



These things are normal when you are
stressed





and these also ...

Digestive
problems

Shut
down

Restlessness

Despair

Feeling
unconnected

Insomnia

Cravings for
food, drink,

Anger

Lack of energy

Procrastination

Hopelessness

Thoughts
of suicide





The Personal Experience of Stress

The good news is that there are two types of stress, pleasant and unpleasant. Positive stress is called **Eustress** and negative stress is called **Distress**. Positive stress or eustress is commonly associated with a desirable life event or a challenge. It is linked to the feeling of fulfilment and enhances functioning and productivity. When we are distressed, we experience hindrances and a whole host of physical, psychological and behavioural alterations in our body. An individual's perception on a situation will determine whether it is positive or negative stress. Symptoms associated with positive stress (eustress) are similar to those of distress, the difference lies in our cognitive reasoning of the situation. And sometimes life is stressful and there is a lot happening all at once, we can barely keep up the pace and consequently have reached our emotional limit.

The top eleven most stressful life events are said to be:

Death of a spouse (or child), divorce, marital separation, imprisonment, death of a close family member, personal injury or illness, marriage, **DISMISSAL FROM WORK**, **marital reconciliation**, retirement, moving house

Stress is our bodies natural reaction to change, feeling threatened, out of control, pressured and overwhelmed. Hans Selye coined the phrase "STRESS" and defined it as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand" it was previously called "GAS" general adaptation syndrome. Stress is a universal feeling, I can assure you that **we all experience it**. Simply put, it is a completely normal response to how we experience the world around us.



This is how it affects us;

Behaviourally

We struggle to concentrate, become reckless, lose track of time, avoid being around people, have a shorter fuse when communicating, become defensive, increase smoking and drinking, turn to junk food.

Psychologically

We get teary, become indecisive, our mood will fluctuate, increased sensitivity and anxiety, feel low and our self-esteem will dip.

Physically

We feel tired, have indigestion, joints and back become painful, there is a tightness in the chest, increase or loss of appetite, headaches.

The Truth About Stress

Grasping a full sense of stress and how it affects you, is the best way to successfully adjust to the challenging conditions around you. Knowing yourself as fully as you can, enables you to cope with life better. Increased self-awareness is absolutely the best resource you can have for coping effectively with stress. Here is what we know about stress:

1. **Stress** has three stages; the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance and the stage of exhaustion.
2. **Stress** causes an internal bodily alteration to occur. It can be both visible and non-visible.
3. **Stress** is felt when a person's existence of well-being is threatened.
4. **Stress** can be triggered by any activity and we all have different triggers.



5. **Stress** occurs when excessive demands are being placed on a person due to work, family, relationships, health and finance.
6. **Stress** activates our hormonal system, immune system and intestinal lining of the digestive system.
7. **Stress** can be felt when awake and when unconscious.
8. **Stress** can come with a feeling of helplessness.

What Happens To Our Nervous System When Stressed?

When stressed, adrenaline and cortisol are produced, and this arouses our sympathetic nervous system. Adrenaline creates changes in our bodies leading to increased sweating, increased blood pressure and increased pulse rate PLUS a decrease in digestion. Our heart beats faster, sending more blood to our arms and legs. Muscles instinctively tense up to safeguard us against pain and injury. This "fight or flight" process happens very quickly and remains active until our brains perceive that the threat has passed. The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for "rest and digest" and provides us with a sense of balance relaxing the body and slowing functions down. Sweetwater Health describe "The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems act like the accelerator and brakes on a car. The sympathetic system is the accelerator, always ready to rev up and take us out of danger. The parasympathetic system is the brakes, slowing us down when danger isn't present."

How To Activate Our Parasympathetic Nervous System

Deep conscious breathing, focus on things around you, activate all five senses, ask for a hug from someone, stand with your back to a wall and count slowly, feet firmly on the ground and laugh.



Stress Indicators

Believe it or not, we all have a huge amount of resources at our disposal all the time in the form of our minds and bodies. Our bodies will, generally, give us clues before our mind decides what is happening to us. By getting to know your body more, you will be able to understand and decipher the clues quicker. By doing this, you can weave healthy coping mechanisms in as soon as you spot a disturbance in your body and/or mind. Become a detective of your own body and mind and put in place good self-care and support systems to combat the symptoms of stress.

The red flags that may indicate you are stressed are;

- Mental arousal such as ruminating, fogginess, racing thoughts, brain freeze
- Feeling over responsible for people and things beyond our capacity
- *Increased appetite, especially sweet things and carbohydrates*
- Feeling fearful, dread, gloomy, negative, hopeless
- More aches and pains in the body, especially joints
- Frustration in your work and/or personal life
- Physical exhaustion and fatigue
- *Mouth ulcers and sore throat*
- Intestinal disturbances
- Loss of appetite
- Feverish
- Skin rash
- Poor sleep
- Headaches



Ignoring these clues will mean that the symptoms will become more plentiful and amplified. Frequent bouts of stress is bad for you and it will inevitably affect your physical and mental health.

Take control of stress as soon as you spot it - share your experience with others and be proactive rather than reactive to your well-being and mental health. After all, you deserve to feel well and enjoy life.

Coping with stress

Stress makes us feel that we are not in control and overwhelmed. The list below can give you some ideas on how to restore your balance:

- **Try to** stay connected to people, talk and share your feelings and thoughts with another person. Ensure you spend time being around others.
- **Try to** weave simple achievable tasks into your daily life eg the cleaning, laundry, admin
- **Try to** check out your perspectives with other people
- **Try to** be realistic about the targets you set yourself
- **Try to** keep hydrated by drinking plenty of water
- **Try to** take regular breaks away from your desk
- **Try to** notice and validate your emotions when they increase
- **Try to** encourage humour and positive thinking in your daily life
- **Try to** do positive things that you enjoy
- **Try to** attend to your self-care
- **Try to** exercise and take time for relaxation
- **Try to** reach out to people
- **Try to** eat and drink healthily.



Things to avoid when stressed

Our minds and emotions are not in sync with each other when stressed and it is easy to make poor choices because we believe it is easier for us in the moment. Healthy choices are the ones that alleviate symptoms and restore a sense of calm to our bodies and minds. Here is a list of things to pay attention to:

- **Do not** ignore your emotions. Emotions are a sign that you are struggling
- **Do not** push yourself too hard. Striving for perfection is too punishing.
- **Do not** self-medicate with substances such as alcohol or drugs
- **Do not** check in with self-doubt and your inner critic
- **Do not** obsess about the big issues in your life
- **Do not** eat junk food, fizzy drinks and alcohol
- **Do not** avoid taking time out during the day
- **Do not** avoid doing none-job activities
- **Do not** dwell on negative thoughts
- **Do not** neglect relationships
- **Do not** overstretch yourself
- **Do not** isolate yourself.