

Managing stress in times of uncertainty



The COVID-19 pandemic has added many new challenges to our lives, both at work and home. Right now we are faced with constant change and uncertainty. Here are some practical tips on how to manage your stress during these challenging times.

Increased pressure

At times pressure can be a good thing. It can improve our performance and help us achieve our goals. On the flip side, too much pressure can leave us feeling stressed and overwhelmed. This can negatively impact our performance, as well as our ability to cope, our relationships and in the long term, our health.

Think of it as a balancing act. The secret to success lies in learning to recognise your early warning signs and taking steps to manage your stress before you tip into overwhelm!

Recognise your stress signals

Identifying and acknowledging your personal stress indicators will help you to intervene early and manage your stress. We all experience stress in different ways. Pay attention to your stress signals - they may be physical or emotional. Watch out for changes in your thinking styles or behaviour.

Common stress signals:

- Constantly tired
- Sick and run down
- Headaches or muscle pains
- Heart concerns or palpitations
- Change of appetite (eating more or less)
- Feeling overwhelmed/unhappy/easily frustrated/angry/worried
- Irrational, being singled-minded
- Negative thinking
- Constant catastrophising
- Tendency to over-personalise
- Poor concentration and difficulty making decisions
- Withdrawal from social interaction
- Absenteeism
- Increase in caffeine/alcohol intake and smoking
- Conflict or tension with others
- More accidents and injuries

Healthy coping mechanisms

There are things you can do to actively reduce your stress levels when you notice that your stress alarm bells have been activated. Some stress relief mechanisms are considered healthy and others are not. For example, regular exercise is considered a healthy way to relieve stress. Whereas other activities that can provide short-term relief can lead to long-term problems such as alcohol, drug dependence or gambling.

Maintaining healthy habits during this pandemic will be key to coping with the additional stressors.

Move more

- Try a variety of different physical activities to avoid boredom, there are many free videos online
- Aim to get 30 minutes of moderate exercise, five days a week
- Take the stairs instead of the elevators
- Avoid sitting down for too long, stretch regularly

Practice good sleep hygiene

- Avoid backlit devices for at least 2 hours before sleep (perhaps read instead)
- Aim for 6-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep every night
- Take a warm shower 1 hour before going to sleep
- Don't work where you sleep

Eat a healthy diet

- Increase your daily green vegetable intake
- Reduce your refined sugar intake (e.g. soft drinks)
- Stay hydrated, aim for 2L of water a day
- Avoid coffee or energy drinks within 3 hours before going to sleep

Take breaks

- Take regular breaks throughout the day
- Get out into nature (e.g. gardening, walking)

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(continued)



Challenge negative thinking

Our thoughts determine our feelings, which in turn impact how we respond to situations. If we think more about what we 'say' to ourselves - and reframe these thoughts - we can build our resilience and capacity to view situations in a more realistic and rational way. While we can't choose what happens to us, we can learn to choose how we respond.

Shift your mindset by asking these questions:

- *What is within my control? What can I do about this?*
- *How else can I perceive this situation?*
- Speak with your social support network
- See a Psychologist (access to bulk-billed psychological services delivered via telehealth are now available)
- Access your company Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Make time for relationships

Why does 'having a shoulder to cry on' help when we are feeling stressed? The research certainly shows that a strong social support network can help us buffer stress and be physically healthier. Connecting with others and having a sense of belonging means you're not left on your own when feeling under pressure.

Additional resources:

Beyond Blue offer free counselling by mental health professionals 24/7, both [online](#) and over the phone 1300 22 4636

Lifeline offer free counselling and support 13 11 14

1800RESPECT for those experiencing domestic violence, please contact 1800 737 732

Kids Helpline is a free service for young people aged 5 to 25 call 1800 551 800 at any time

Those on a low income may be eligible to apply for a 'No Interest Loan'. For more information and details on how to apply, visit [Good Shepherd Microfinance](#)

For financial counselling, including advice on managing debt, contact the free and confidential **National Debt Helpline** by calling 1800 007 007

To test eligibility for income support payments including JobSeeker, contact **Services Australia** by visiting [servicesaustralia.gov.au](#)

For advice on how to seek medical help or to get tested for COVID-19 call the **Coronavirus Helpline** on 1800 020 080

Latest COVID-19 news, advice and public health information is available at [Australia.gov.au](#), or download on the 'Coronavirus Australia' app from the Apple and Google Play stores.