

## What is stress?

Changes and demands in your life can result in stress, which is the physical, mental, and emotional reactions you experience. The changes can be both large and small, and each person will respond to life's changes somewhat differently.



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Veterans & Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS)

Phone: 1800 011 046 – 24 hrs, 7 days



New Zealand

Veterans' Affairs New Zealand (VANZ)

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8am-5pm Monday to Friday (NZ time)

# Stress

Some people are more susceptible than others to stressful situations. Positive stress can be a motivator, while negative stress occurs when these changes and demands are overwhelming to you. Stress can affect any body system and aggravate any chronic disease.

## \* Frequent signs and symptoms

- Physical symptoms include muscle tension, headache, chest pain, upset stomach, diarrhoea or constipation, racing heartbeat, cold clammy hands, fatigue, profuse sweating, rashes, rapid breathing, shaking, tics, jumpiness, poor or excessive appetite, weakness, tiredness, and dizziness
- Emotional reactions include anger, low self-esteem, depression, apathy, irritability, fear and phobic responses, difficulty concentrating, guilt, worry, agitation, anxiety, and panic
- Behavioural reactions may cause alcohol or drug abuse, an increase in smoking, sleep disorders, overeating, memory loss, or confusion

## \* Causes

In a stressful situation, the body responds by increasing the production of certain hormones causing changes in the heart rate, blood pressure, metabolism and physical activity.

## \* Risk increases with

Common causes of stress include

- Recent death of a loved on (spouse, child, friend)
- Loss of anything valuable to you
- Injuries or severe illnesses
- Getting fired or changing jobs
- Recent move to a new city or state
- Sexual difficulties between you and your partner
- Business or financial reverses, or taking on a large debt, such as purchasing a new home
- Regular conflict between you and a spouse or family member, close friend or business associate
- Constant fatigue brought about by inadequate rest, sleep or recreation
- Demands on your time and energy levels by other family members leaving little time for self-care

## \* Preventive measure

- To help prevent negative stress, try to take charge of those aspects of your life that you can manage
- Since stress cannot always be prevented, learn coping techniques to protect your mental and physical health. Educate yourself about stress, its causes, effects and self-treatment techniques

## \* Expected outcome

Usually resolved with time, self-treatment or professional therapy.

## \* Possible complications

Chronic stress can play a role in many health problems including accidents, arthritis, asthma, cancer, colds, colitis, diabetes mellitus, endocrine disorders, skin disorders, heart disease, high blood pressure, insomnia, muscle aches, sexual dysfunction, and ulcers.

## \* Treatment/post procedure care, general measures

- Diagnosis is usually by your own or others' observation of symptoms. Sometimes medical tests may be necessary to rule out medical disorders that could be the cause of the symptoms. Patients often don't recognise that they are stressed
- Psychotherapy or counselling may be recommended
- Here are some tips to help reduce stress
  - Learn a meditation or relaxation technique and practice it regularly, daily if possible, There are a variety of methods available
  - Rearrange daily schedules to make them less stressful
  - If possible, get help with physical responsibilities and decrease the burden of other responsibilities where you can. Determine what is important and necessary to get done and what can be postponed, left undone or passed on to others
  - Take a short time away from any stressful situation you encounter during a day
  - Learn and practice a muscle tensing and muscle relaxing technique. Take warm relaxing baths
  - Make lists of what needs to be done each day and then cross the items off as they are completed; this will bring a feeling of accomplishment
  - Take time for some form of enjoyable recreation for yourself
  - Try to increase self-esteem by finding ways to validate your worth and having your needs taken seriously
  - Avoid taking your problems home or to bed with you
    - ✓ At the end of the day, spend a few minutes reviewing your entire days experiences, event by event, as if you're replaying a tape
    - ✓ Release all negative emotions you have harboured (anger, feelings of insecurity or anxiety)
    - ✓ Relish all good energy or emotion (loving thoughts, praise, feeling good about your work or yourself)
    - ✓ Reach a decision about unfinished events, and release mental or muscular tension
    - ✓ Now you're ready for a relaxing and emotionally healing sleep

## \* Activity

Adopt an exercise program. People in good physical condition are less likely to suffer the negative effects of stress.

## \* Notify your doctor or talk to a counsellor if

You or a family member is concerned about stress

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