

HOW TO: Deal with Stress

One of the Trust's priorities is to value and support our people and partner's and to nurture a highly skilled and motivated staff. We would like to promote a culture where stress is not seen as a sign of weakness or a reflection of capability but a culture where staff can speak freely about stress and seek appropriate help.

What is stress?

Stress plays a part in all of our lives. Stress is the way we react mentally, physically or emotionally to changes and demands in our lives. A certain amount of stress in one's life is good, it can keep us engaged, focused and moving forward. However, too much stress can detract from productivity, happiness and well being.

Stress is unique and personal to each of us. What is relaxing to one person, for example relaxing on a beach, may be stressful to another who would rather be actively engaged.

Primary sources of stress at work.

The HSE has developed six Management Standards which cover the primary sources of stress at work

Demands: workload, work patterns and the work environment

Control: how much say you have in the way you do your work

Support: encouragement, sponsorship and resources available through the organisation, line management and colleagues

Relationships: avoidance of conflict and promotion of positive working

Role: understanding of role within the organisation

Change: management and communication of change

In accordance with the Health and Safety At Work Act 1974, as an employee, you have a personal responsibility for your own health and safety and should, therefore speak to your manager if you are suffering from stress or feel you are developing a stress related illness. To help you identify please read the signs of stress below

Signs of Stress

The best way to cope with stress is to recognise when your stress levels are increasing. We can view 'stress signals in four categories: thoughts, feelings, behaviour and physical symptoms.

Feelings	Thoughts	Behavioural	Physical
Anxiety, Irritability Fear Moodiness Embarrassment	Self-criticism Difficulty concentrating or making decisions Faulty judgement Forgetfulness or mental disorganisation Preoccupation with the future Repetitive thoughts Fear of failure	Stuttering or speech difficulties Crying Acting impulsively Nervous laughter Less tolerant Teeth grinding or jaw clenching Increased smoking alcohol or other drug use Casual errors Increased or decreased appetite Lower productivity Missing deadlines	Frequent headaches Unexplained aches and pains Back or neck problems Cold or sweaty hands Poor sleep pattern Nausea Increased infections and more colds Fatigue Rapid breathing or pounding heart Shaking or trembling Jumpy appearance Dry mouth

Seven tips to help you manage your stress

- 1. Identify what is stressing you most.** Try to get your feelings out – share them with a friend, or write them out – before you can conquer your stress you must know what is stressing you.
- 2. Learn to relax.** Take time off to do what you enjoy. Physical activity can play a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Also allow yourself time to create a quiet scene – if time is limited use your imagination to create in your mind a place where you feel relaxed, recreate pleasant sounds, smells and temperature or play some relaxing music to create a sense of peace and tranquillity.
- 3. Take a deep breath.** Stress can cause your breathing to be too shallow, your chest to feel tight and you could even be holding your breath without knowing it. Take a minute to slow down and breathe deeply. Place your hand on your tummy just below the navel, breathe in slowly through your nose and watch your hand move out as you tummy expands. Hold your breath for a few seconds, then exhale slowly. Repeat a few times till you feel calmer and more relaxed.
- 4. Eat healthy.** Avoid sugar foods, in excess these will provide temporary highs but will end in fatigue later. Take time to eat breakfast and do not

skip meals – keeping your nutrition levels up will better enable you to deal with stress – like a car running low on fuel – if you are irritable and not eating well you will be less able to deal with stressful situations.

- 5. Keep laughing.** Keep a sense of humour. Smiling is a two way mechanism- we do it when we are relaxed and happy, but doing it can also make you feel relaxed and happy.
- 6. Organise and prioritise.** Try to plan ahead, trying to take care of everything at once can seem overwhelming and as a result you may not accomplish anything. Give priority to the most important tasks first. Keep a to-do list and calendar – *if you fail to plan you plan to fail.*
- 7. Assess the level of the situation.** Using a scale of one to ten, with one being the equivalent of a minor hassle and 10 being a true catastrophe, assign a number to what is making you feel stressed or anxious. You will find that most problems you may encounter will rate in the region of 2 to 5, in other words, they are really not such a big deal! This will help you put things into perspective.

If your symptoms persist seek advice and support available to you within the Trust

- Raise any concerns about excessive pressure, both work related or from external factors, with either:
 - your line manager.
 - Divisional Workforce Lead (DWL) who can offer further guidance
 - Occupational Health ext 2767

An Individual Stress Risk Assessment will be completed and help to develop an action plan to control negative stressors that you may be exposed to.

- Care First
'Care First' is a free service to staff providing advice, information and a counselling service, 24 hours a day. The number to call is free phone 0800 174319. In addition to telephone counselling, all staff are entitled to four face-to-face counselling sessions from Care First. In certain circumstances Care First may be able to provide counselling for groups of staff or support such as facilitation/mediation. For more information also see how to guide:
http://connect/media/pdf/0/g/How_to_access_advice_information_and_counselling_service.pdf
- Psychological Wellbeing Service
The Psychological Wellbeing Service (IAPT) offers cognitive behaviour therapies and other talking therapies for common difficulties such as depression, anxiety and stress. It is available to all staff either through self-referral or a supported referral via Occupational Health.

The service operates two clinics a week (Tuesday and Friday) at Cambridge Health at Work and can be contacted on 01223 726789.

- Other support services

Support for those affected by stress is also provided by employee relations, occupational health, the individual's general practitioner, union and staff side representatives, and chaplaincy. A mental health group 'It's not just you' is also available for staff to attend.