

Stress

Information and a self-help guide

Stress

Stress is the feeling of being under too much emotional or mental pressure. These pressures turn into stress when you feel unable to cope. Stress can occur through many of life's everyday demands; including work, family and finances.

Stress can cause a number of physical problems:

- Sleeping problems
- Sweating
- Loss of appetite
- Increased heart rate
- Muscle tension
- Low sexual drive
- Urinary problems
- Fatigue
- Headaches

As well as a number of psychological problems:

- Anxiety issues
- Depression
- Lack of motivation
- Irritability or anger
- Restlessness

A key point to note with stress is that everybody experiences it and we are never experiencing a state of "no-stress"; whether the stress is an unpaid bill or an upcoming meeting at work. This is why it is best represented as a continuum. You either have lots of stress, or very little stress, in your life at one time. You can fluctuate along this continuum dependent on the year, month or even day.

Low Stress-----**High Stress**

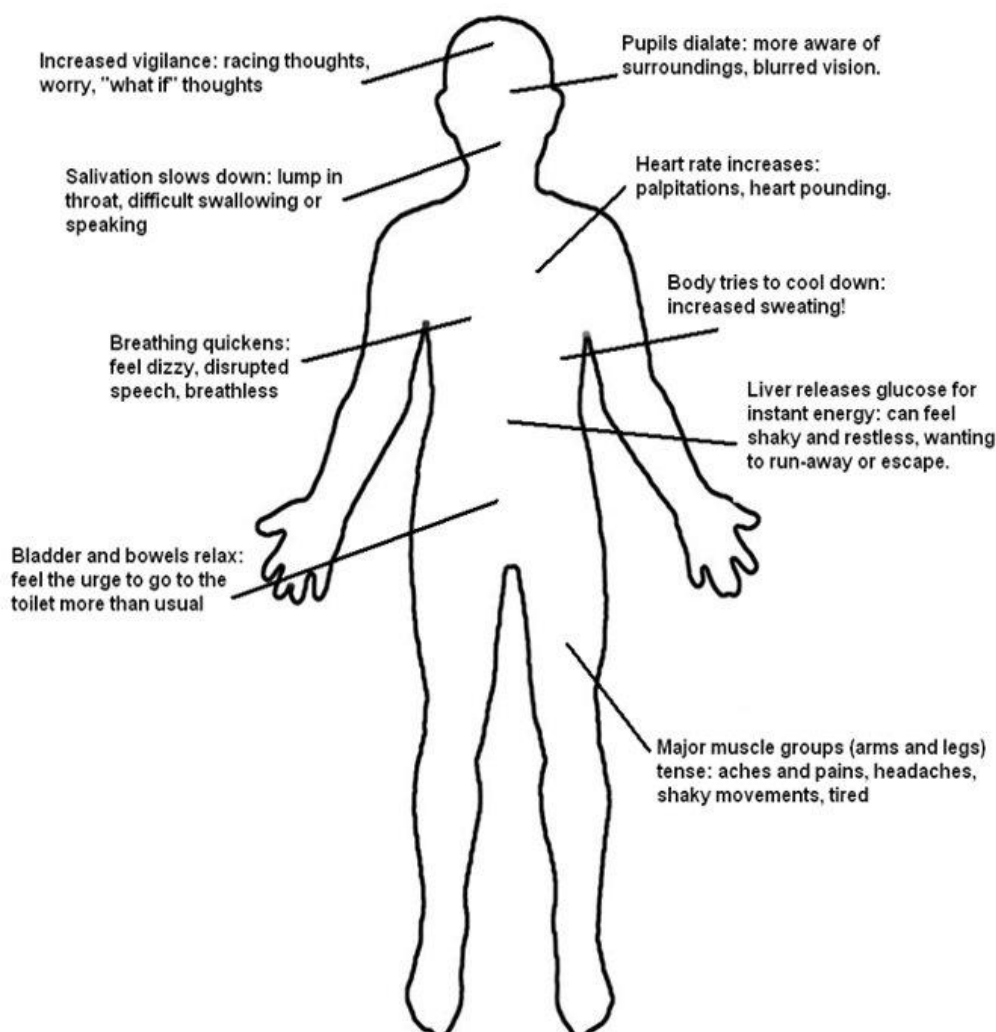
To better explain how stress can manifest itself, the following information will be on the "fight or flight" response

Fight or Flight

The fight or flight response is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived threat. Evolutionary psychology suggests that early animals that lived in extremely dangerous environments would develop the necessary mechanisms to survive. These mechanisms would psychologically and physiologically prepare them to either fight (engage the stimulus) or take flight (retreat away from the stimulus).

For example; a bear approaches a deer in the woods, the deer's stress response is activated, and the deer's receives the necessary physiological arousal to attempt an escape (e.g. increased blood supply to the muscles).

We can all experience these exact physical reactions, even if we aren't being chased by a bear. These physical reactions can be caused by a simple stressor (e.g. an unpaid bill). These stressors are not necessarily dangerous, yet they bring about the same physiological response as one that is. However, this response isn't always helpful and becomes a problem when it interferes with daily life; for example, not going to busy supermarkets because of how we feel.



Bodily Changes...	What you may notice...
The brain releases chemicals, such as adrenaline, which trigger the fight or flight reactions	
Increased vigilance	Racing thoughts (everything feels “speeded up”) Increased worry “What if” thoughts
Salivation slow down	Lump in the throat feeling Difficulty swallowing Difficulty/disrupted speech
Digestion slows down	Nausea Butterflies in stomach
Pupils dilate	More aware of surroundings Increased alertness
Breathing quickens so more oxygen can get to the muscles ready for action	Feeling like you need more air/cant breath Disrupted speech Feeling dizzy or light headed
Due to increase metabolic rate the sweat glands increase their response to cool the body down	Increased sweating!
Heart rate increases to get more blood and oxygen around the body, to supply energy to major muscle groups	Uncomfortable palpitations Heart pounding
Muscles in bladder and bowels relax (if we go to the toilet our bodies will be lighter, which helps us run faster)	Urge to go to the toilet more than usual.
Liver releases glucose to provide energy	A burst of energy in our muscles can make us feel shaky and restless Desire to run/escape the situation
Major muscles in legs and arms tense (ready for action)	Aches and pains Headaches Shaky movements

Ten tips to combat stress

1. **Get active**- exercise will not get rid of the problem, although it will help you see the problem more clearly, helping you to process your thoughts more calmly.
2. **Be positive**- attend to the positive aspects of your life, focus on those days, people, places that really make you happy and keep them in sight. Negativity breeds negativity.
3. **Avoid unhealthy habits**- drinking alcohol and smoking as a means of solving your problem is ineffective. These may provide you with a temporary 'numbing', but in the long run, they are only going to make matters worse. Try kicking these bad habits and starting a better one.
4. **Be in control**- empower yourself and take control of your life. Don't allow the stressors in your life to dictate its course. Find a solution that satisfies you and not someone else.
5. **Have some 'me time'**- we all need to take some time out for socialising and relaxing. Make sure that you are making time for this in your week.
6. **Stay connected**- have, and maintain, a good network of support between your friends and family. Sometimes, talking it through with someone close to you can help you find solutions to your problems.
7. **Set yourself a goal**- start a new sport or spend more time outside. These can both help you build up your self-esteem and, in turn, help you deal more efficiently with stress.
8. **Work smarter, not harder**- try and work towards a standard of quality rather than quantity. Take pride in the work that you do and accept that your workload won't be completed at the end of the day, there's always tomorrow!
9. **Volunteer**- people who help people become more resilient and happy. Even if you just do a favour for someone. The act of kindness will make you feel more positive about yourself.
10. **Accept changes**- sometimes things happen that are beyond our control, and that's just life! But it's how you deal with that change that makes you who you are. Try accepting a change before allowing it to take control.