



Dealing with stress



‘Stress’ is not an illness itself, it is simply the word we use to describe the brain’s response to demands.

Those stressful demands come in many forms, not all of them unpleasant. Even happy events, such as a wedding or the birth of a child, can be stressful, because they involve change.

Lots of day-to-day events can be stressful. Being late for a meeting or stuck in a traffic jam can cause stress. Living with a long-term condition can be stressful because it involves a great deal of change and sometimes other demanding emotions, that can sometimes cause frustration.



Your body and stress

When you are stressed, your brain notices this, and believes the body to be in danger. So, it prepares for 'fight or flight'. This means that chemicals such as adrenaline, are released into your bloodstream. The following stress responses can help you identify when you might be under too much stress:

- Your heart begins to pump faster.
- Your pulse rate increases.
- You may have trouble breathing.
- Over time, your immunity drops and you may have other problems with your health.

Although the basic stress response is the same for everyone, individuals experience stress differently and may show different symptoms.

Sustained pressure can affect your heart and raise your blood pressure, both of which are not good for your heart. It can also make you feel more tired. So what should you do about it?



It's in your head

It's very easy to think of stress as something that happens to us, that comes at us from outside. But in fact it is our personal response to stress that causes the problems, as we have seen. And actually, there is quite a lot that you can do to alter your own response to stress, and make it less harmful to your health.

First of all, learn to recognise how your body responds to stress, for example do you develop sleep problems, get irritable, or lose motivation?

Once you know the signs, look out for them. When you notice yourself becoming stressed, see if you can identify the source and then, look for ways to solve that problem or demand in a productive way. For example, if a problem within the family is causing you stress, start a discussion with family members in order to find a solution.



SCHEDULE SOME TIME TO REST

Rest and relaxation are your best weapons against stress, so plan them into your life. Don't just hope that an opportunity to rest will present itself – schedule it! There are lots of ways to rest and relax; in another e-mail, about anxiety, we gave you some relaxation exercises to try.



BE MINDFUL

In an earlier email, about anxiety, we also looked at mindfulness. Make mindfulness a frequent aspect of your daily life. Focus on the present moment and calmly acknowledge your feelings, thoughts and body sensations. By being mindful you can respond in new ways to situations and make better choices.



PACE YOURSELF

Accept that sometimes, you can't do everything. Prioritise what matters and consider whether any of the pressures and demands upon you can actually be discarded altogether.

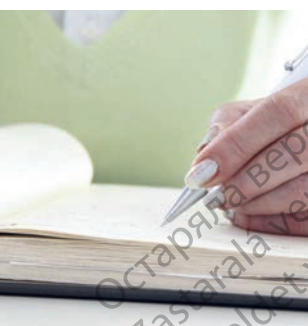




FIND SUPPORT

Make sure you have support from the people around you, in particular make sure that you have at least one person to whom you can talk about your feelings.

Wherever possible, delegate. Ask friends, family members or other for help you manage day to day tasks and other sources of stress.



IDENTIFY YOUR STRESSORS AND START MAKING CHANGES

You might find it helpful to write down the sources of stress in your life, and think of ways to deal with them that removes, or at least reduces, the stress they cause you.



Long periods of stress are bad news for people with heart failure. If you are feeling overwhelmed or distressed, please speak to your healthcare team and try some of the self-help techniques mentioned here. Remember that stress is not always 'outside' you, and that changing your own responses to stress can make you feel much better.

If you happen to have an urgent medical concern, please call your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call your local Emergency Contact number. Remember, your doctor is your primary source for information on your condition and treatment. Be sure to speak with them if you have any questions or concerns.