stimulating or irritating but it is not debilitating. We all need a certain amount of pressure in our everyday lives to function and for a lot of people increased pressure can be exciting, motivating and energising.

## HOW CAN I MANAGE STRESS POSITIVELY

One of the best defences against stress is to have a well balanced lifestyle backed up by a healthy diet and an idea of the relaxation techniques that work for you. The following techniques are a selection which can be successfully used to relieve tension and anxiety during a difficult situation. They are not difficult and you will be able to use them without anyone else being aware.

## STEPPING BACK FROM THE SITUATION

When you feel yourself becoming tense in a situation try stepping back from it and observe how you are reacting. Are you perhaps imposing something unrealistic on yourself or is someone else?

Does the situation really justify the negative stress level?

How will the situation look in a week, month or even a year's time? By distancing yourself from what is going on you should be able to begin to take control and stop your own stress level rising.

## BETTER BREATHING

When we become anxious and tense our breathing changes. It becomes shallow, fast and irregular. Try to be aware of your breathing as it gives an excellent early-warning signal of tension. Concentrate on breathing deeply, taking your breath down to your diaphragm and holding it there for a moment or two before exhaling. Try to get your breathing into a comfortable rhythm and breathe in and out for the same length of time, say for a count of 3 or 4, until you begin to feel calmer.

## RELAX

Mental tension is always accompanied by physical tension particularly in muscles of the face, shoulders, hands and back. A quick way to lessen the tension is to take each part of the body starting perhaps with your eyes then your mouth, shoulders, arms etc. - clench each set of

muscles tightly so you can feel all the tension being concentrated in that one place then release the tension letting it flow out of your body. These techniques need to be practised and it is important to remember to breathe evenly and deeply at all times.

## EASY EATING

The benefits of a balanced diet are well known - everything in moderation is currently a fashionable view with an emphasis on fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and pasta. But just as we are what we eat, how we eat can affect our well being too. If you are feeling tense you will have a tendency to bolt your food which is then difficult for your body to deal with often resulting in indigestion and other stomach problems. Try to eat slowly and peacefully and enjoy your meal. If you are feeling stressed you could consider vitamin supplements.

## DON'T TRY TO BE PERFECT

When we are under stress many of us add to our problems by trying to be everything to everybody - in fact trying to be perfect in every sphere of our home and work lives. We become so busy being busy that we never get a chance to think about how we are coping and about what is going on inside ourselves. If you feel this is happening to you take stock of your situation. Think about what is important to you, what you want to focus on, what you want to achieve rather than trying to live up to other people's expectations. Don't spend time just worrying about a situation. Try to convert that anxiety into some form of action which will help you to feel much more positive. Try not to worry about things that haven't yet happened or that you can't do anything about.

## POSITIVE THINKING

Don't let the superficial chaos of the world get you down - be your own person with your own positive approach to life. Make time every day to close your eyes and use your imagination to conjure up images of the things that give you pleasure or that you enjoy. Don't under-estimate the importance of laughter. It immediately relaxes all your facial muscles and is one of the best safety valves for strained nerves. Try to be optimistic particularly last thing at night and first thing in the morning - don't let the cares of the world get you down before you've even had your breakfast. For many people negative thinking becomes a habit and a very bad one. Try to break the mould and take control of your own thoughts.

## SUMMARY

- Try to identify your own stress triggers
- Adopt techniques which work for you - we all cope with stress differently
- Be aware of your own symptoms of stress
- Accept yourself and don't try to be perfect
- Take action to tackle your problems
- Look after yourself physically and mentally
- Be positive