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# Head way

Promoting healthy minds

*e-on*

# Pressure is something we all encounter at sometime in our life.

Major life changes like bereavement, marriage, moving house or divorce, negative social situations such as debt, poor housing, unemployment, can all contribute to the levels of pressure we feel. This booklet aims to give you guidance on building resilience to stress. Like any new skill this takes some patience and a lot of practise, but most importantly it is about finding the right balance.

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# What is stress?

In current times the word stress has become a word which describes a myriad of conditions, from mild frustrations through to the feeling of being unable to cope and function in the usual way.

Pressure and challenge is healthy, it's part of normal life, we need it to motivate us to succeed in our day to day activities, otherwise we would decline into apathy. When demands are made that are achievable, our confidence grows, we have increased focus and a true sense of achievement.

Each individual has an optimum pressure level and when this is exceeded our ability to respond effectively decreases. One person's challenge is another one's stress. In any one person the effect of pressure will be influenced by a variety of factors including support systems at home and work, our personality and coping strategies.



**Stress is not an illness but if it becomes excessive or prolonged you may start to experience physical or emotional symptoms.**

# Stress quiz

When does healthy pressure, that keeps us motivated, enthused and interested become stress?

Grade your answers to the questions below and find out how you are coping, use the tips to give you ideas on developing a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

**1= Never or Occasionally**      **2= Sometimes**      **3= Often**

Stress quiz	
Question	Answer
Do you wake up during the night or have difficulty falling asleep?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it hard finding time to participate in hobbies or leisure activity?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you describe yourself as moody?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you sweat profusely or have a dry mouth?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you ever experienced panic attacks, with shortness of breath and fast heart beat?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you suffer from aches and pains in your neck, shoulder or back?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you loose your temper easily over small incidents?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you suffer from heartburn, or migraine / frequent headaches	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you use alcohol, smoking or food to relax?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel unable to prioritise important issues in your life?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have others noticed a change in you recently?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it difficult to find relaxation in life?	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Reviewing your answers:

### 1. All answers 'never' or a mixture of 'never and 'sometimes'

You seem to have a healthy level of pressure, a good balance in your life and good resilience. Check through the tips on the next page and add any that you think might be useful to you.

### 2. Mainly 'sometimes' with less than 5 'oftens'

You may experience periods of stress, between periods of recovery - check the tips on the next page and practise them regularly to build upon your resilience

### 3. More than 5 'oftens'

You may be experiencing periods of stress, use the tips on the next page to build upon your resilience and coping mechanisms. Consider seeking further advice and support.

# Tips

Read through the following tips and think about how and when you can put them into action. Consider asking your family, friends and work colleagues to help support you. If you need further support or help consider calling the employee assistance line or speaking with your Occupational Health Advisor.

1. Avoid drinking caffeine four hours before you go to bed. Have a warm shower or bath prior to your planned bedtime (you might like to add lavender oil).
2. Switch off the TV, consider using a relaxation CD, or listening to relaxing music.
3. Practise breathing slowly and fully.
4. Reduce your daily intake of caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee, cola and replace with water, decaf or fruit juice.
5. Find a form of exercise that you enjoy and can participate in regularly. Make it part of your life (this may include walking the dog, playing with your children, swimming, yoga or going to the gym).
6. Talk to a friend, family member or work colleague about how you're feeling. Try not to bottle up emotions, seek professional help if this is required.
7. Try other activities such as exercise, deep breathing, or talking before using alcohol as a relaxant.
8. Make time to eat, before dinner take some time to stop and relax. Do not work as you eat.
9. Eat at regular intervals, do not skip meals. Avoid foods high in sugar and carbohydrates.
10. Make a list of all of the things that are worrying you. Choose just one item from the list and write a plan as to how you could control or resolve the issue.
11. Before losing your temper, stop, and take a break from the situation. Practise breathing slowly and take time to think about how you want to respond. How can you communicate in the most effective way?
12. Take time out to appreciate that you are doing your best in any given situation. Reward yourself when you achieve a goal or overcome a challenge or pressured situation.
13. Reduce your nicotine intake. Think about the times in the day when you most desire a cigarette. Are they times when you feel under pressure or feel a need to relax? Think about other ways you might cope with the situation.
14. Take time out to spend quality social time with people whose company you enjoy. This might be your friends, family or work colleagues.
15. Think about the last time you felt totally relaxed, can you recreate the situation?

# Am I stressed?

Many people are afraid of admitting to feeling stressed and struggle on till the point where they can no longer cope with their usual activities.

## Does this seem familiar to you?

- Oversleep because the alarm doesn't go off.
- Miss breakfast and jump in the car.
- Miss your turning on the motorway.
- Grab a coffee.
- Arrive late, have a row with your boss and spend the morning muttering under your breath.
- Grab another coffee.
- Realise you have a deadline and miss lunch.
- Have another coffee.
- Look at the e-mails that have built up over the morning, then decide to put off answering them.
- Have another coffee.

Life moves fast quickly, as each incident happens, we gradually start to feel out of control and feelings off being overwhelmed kick in.



One of the most effective ways of managing stress is to be aware of the early warning signs, identify potential causes and look for ways to resolve them. The signs and symptoms of stress can vary from individual to individual.

## The following is an example of some of these:

### Emotional symptoms may include:

Getting irritable or angry  
 Increased anxiety  
 Feeling numb  
 Being hypersensitive  
 Feeling drained or exhausted  
 Tearfulness

### Physical symptoms may include:

Tiredness  
 Indigestion and nausea  
 Headaches  
 Aching muscles  
 Palpitations  
 Constipation / diarrhoea  
 Skin problems  
 Sexual problems

### Mental symptoms may include:

Being more indecisive  
 Finding it hard to concentrate  
 Forgetfulness  
 Feelings of inadequacy  
 Prone to errors

### Behaviour Changes may include:

Sleep disturbance  
 Changes in eating habits  
 Smoking or drinking more than usual  
 Avoiding family and friends  
 Avoiding social activities  
 Difficulty following instructions

# Identify the cause of your stress

The most effective way of preventing stress from getting out of control is by finding ways to tackle the causes of stress and to improve your coping strategies. Knowing what causes stress for you can help you cope better and provide mental and emotional relief. There are many ways to plan for and avert stress. Recognising your specific triggers is one of the first steps.

## Common causes of stress include:

- Work.
- Family.
- Health concerns.
- Debt.
- Unrealistic expectations.
- Sudden traumatic events.

Below is a stress diary. Use it over 5 days to understand the causes of short term pressure in your life. It will give you an important insight into how you react to pressure and challenge, and help you understand the level of pressure at which you prefer to operate. Think about what you were doing when you felt pressured, how it made you feel and what you did to feel better. Once you've completed the five days, look back on the diary and think about how you might manage pressure in the future.

Managing pressure			
Day	What caused the pressure?	How did it make you feel ? (very unhappy 0, very happy 10)	How did you manage the pressure ? Eg: took a break, cried.
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

- First look at the different pressures you experienced. List the types of pressure you experienced by frequency, with the most frequent type of stress at the top of the list.
- Prepare a second list with the most unpleasant type of pressure at the top of the list.
- Looking at your lists of pressures, those at the top of each list are the most important for you to learn to control.

## What are your top 3 pressures?

1 ..... 2 ..... 3 .....

Now think about how well you handled the pressured event. Does this show the areas where you handled the pressure poorly, could you improve your stress management skills.

## If so, how? List below:

1 ..... 2 ..... 3 .....

Having analysed your diary, you should fully understand what the most important and frequent sources of pressure are in your life and identified how you could improve the handling of these events.

# Managing your time

There are 168 hours in a week, 24 hours in a day - ever wished there were more? Using the table below, calculate the time you have left in an average week for quality time for you.

Managing pressure		Hours
No.	Weekly tasks	
1	How many hours per week do you sleep?	
2	How many hours per week do you spend shopping, cooking and eating?	
3	How many hours a week do you work? (include paid and unpaid overtime)	
4	How many hours per week do you spend travelling?	
5	How many hours per week do you spend doing chores/ looking after the children/ feeding the dog/ family taxi duties etc.?	
6	Now add up all the hours you would spend doing these weekly tasks (questions 1-5)	
7	Subtract the answer for question 6 from 168, the number of hours in a week	<b>Total =</b>

How many hours did you have left? Look at the total hours left and think about how you spend that time. Is it quality 'you' time? Make a note of the last time you enjoyed quality 'you' time and make a commitment as to when you'll experience time like that again.

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If one of your main sources of stress is the sheer number of things that need to get done, getting organised should help you feel more in control. Simplifying your life should also help you feel less overwhelmed.

- Plan your day and week around **YOU**. Manage your time rather than let it manage you. Learn to prioritise, be realistic about what you can achieve. Make a list of what you can do on any given day. Do what is urgent / important first and realise that some things can wait until later. Cut out some activities and delegate tasks. Break large demands into small manageable chunks.
- Work through tasks one at a time. Variety is a good idea, where possible, vary your tasks, mix dull jobs with interesting ones, tiring jobs with easier ones. Speak to your line manager about your commitments, ask for their support in improving your work life balance if you think this is needed.
- Take time out, book time in your day to unwind, reflect and think. It will help recharge your batteries. Make sure you eat regularly.
- Try to leave work at work. Spend five minutes at the end of each day making a list of what still needs to be done and review it first thing in the morning when you are feeling fresh and revitalised.

# Communication with others

One of the most effective things we can do when we are stressed is to talk to a friendly listener who remains calm and listens in a way that makes us feel understood. To assist you in reducing the stress you feel, develop a network of friends, family members and work colleagues who you can turn to when your feelings threaten to overwhelm you. If you are a naturally private or independent person it might seem challenging to build a support system, but in order to cultivate this circle of listeners, you need to take the first step. Open up to your managers at work or your partners at home about what you perceive is giving you pressure. Different perspectives may provide solutions that you hadn't previously considered.

## Being Assertive

Think about what it means to be assertive. Ask yourself the question 'do you find it difficult to say no?' Do you find yourself wishing 'if only I had done or said that'. Perhaps you are not assertive enough?

### Being assertive means you are able to:

- Be honest with yourself and others.
- Say what you mean and feel.
- Be self confident.
- Understand other peoples point of view.
- Negotiate and reach workable compromise.
- Have self respect and respect for others.

### Here are some tips that might help you practise your skills:

- Be clear and direct in what you say – misunderstanding often occurs as a result of unclear messages.
- Use appropriate body language. Adopt an open, relaxed posture and face the other party square on. Establish eye contact and try to keep your voice steady.
- Keep calm and stick to the point.

Learning to be assertive takes time and practise. Look on Academy on Line for some courses which might help you



# Positive thinking

When feeling stressed it is easy to focus on negative occurrences, forget the positives, and to feel isolated from others. When managing stress, you may need to find a way to change your thinking and manage your expectations. You might like to consider the following tips:

- Try to spend time at the end of each day focussing on the positive things you've achieved since you woke that morning.
- Reflect on what you have done and what you've achieved, rather than spending time worrying about what still needs to be completed.
- It is hard to be perfect all of the time! Good enough can also be satisfactory.
- If mistakes occur concentrate on the learning points, rather than beating yourself up.

# Getting up and getting active

Exercise is one of the best stress reduction methods available - it's nature's own antidepressant!

Exercise provides a psychological boost by releasing natural chemicals in the brain, which help reduce the feelings of anxiety and stress, making your working day far more enjoyable.

## Did you know that when you exercise:

- Your temperature rises, bringing with it a feeling of warm relaxation, endorphins are released giving us a natural high.
- Has a positive effect on certain biochemicals, such as serotonin, which affect mood.

## Hints

- Choose an activity you enjoy, that way you're more likely to keep it up.
- Start slowly and gradually build up the amount you do.
- You don't have to engage in a full fitness workout, just fit exercises into your usual routine.
- Recruit some colleagues/ friends to join in.

## Let's workout at work!

- Your temperature rises, bringing with it a feeling of warm relaxation, endorphins are released. Try to build up your activity levels, does the site at which you work have a sports and social club - perhaps you might like to start one!
- Try walking part or all of the way to work.
- Go for a walk at lunchtime. Ask a colleague to go with you and catch up on all their news on the way.

# Mood Foods

What you eat can affect how you feel. Evidence shows that consumption of high fat, high sugar snack food increase when people are under pressure. Stress may also result in under eating and loss of appetite, which may in turn lead to depression.

## Some simple guidelines:

- Eat a balanced healthy diet
- Eat regular meals, including breakfast
- Eat complex carbohydrates such as, wholemeal bread, pasta, jacket potatoes. These encourage the brain to produce serotonin which has a calming effect and will help keep your blood sugar constant
- Avoid refined carbohydrates such as crisps and biscuits which can contribute towards mood swings
- Eat lots of fruit and vegetables - remember the 5 a day rule!
- Try to drink at least 1 litre of water per day

## Mood 'Stressors':

- Sugar
- Caffeine
- Alcohol
- Chocolate
- Wheat containing foods
- Additives
- Dairy
- Saturated Fats

## Caffeine

Do you make a regular contribution to the 2.5 billion cups of coffee drunk each day? It lures you out of bed, and helps you face the day ahead. The rich tempting aroma and flavour are welcoming and familiar.

So what's wrong with your coffee habit? How about low energy, extra stress, mineral depletion, exhausted adrenal glands, indigestion, anxiety and mood swings. Too much caffeine in a day will drain your energy, upset your sleep patterns and add to your stress levels!

### Now for the good news!

By reducing your caffeine intake - remember caffeine is also found in tea, and cola type drinks, you will reap the benefits of:

Reduced stress, better skin, fewer mood swings, more energy and a better nights sleep!

So what are the alternatives: Decaffeinated coffee & tea, herbal teas, fruit teas, milk and coca, drinking chocolate, fruit juice and of course water.

# A Good night's sleep

Sleep problems and lack of sleep can cause more than just tiredness - a lack of quality sleep can cause accidents, affect your relationships, reduce your productivity, and affect your mental and physical health. When you're under pressure sleep disturbance is not uncommon.

Adults on average usually need 7-8 hours of sleep per night.

## Some simple tips to aid you with sleep are:

- Stick to a schedule. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on the weekends.
- Don't eat or drink large amounts before going to bed.
- Avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol in the evening.
- Exercise regularly but not within 3 hours of your bedtime.
- Make your bedroom cool, dark, quiet and comfortable.
- Sleep at night, avoid naps during the day.
- Choose a comfortable mattress and pillow and make sure you turn your mattress regularly.
- Start a relaxing bedtime routine.
- Go to bed when you're tired and turn out the lights, If you don't fall asleep within 15 - 20 minutes don't lie there tossing and turning, get up and do something else and return to bed when you feel tired.
- Sleeping tablets should be seen as a last resort; seek advice from your General Practitioner before taking these.



# Take Action

This booklet has been written to help you manage pressure in a way that puts you in control. The first sections have shown you how to recognise pressure and stress and whilst the second section asked you to consider your lifestyle and taught you simple coping techniques.

**The next step is to take action! Simply look at the pressures affecting you in two ways:**

- How can you reduce the pressure you feel under - from work, life or balancing the two?
- How can you cope better?

Choose a goal based on either reducing stressors or improving coping skills and list the actions you will need to take to achieve your goal for example: Goal - pressure of workload, Action - prioritise my workload, organise my time and speak to my manager etc. Simply tick once you achieve each individual action over the next week.

**My week one goal is:**

Managing pressure	
Actions	Complete
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	

- Did you complete your actions?
- Did you learn ways of managing the pressure better?
- What can you do to improve things further?

Now you have completed one week, consider recording your goals on a weekly basis and rewarding yourself each time you complete your list of actions. Don't get disheartened if you don't complete your list each week; think about the reasons why you did not complete it and what you could do differently next time.

# Sources of further support

## Occupational Health

For support you with any health related concerns that may impact on your work.

The Occupational Health Toolkit now has a section focussing on mental wellbeing, where you can find more information about the topics covered in this booklet.

Call OH One on 02476 182400 or visit the Occupational Health Toolkit on Portal.

## PPC

Your employee assistance programme can provide information and support on a variety of issues including: debt, relationships, legal issues etc

Contact them via the 24 hour confidential helpline on 0800 282193 or via PPC online accessed via the Portal.

## Active Energy

Consider booking an Active Energy Assessment. This free, confidential health assessment is undertaken by a highly trained fitness instructor and consists of:

- A medical history & lifestyle questionnaire
- Height, weight, BMI levels
- Blood pressure test
- Hydration levels test
- Urine analysis

## Don't forget...

Speak to your line manager or Human Resources Advisor if you're experiencing pressures at work that you're finding it difficult to cope with.

If you are experiencing physical or emotional symptoms that are affecting your daily life, consider contacting your General Practitioner for further advice.

# Other sources of support

## Useful contacts

Organisation	Web site
International Stress Management Association	<a href="http://www.isma.org.uk/stressnews">www.isma.org.uk/stressnews</a>
No Panic	<a href="http://www.no-panic.co.uk">www.no-panic.co.uk</a>
Citizens Advice Bureau	<a href="http://www.adviceguide.org.uk">www.adviceguide.org.uk</a>
Alcoholics Anonymous	<a href="http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk">www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk</a>
Drugscope	<a href="http://www.drugscope.org.uk">www.drugscope.org.uk</a>
MIND	<a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">www.mind.org.uk</a>
Samaritans	<a href="http://www.samaritans.org">www.samaritans.org</a>
SANE	<a href="http://www.sane.org.uk">www.sane.org.uk</a>