



Managing Stress

How we think about problems can influence the degree of stress we feel. It is easy to lose perspective when under stress so changing your expectations or reframing a problem can be helpful in changing your perspective. Engage in structured problem solving – learning how to break down a problem into its various components- and then deciding on a course of action- is a valuable skill that can help manage anxiety and depression.

Become aware of your coping style. Does your usual coping style still work for you? Understand what situations you can and can't control and adapt accordingly. Balance an acceptance and tolerance of any unsatisfactory elements of your present situation with a flexible approach in coping with change and the uncertainties of your present situation.

A balanced lifestyle helps you to manage stress and enables you to function more efficiently. Introducing and maintaining a routine into your activities can be very helpful. Treat job hunting as a part of your daily work routine while setting aside time for meeting with friends, exercising and engaging in activities you really enjoy. Learn a new skill or engage in further study.

Remind yourself that no situation remains the same: the difficulties which may seem insurmountable at present will resolve with time and effort, and may lead to other opportunities or options you have not previously considered.

Specific Strategies

Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing is a quick and effective strategy for reducing anxiety and stress. A simple breathing exercise is described in Section 4 of this brochure.

Exercise

Regular, vigorous exercise is one of the most effective antidotes to stress. Aim for at least 20 minutes of exercise at least three to four times a week and vary your activities to avoid boredom.

Keep a journal

Writing down your thoughts, worries, difficulties helps provide clarity, dilute distressing emotions and regain your perspective.



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Social Contact

Take the time to enjoy your life: regular social contact and humour can help alleviate symptoms of stress. Talking things through with a trusted friend or family member can help you to re-assess matters, get over disappointments more readily and focus on moving ahead.

Professional Contact

Remain in contact with as many people as possible. Join groups to network within and maintain ongoing contact with your former colleagues. Use career support seminars and services and retain membership of the law society to remain in touch with others in the legal profession.

Eat well

A nutritious diet helps maintain a healthy nervous system; fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods are especially helpful, and try to limit your intake of caffeine, sweet and fatty foods as well as alcohol and cigarette use.

Sleep

A good sleep routine is essential so do something calming and relaxing like listening to music or reading if you have difficulty falling asleep.

Your awareness of symptoms of stress, anxiety or depression means you can work quickly to alleviate them, or seek help if they become unmanageable. These are very treatable conditions and support through friends, family, professional counselling, chaplaincy services, your GP or helplines are all avenues of support. It is advisable to seek whatever assistance you are comfortable with if you feel that your reactions to stress are extreme, beyond your control or you feel you are using harmful coping methods to alleviate distress.

Self Esteem

Job seeking, particularly in times of economic downturn, can be discouraging and maintaining a healthy self-esteem at such times can be challenging. It is important to maintain a positive opinion of yourself, for your own well-being and because you will be trying to make the best possible impression on potential employers. At the same time, you need to be philosophical about rejection, understanding that it is an integral part of job search and that it is only a short term setback.



Characteristics of low Self – Esteem:

- Blaming oneself when things go wrong instead of taking into account other things over which you have no control, such as the actions of other people or economic forces .
- Having discussions with oneself that are always negative, critical, and self blaming
- Judging oneself to be inferior to your peer
- Assuming that luck plays a large role in one's achievements and doesn't take credit for them.

Effects of low self – esteem:

- Self esteem is strongly related to how you view and react to things that happen in your life. Low self-esteem can reduce the quality of a person's life; for example you may perhaps:
 - Start to doubt your abilities
 - Find you have low resistance to challenging life events
 - Become self conscious around others – fearing you have been negatively judged
 - Begin to tolerate unreasonable behaviour from your partner.
 - Begin to feel depressed, angry or anxious.

Suggestions to offset such tendencies include:

- Look objectively at negative self talk – every time you criticise yourself, stop and look for objective evidence that the criticism is true, or ask a trusted friend for their opinion. Aim for a more realistic assessment of your abilities.
- Appreciate your unique qualities. Write a list of your good points and refer to it often, ask a family member or friend to help if you find this difficult.
- Be assertive – communicate your needs, feelings and opinions to others in a direct and honest manner.
- Don't compare yourself with others – recognise that everyone is different and that every person has value in their own right. Make an effort to accept yourself as you are.
- Practise the above suggestions - it takes effort and practice to replace unhelpful thoughts and behaviours and boost low self-esteem.
- Seek the help of a professional counsellor, trusted friend or health professional.



Depression

Depression is an illness which can result in from a combination of psychological factors. Many people find it difficult to acknowledge they may be suffering with depression: they may perceive it as a weakness rather than an illness, they may fear that their friends or colleagues may respond negatively, or fear being stigmatised or discriminated against through being labelled depressed.

Please be aware that depression is a common illness: the World health organisation estimates that one in four people will experience an serious mental health episode during their lifetime. Other studies conclude that one in four women and one in six men will suffer depression at some point in their lifetime. It is very common for a person to experience depression as a result of changed life events, including job loss.

Causes of depression

Depression is a complex and may result from a number of factors including:

Biological factors:

Substance or alcohol misuse, diet, inactivity, hormonal or neurochemical imbalances, thyroid problems, chronic illness, physical trauma.

Psychological Factors:

Negative thinking patterns, poor coping style, interpersonal style, intense emotions, low self – esteem, chronic stress or anxiety.

Social factors:

Bereavement , employment problems, relationship difficulties, arrival of a new baby, sustained problems at work or home, social isolation, separation or divorce.

A person's responses to life events are considered to be an interaction between physiological , cognitive, emotional or relationship factors which impact upon each other.

For example,

Receiving a rejection letter can result in feelings of nausea (physiological) and shame/guilt (emotional), the person may have thoughts such as "I'm worthless, or I'll never find a job" (cognitive) and may respond by withdrawing socially, staying indoors or giving up applying for jobs (behaviourial).



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Alternatively,

Receiving a rejection letter can result in feelings of alertness (physiological) and determination (emotional) the person may have thoughts such as “ this is tough” or “Im disappointed” and may respond by seeking support , meeting with a friend or colleague and engaging in sustained job search (behaviourial).

Symptoms of depression:

Typical symptoms include:

- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Sleep disturbance – insomnia or hypersomina
- Poor appetite and weight loss, or alternatively increased appetite and weight gain
- Fatigue and loss of energy
- Irritability and agitation
- Dimished ability to think or concentrate: indecisiveness
- Feelings of worthlessness, helplessness or excessive guilt
- Recurrent thoughts of self – harm or suicide.

If you have been experiencing these symptoms, particularly for longer than a two week period, and if they are effecting how you function on a day-to-day basis, seek professional help immediately. Tackle depressive symptoms as early as possible to address problems and avoid them becoming worse. There are a range of strategies and supports that can help you manage depression.

Treatment for Depression

Your GP

If you feel depressed, your doctor is the best place to start. They can do a medical assessment and check that there are no other conditions that may be responsible for your symptoms. Your doctor can also check for more serious forms of depression that may need prompt specialist help. Your doctor might prescribe medication or refer you to a different health professional for therapy. It is important for you to discuss treatment and any concerns or questions you have with your doctor to make sure you are comfortable with the path they suggest.

Medication

If your treatment involves antidepressant medication it will usually take two to six weeks for the medication to become effective. Discuss any side effects of the medication with your doctor or therapist. Everyone is different and many people need to try different medications before they find one that suits them.