



# Stress!!!

*Awareness of it...*

*How to handle it...*

*Looking after yourself...*

*Information on services...*



## What is stress?

**Stress is a state of arousal experienced during times that we are under some sort of pressure.**

Sometimes this pressure is caused by circumstances, sometimes by others and sometimes by ourselves.

Many things that stress us are objective, but we can also 'turn on' the stress response with unhelpful thoughts, beliefs or attitudes. Sometimes we respond to stressful situations by creating even more stress in our bodies by overeating, smoking, drinking too much alcohol or coffee and not exercising.

Not all stress is bad. Stress is a natural occurrence in life and everyday stress is necessary for growth and development.

Most people enjoy being stimulated or challenged. The danger lies in too much stress or prolonged stress. At first we may become tired and irritable but if the stress continues and is not dealt with effectively the result can be physical and mental ill-health.

Usually, we encounter numerous potentially stressful experiences in our everyday lives such as the weather, pressures of work, financial insecurity, relationships, losses, feeling isolated, and many more.

Stress tolerance is individual - what one person may experience as 'energising', another may find stressful. Your capacity to cope with stress changes at different times and stages of your life.

### How can work contribute to stress?

One of the major causes of stress in the workplace is feeling that things are beyond our control.

Other stressors that may arise from the rural workplace include:

- Weather not doing what is needed
- Overload 'too much work, too little time'
- Financial pressures and uncertain incomes
- Unfair and/or unequal returns within the sector
- Rising costs of geographic isolation
- Decreasing social services in rural areas
- Relationships conflict with colleagues, boss or family
- Long hours, shift work, being unclear about work roles
- Conflicts between work roles, job demands, and juggling the balance between work and home life
- Not being able to talk openly about stress, health or mental health problems
- Advances in technology bring many advantages, but they are also a major contributor to daily stress - computers, printers, cell phones are very necessary but they can be soooo frustrating...and stressful
- Complicated tasks, poor training, feeling isolated or undervalued
- Bullying or harassment
- Physical environment noise, dirt, dangers, poor equipment, messy workspace

Many of these stressors will also apply to people who work from home or do unpaid or voluntary work as well.

**"It's not the stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it."**  
Hans Selye,  
pioneer stress researcher.

## What are some of the warning signs of stress?

- Losing your zest for life; losing interest in family, friends or work
- Changes in your sleeping patterns
- Nervous 'twitches' or muscle spasms
- Indigestion, stomach upsets
- Muscle tension and pains in lower back, chest, shoulders, joints or other parts of body
- Skin itches or rashes for no apparent reason
- Frequent colds or flu
- Shortness of breath or shallow breathing
- Memory or concentration problems
- Feeling anxious and tense for no obvious reason
- Finding it hard to make decisions
- Tearfulness for no apparent reason
- Feeling impatient or irritable

If you are experiencing high and persistent levels of stress and would like further information or support:

- Talk to your doctor or health professional
- If the situation is urgent - phone your local mental health service Telephone 753-6139

It is important to learn more about what your personal levels of stress are. That way, you will know when it is time to do something about it.

### A couple of useful websites:

- [www.betterliving.co.nz/atwork/stress](http://www.betterliving.co.nz/atwork/stress)
- [www.helpguide.org/mental/stress\\_signs.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm)

## What can I do about the stress?

It is not always practical to change our work place or where we live or our relationships - but we can perhaps improve those parts of our environment which are causing the most stress.

We can also learn to cope differently with stress.

Here are some ways to help you reduce and prevent too much stress and tension.

### Talk your worries over.

Spend time with others you trust. Talk with a friend, partner, parents, counsellor or clergy or someone else you trust.

### Limit your expectations.

Be selective and use your energy to do the most important and possible tasks. Set goals you can reach. Do not blame yourself if you don't reach all your goals these may be possible next time.

### Eat well.

Eat a variety of fresh foods in a well balanced diet. Some foods actually cause or increase nervous tension, for example, coffee, tea, chocolate, alcohol and soft drinks. These are usually foods we crave when we are stressed so be aware of this and resist taking them - mostly.

### Make time to exercise.

Make some time (three times a week minimum) for exercise such as walking, swimming or anything you enjoy doing.

### Organise your work habits.

Get up 5 or 10 minutes earlier so you don't have to rush; break large projects down into small steps. Spend 5 to 10 minutes at the end of the day preparing for the next day. This helps feeling that you are in control of your life.

### Take time out.

Some people find it hard to take time out for a holiday or a weekend. Give yourself a breather every now and

then. Treat yourself and yours.

### Solve problems.

Try to find a solution to conflict; learn to be more assertive and learn to say NO.

### Feel better about yourself.

Identify what you do well, and recognise and acknowledge your qualities and characteristics. Practice positive 'self-talk.' It does help.

### Practise relaxation.

Try yoga, meditation, a massage, a long hot bath, listen to music etc. Relaxation is very important; learn what works for you and practise it regularly.

### Get sufficient sleep.

To help you sleep, take a walk in the evening, meditate, or practise relaxation.

### Put fun and laughter in your life.

This has proven to be good for our health and it feels good!

## Other resources available...

**Like Minds Taranaki** Box 5015 New Plymouth  
Tel: 06-759-0966 or Email: [mental.health@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mental.health@xtra.co.nz)

**Like Minds National Office HELP LINE:**  
24 hour service - 0800-102-107

**Depression Helpline:** 0800-111-757

**Hauora Taranaki PHO** 06-759-4364

**Lifeline Tele Counselling:** 0800-5433-54

**Local GPs, Counsellors /Psychologists**  
refer Yellow Pages

**Mensline:** 0800-636-754

**Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand**  
PO Box 10051 Dominion Road, Auckland 1446  
Phone: 09 300 7030

**Supporting Families Taranaki** 06-757-9300

**Taranaki District Health Board** 06-753-6139

**Youthline** 0800-376-633

**If you think you may be stressed  
- ask for help  
- the sooner the better.**

**If you think you know someone who is  
stressed - offer to help  
- the sooner the better**

## Mental Health Matters...of note...

46% of people will suffer from a mental illness at some stage in their lives

1 in 5 New Zealanders will experience a mental illness in any given year

Mental illness can affect anyone at any time regardless of age, culture, income or gender

For every person with a mental illness, there are many other people affected - family, friends, workmates, neighbours...

Not only do people experiencing mental illness have to cope with an illness that can radically change their lives, but they often experience rejection and discrimination and this is so, so unnecessary...

A diagnosis of mental illness does not say anything about a person's capabilities, character or future.

The vast majority of people who have some kind of mental illness get better, hold down jobs, make good partners, lovers, parents, are not dangerous and have a great deal to offer their community.

In fact, the very act of dealing with mental illness often gives people extraordinary strength of character.

One of the biggest barriers to recovery is discrimination. This stops many people from seeking professional help.

It is also why stopping discrimination and championing understanding, respect, rights, and equality for people with mental illness is just as important as providing the best treatments and therapies.

## Treatments are available and they do work...

If you feel that depression or anxiety or stress is adversely affecting your life or a family member or friend... the best person to see is someone with medical knowledge.

The nurse or doctor will be experienced in understanding mental health and may be able to treat you themselves.

Ideally, they will also refer you or yours to a counsellor or psychologist. While not able to prescribe medication, these two professionals can provide support and coping strategies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and inter-personal skills that, together with medication, will help ease distress and promote a return to wellness.

Some of the education and skills learnt can make significant improvements to coping with life's challenges, now and in the future.



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**HAUORA TARANAKI (PHO)**