"Knowledge Dispels Fear"

The Depression Self Help Plan

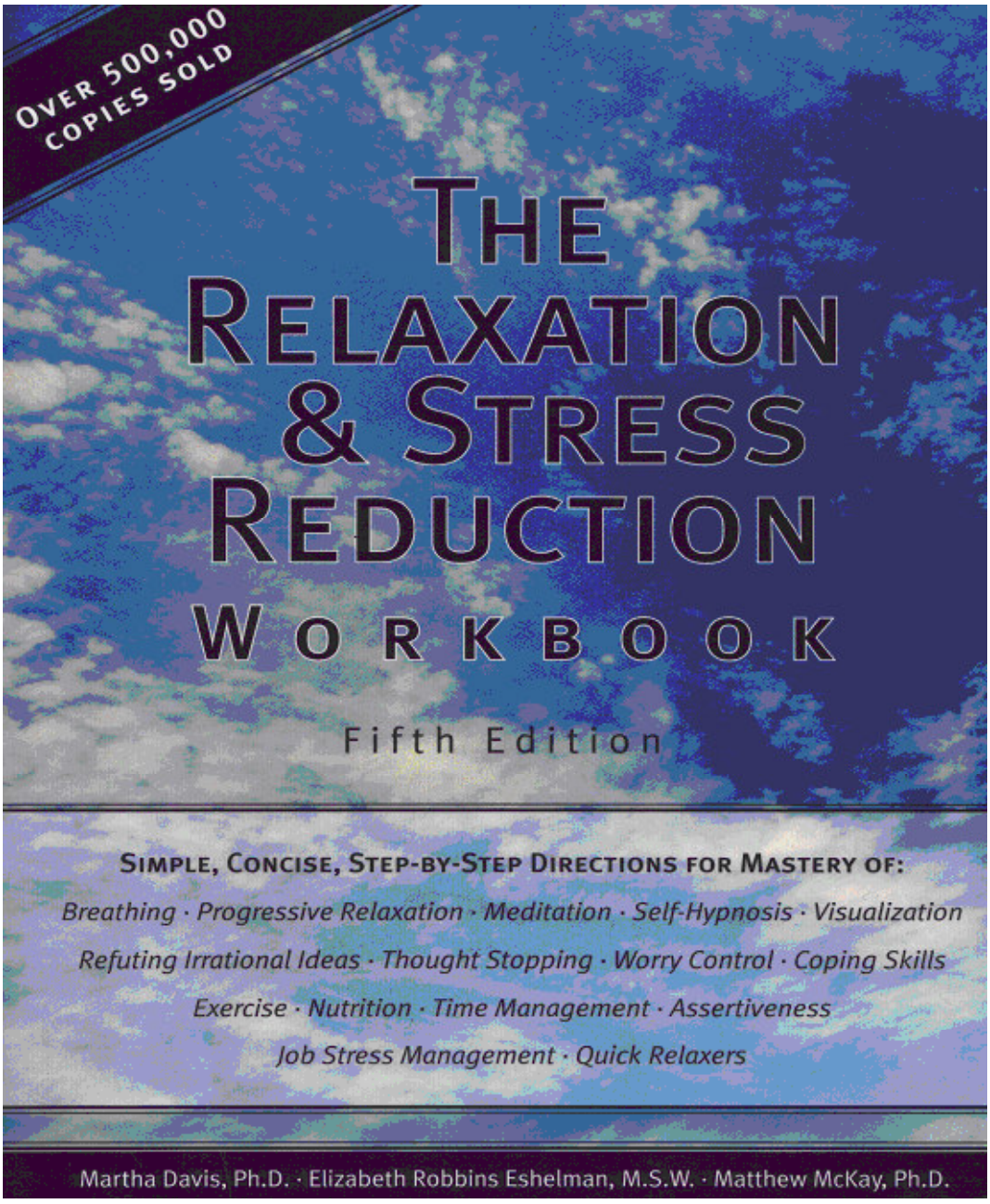
email: depressionselfhelp@lycos.com

Session (3) Managing Stress

Caution

The Depression Self-Help Plan is designed as a self-help tool for clinical Depression. It is important that you do not diagnose yourself as suffering depression but see your Doctor for an assessment and diagnosis, because there are some medical conditions whose symptoms can mimic those of depression such as thyroid gland problems, pernicious anaemia etc, and if this is the case then it is vital to get it diagnosed and treated by your doctor. If you have any health problems and/or are taking any form of regular medication, are pregnant, then discuss with your doctor before using the depression self-help techniques outlined in this course. The techniques outlined in this course are designed to be used in conjunction with any treatment from your Doctor, not as an alternative to standard treatment by your doctor. The techniques outlined in this self-help plan, such as relaxation, exercise, etc. may cause a few people on long-term medication to require a reduction to their medication; this should not be done by the individual but by their doctor. Do not practise techniques like relaxation while driving a car, or doing any other activity that needs concentration for safety and do not drive immediately after using a relaxation technique, acupressure or any other technique that makes you drowsy. We also advise that you do not make any life changing decisions such as leaving a job or ending a relationship until you have recovered from your depression, otherwise you may make a mistake that you later regret.

Recommended Reading: Managing Stress



Davis M. PhD, Robbins Eshelman E. MSW, and McKay M. PhD (2000) The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook, New Harbinger inc.

Introduction

> ***"Reducing the amount of stress in your life is one of the most positive steps you can take to lessen the symptoms and severity of your depression."*** (Dr K. McKenzie)

Unmanaged stress is becoming more and more of a problem in our fast paced, complex, 21st Century life. You only have to pick up a newspaper, read a magazine, watch television, listen to the radio or walk into any High Street bookshop and see the many books written on the subject of stress, to realise that we perceive it to be a big problem. Stress is much more recognized than it used to be, we have become very aware of the potential negative impact of stress on our health. Yet despite all of this information and wealth of knowledge, the subject of stress still remains vague and not very well understood. There are also many myths about stress that are not accurate and this further confuses the subject.

Life in the 21st Century is infinitely far more complex than it has ever been. We were never designed to live in this complex, modern world with its many demands on us. We live in a crowded, noisy, 24-hour society, which we often refer to as the rat race. Our lives are run by deadlines, the clock, modern technology, mobile phones, pagers, faxes, computers, satellites and a hundred and one other demands and pressures.

Many of us have too many tasks and too little time. We drive our children through traffic-clogged roads to maybe two or three different schools. We then try to get to work on time, through more congested roads with many more cars than there used to be, or we deal with delayed trains as some of us may have to commute hundreds of miles to work. While we are at work we have to operate computers, learn newer versions of software, deal with faxes, phones, manage many tasks and people, often without adequate training or support. There are no longer jobs for life and many people are working under temporary or short-term contracts. Therefore it is hardly surprising that stress is such a problem.

Research has shown that today we have fewer friends than we used to and live in a more fragmented, isolated society with lower levels of social support. Low levels of social support have been shown to make us more vulnerable to stress.

We are less physically active, eat poorer diets, there is a greater amount of pollution, higher crime rates, greater urbanisation (it is known that there is a higher incidence of stress, anxiety and depression in urban areas than in rural areas), increased drug and alcohol misuse, we see daily the many world tragedies of famine, flood and war, beamed directly onto the television in our homes, we have higher levels of debt and we no longer have a religious faith to rely on. Is it any wonder that depression and stress are such problems today?

What is Stress

"Stress is a reaction people have when excessive pressure or demands are placed upon them, and arises when an individual believes they are unable to cope." (The Health and Safety Executive)

There are many definitions of the word stress, but it is often used loosely to mean distress. In order to help us understand the concept of stress and to remove any ambiguity and misunderstandings, it is important to clarify what we actually mean by the term stress. The Health and Safety Executive quote as outlined above is one good definition.

Stress is a somewhat difficult concept to define largely because it is such a unique, individual and subjective experience. What one person may regard as stressful another person may not. The word stress has become an umbrella term, overused and misunderstood, meaning different things to different people. It is used at one extreme to describe minor events like being caught up in a traffic jam or having an argument, right up to the other extreme where some people use it, incorrectly, to describe clinical depression (which is not stress). This is partly the cause of some of the confusion that surrounds the subject of stress. To complicate the matter further some people use the term stress to describe the causes of their stress and others use the term to describe their physiological, psychological and behavioural reactions in response to the external event.

> *"Research has shown that there is a physiological difference between stress and pressure. A person experiencing stress has higher levels of the various hormones in their blood stream than a person who is merely challenged."*
> (Professor Cary Cooper, PhD)

It used to be thought that there were two types of stress, Eustress (good stress) and Distress (bad stress), and that a certain amount of good stress was required to stimulate and challenge us. However recent research has indicated that this view of good/bad stress is incorrect and that all stress is bad.

It is correct however to say that we do need a certain amount of stimulus to make life interesting and to be at our most efficient, but this stimulation should be called Pressure which is different from Stress. However if pressure is excessive for too long it can develop into stress. The point at which pressure develops into stress can be different in different people.

Research by Dr Robert M. Yerkes MD and Dr John D. Dodson MD, of Harvard School of Medicine, who developed the Human Performance Curve shows us that a small amount of pressure improves our performance, but excess pressure reduces our performance and efficiency increasing our vulnerability to a wide range of physical, psychological and social health problems.

The Fight Flight Response

> ***". . . the 60 pounds of gear I was wearing suddenly weighed nothing . . . ."***
> (New York Fire Fighter talking about his experience when a building near the World Trade Towers started to collapse and he had to start running for his life)

Humanity has survived and thrived on this earth for hundreds of thousands of years, through some of the most difficult and stressful of times. One of the factors that has enabled us to survive is a system called the fight/flight response. Whenever we perceive we are physically or psychologically threatened an inbuilt, reflex, alarm-system in our brain triggers the release of electrical impulses and a variety of hormones. There is a complex hormonal cascade of over 30 stress hormones, such as adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol, which have a powerful and widespread effect on our body's biochemistry, physiology and psychology, giving us the extra strength and speed we need to deal with the threatening situation. If a wild animal attacks us, we can either run away (flight) or if trapped, stand our ground and fight.

The fight/flight response is a 40,000-year-old model, its alarm reaction is designed for short-term use to deal with physical threats in which the emergency resolves very quickly in a few seconds or minutes; either we kill the wild animal or it kills us! But life in the 21st Century is infinitely far more complex than it was 40,000 years ago (or even 50 years ago for that matter). Many of the stressors today are psychological in origin, and they are chronic, lasting days, weeks, months, even years in some cases. Modern stressful events such as financial problems, health worries, work problems, difficult neighbours, relationship problems, etc. can not be resolved by fighting or running away; never the less these psychological stressors still trigger the fight/flight response.

The fight/flight response is designed to be triggered occasionally. However modern living keeps tripping it, making it overactive and this can be a factor in causing stress related health problems. These problems are then made worse by the typical western diet, full of fat and sugar that can cause increased blood clotting, increased blood pressure and can stimulate higher levels of stress hormones in the blood stream.

This is then complicated by the fact that we do not get enough physical exercise. Exercise can help to counter the stress response by - reducing blood clotting, boosting immune function, reducing blood pressure, relaxing muscles, increasing metabolism which burns up stress hormones and making the sympathetic nervous system (which triggers the stress response) less sensitive.

When the fight/flight response is triggered over 1400 different physiological and biochemical changes occur in the body. But there are also psychological effects making us more alert, aggressive, angry, fearful etc., which all motivate us when we are physically threatened, but have to be suppressed during a meeting with the Bank Manager that doesn't go so well!

Having said this, the fight/flight response is still an important part of our body's vital defence systems. Even though the majority of physical threats have gone, there are still situations today where the fight/flight response can be life saving; such as escaping a house fire or speeding up the reflexes to avoid an accident on the motorway. For example, a few years ago a farm worker had his arm torn off by a bailing machine, yet he was able to pick up his severed arm, carrying it for two miles, to get help. It was the fight/flight response that enabled him to do this.

There are 2 co-ordinated stages to the fight/flight response:

1. Short Term Fight/Flight Response
2. Long Term Fight/Flight Response

1. ***Short Term Fight/Flight Response, SAM (Sympathetic Adreno Medullary) Axis***

The SAM or Short-term response is the primary system that is triggered within us in response to short-term threats. This is a reflex response, which is electrically triggered. Electrical impulses from the hypothalamus, a gland located in the brain, travel along nerves that directly connect to the adrenal glands (these sit on top of the kidneys) and stimulate the release of stress hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline. The body cannot sustain this short-term fight/flight response for long because it would become exhausted. If the stressor is a more chronic one then this triggers the secondary, longer-term fight/flight response to take over.

2. ***Long Term Fight/Flight Response (HPAC Hypothalamic Pituitary Adreno Cortical) Axis***

The longer-term fight/flight response is triggered hormonally. This time the hypothalamus secretes a hormone called CRF (Corticotropin Releasing Factor), which stimulates the pituitary gland (also located in the brain) to produce ACTH (Adrenocorticotropic Hormone), which in turn stimulates the adrenal cortex (outer part of the adrenal glands) to release stress hormones like cortisol. This longer-term fight/flight response is affected by our perception of the event, which decides the type and amount of stress hormones that are secreted. Research has shown that chronic activation of this longer-term HPAC fight/flight response can be a factor in causing a number of psychological and physiological health problems.

Nerve impulses travel at 150 metres per second so the first stage of the fight/flight response, the short-term response, occurs very quickly, literally in milliseconds; whereas the second, long-term (HPAC) response takes several minutes to kick in and lasts longer.

The fight/flight response is controlled by the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) which is the part of our nervous system that controls the automatic functions of the body (those not under our conscious control such as regulating heart beat, digestion etc.)

The Autonomic Nervous System is made up of two branches:

1. The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS). This is the system that triggers the biochemical and physiological changes brought about by fight/flight. Think of it as the accelerator on a car or a supercharger on an engine which pumps in more air and fuel to increase speed.

2. Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS). The second part of the ANS is the Parasympathetic Nervous System, which helps to switch off the fight/flight response and return all hormones, organs and systems, back to pre-stress levels.

Our body's organs such as the brain and heart, and systems such as the endocrine, immune and digestive systems, are all hard-wired into the Autonomic Nervous System. As a result the Sympathetic branch can speed-up an organ or system and the Parasympathetic branch can slow-down an organ or system.

The fight/flight response is triggered by the Sympathetic branch of the Nervous System, but three minutes after we perceive that the threat is over, the brain, via the hypothalamus, stimulates the Parasympathetic nervous system which switches off the fight/flight response. The stress hormones fall back to pre-stress levels, reversing all the biochemical and physiological responses; blood pressure falls, heart rate slows down, digestion is stimulated again. However if the stress becomes chronic the fight/flight response can become overactive and maintaining factors can leave us with heightened stress levels even though the original stress may be over.

The brain cannot distinguish between a real or potential threat. It can only respond to both, by triggering the fight/flight response. For example research has shown that our levels of stress hormones rise when we watch a horror film even though we are not physically experiencing the stressor.

Biochemical and Physiological Changes caused by the Fight/Flight Response

All the biological, psychological, chemical and physiological changes brought about by the fight/flight response are designed to give us extra strength and speed to help us fight or run away. They are vital in the short-term but in the long-term they can have a potentially negative impact on our physical, psychological and social well-being. Some of the changes that occur include:

- ***Blood Clotting***

The blood clots more quickly, to help reduce the risk of blood loss if we are injured in fighting or fleeing.

- ***Blood Flow***

Our muscles are a vital part of fight-flight. Blood flow to our muscles is increased by 300%, by being diverted from less important areas like the skin.

- ***Blood Pressure***

In order to pump the extra blood, oxygen, fats and sugars to the muscles to supply energy, our blood pressure and heart rate increase.

- ***Blood Sugar and Fats Increase***

Stored reserves of fats and sugars are converted and released into our blood stream to supply extra energy to fight or run away.

- ***Breathing Rate Increases***

The muscles need extra oxygen for fight-flight. To supply this extra oxygen requirement our breathing rate speeds up and the airways in the lungs widen. Breathing switches from relaxed, slow, diaphragmatic breathing, to fast, shallow, chest breathing.

- ***Digestion slows***

Blood is diverted from less vital areas such as digestion, to more vital areas such as muscles; digestion slows and stomach acidity increases.

- ***Dry Mouth***

Our mouth dries up and digestive juices reduce as blood is diverted from less important areas to provide energy needed elsewhere in the body.

- ***Fear/Anxiety***

The stress hormone adrenaline, primes an area of the brain called the Amygdala to feel increased anxiety and fear, our thoughts race and we can think more quickly.

- ***Hearing***

Our hearing becomes sharper.

- ***Muscles Tense***

In order to give us extra speed and strength the muscles of our body tense.

- ***Pupils Dilate***

In order to help us see more clearly, our pupils widen to let in more light.

- ***Perspiration Increases***

During fight/flight our metabolic rate increases and so we get hotter because of all the biochemical reactions going on in the body; to help prevent us from over-heating we need to cool down so perspiration increases.

- ***Red Blood Cells Increase***

The spleen manufactures more of the oxygen-carrying, red blood cells and releases them into the blood stream in order to get more oxygen to our muscles.

Physical Stress Symptoms (How Our Body Reacts)

- Breathlessness
- Churning stomach
- Diarrhoea/Constipation
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth
- Excess perspiration
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Hyperventilating
- Impotence
- Increased colds/flu
- Increased heart rate
- Indigestion
- Nausea
- Palpitations
- Pounding heart
- Pre Menstrual Syndrome
- Shallow breathing
- Sleeping problems
- Tension headaches
- Tingling in hands/legs
- Tremor in hands/legs
- Weight loss/gain

Psychological Stress Symptoms (How We Think and Feel)

- Abrasive
- Anxious
- Blaming others
- Catastrophising
- Cynical
- Depression
- Depressed/Anxious thinking
- Excess guilt
- Excess worries over health
- Feeling a failure
- Feelings of fear
- Feeling unable to cope
- Frustration
- Hopelessness/helplessness
- Hostile
- Hypercritical of self/others
- Impatience
- Indecision
- Irritability
- Jealousy
- Lack of concentration
- Loss of confidence
- Lower self-esteem
- Mind in a whirl
- Mood swings
- Negative thinking
- Pessimistic thinking
- Rumination
- Sensitivity to criticism
- Snappy
- Stressful thinking
- Tense
- Worrying a lot

Behavioural Stress Symptoms (How We Behave)

- Aggression
- Agitation
- Avoidance behaviour
- Crying
- Decreased/increased sexuality
- Difficulty relaxing
- Difficulty with relationships
- Eating fast
- Eating too much/too little
- Gambling
- Hostile behaviour
- Impatience
- Increased alcohol
- Increased caffeine
- Increased smoking
- Losing temper
- Making mistakes
- Nail biting
- Outbursts of anger
- Poorer personal hygiene
- Poor eye contact
- Poor time management
- Restlessness
- Risk taking
- Substance abuse
- Talking fast
- Walking fast
- Withdrawal from activities
- Withdrawal from relationships

Work Related Stress Symptoms (How we may be affected in our work)

- Accidents
- Absenteeism/ Presenteeism
- Inability to delegate
- Increased sick days
- Inefficiency
- Persistent lateness
- Poor decision making
- Poor interaction with colleagues
- Procrastination
- Reduced work performance
- Resentment/anger/ irritability

Causes of Stress

> ***"No matter where we live, today's world is stressful. We are bombarded with stimuli, perhaps pressured by money problems, insecure in our job, overworked, underpaid, controlled by the system, anxious about the future. You could say we are overloaded as we struggle to keep up with the pace of living in the 21st Century. As a result of all these pressures, we spend most of our time in a state of mental and physical tension."***
>
> (The New Guide to Therapies)

The causes of stress are known as stressors and there are literally hundreds of different types of stressors. Any event in life that a person finds threatening, difficult to cope with, or causes excess pressure can be a potential cause of stress. It is important to bear in mind that stress is an individualistic, subjective experience and therefore what one person finds stressful another may not.

Stressors can be broken down roughly into either external or internal (or a mixture of both.)

1. External Stressors

a) Major Life Events

Research by Psychiatrists Drs Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe revealed a list of common causes of stress that most people would find stressful. They called this scale the "Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Scale". The scale is a list of 45 stressors each given a number of points, with the most stressful at the top of the list (death of a spouse) and the least stressful at the bottom of the scale (a minor violation of the law). The research indicates that if your total score is more than 150 points the chances are that it could have an impact on your health. A score of over three hundred points in one year indicates that you have a high risk of developing a stress related health problem.

One of the drawbacks of the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment scale is that it doesn't take into account the individuals personality, their perception of how difficult the stressor is, nor does it take into account how long the stressor continues for; the scale just gives a single number for each stressor. However, it is known that the longer a stressor continues the more likely it will cause stress, and an individuals perception of an event is the key to whether they will find a situation stressful or not.

For example, if a person is happy living in their house, they've lived there for a number of years, have developed close friends in the area and do not want to move but are forced to move because their home is being repossessed, then they are going to find the event of moving infinitely far more stressful than a person who has lived in their home for a short time, next to a very noisy, difficult neighbour and who wants to move to get away from the noise.

So to help enhance the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Scale, Psychologist Professor Cary Cooper PhD has upgraded it by allocating a scale of 1 - 10 points for each event, so allowing for a person's perception of how stressful the event is, to be taken into account (A copy of this Cooper's Major Life Events Questionnaire was included in the first session of this plan).

b) Daily Hassles

> ***"Any idiot can face a crisis, it's this day-to-day living that wears you out".*** (Anton Chekov)

The majority of causes of stress that we face on a day-to-day basis are not as extreme as life events. The day-to-day causes of stress are called daily hassles; they are those daily, minor irritations such as misplacing our car keys, traffic jams, minor arguments with family/colleagues, etc.

Researchers at the University of California indicated that it was the daily hassles rather than the major life events that affected us the most. Life events do not occur every day, but daily hassles do; its the constant, daily frustration caused by these hassles that cause us the most stress, because they occur so regularly and therefore can undermine our health.

Some Examples of Daily Hassles

- Arguments
- Bureaucracy
- Car breakdown
- Difficult neighbours
- Excess noise
- Fear of Crime
- Gossip
- Inconsiderate people
- Job dissatisfaction
- Lack of sleep
- Loneliness
- Meal Preparation
- Misplacing keys
- Office Politics
- Pollution
- Problems with children
- Queuing
- Relatives
- Shopping
- Time pressures
- Traffic jams
- Waiting

2. Internal Stressors

> *"Stress resides neither in the situation nor in the person; it depends on a transaction between the two."* (Dr Richard Lazarus PhD)

We tend to think that stress is solely caused by external events, situations and people, yet this is not strictly correct. Research has found that the Transactional Model of Stress is more accurate. This model says that stress is caused by a transaction, ie there is an interaction between the stressor, our view of the stressor and our perceived ability to cope with it. It is our own internal beliefs, attitudes, interpretations, perceptions and other factors, in combination with the external events that tend to create stress.

Internal factors which influence how we perceive stress include our:

- Beliefs
- Unrealistic expectations
- Locus of control
- Chronic worrying
- Low assertion
- Low self esteem
- People pleasing
- Time urgency
- Perception
- Perfectionism
- Personality
- Pessimism

Examples of Some Causes of Stress

Physical Stressors

- Chronic hyperventilation
- Chronic pain
- Drug /Alcohol misuse
- Excess caffeine
- Excess cold
- Excess heat
- Excess/to little exercise
- Hypoglycaemia
- Illness
- Lack of relaxation
- Poor diet
- Poor natural light
- Sleep debt
- Smoking
- Surgery

Psychological Stressors

- Boredom
- Exams
- Excess anger
- Excess pessimism
- Excessive self criticism
- Excessive worrying
- Financial problems
- Giving talks/presentations
- Health worries
- Loneliness
- Low levels of assertion
- Low self-esteem
- Negative self talk
- Perfectionism
- People pleasing
- Personality
- Rigid thinking style
- Unhappy childhood
- Unrealistic beliefs
- Unrealistic expectations
- Unemployment

Work Stressors

- Commuting/ Traffic jams
- Company takeovers
- Conflicts with colleagues
- Delegation problems
- Excess working hours
- Job insecurity
- Lack of work recognition
- Low pay
- Poor support/supervision
- Role ambiguity
- Time pressures
- Understaffing
- Workaholic
- Workplace bullying

Family Stressors

- Arguments with children
- Bereavement
- Caring for a chronically ill relative
- Children leaving home
- Partner with alcohol/drug problems
- Partner with health problems
- Relationship difficulties

Social Stressors

- Bureaucracy/red tape
- Fear of crime
- Living in an urban area
- Low social support
- Poverty
- Problem neighbours
- Racial harassment
- Rude, aggressive, unhelpful people
- Victim of crime

Environmental Stressors

- Damp conditions
- Excess noise
- Pollution
- Poor housing

Stress Management Techniques

> ***"Stress Management is the ability of an individual to manage the perceived pressures they face on a day to day basis. This may be through a variety of techniques including reducing or reappraising the pressures and enhancing coping ability and resources."*** (ISMA, Stress News April 2002, Vol 14 No. 2)

Stress Management Techniques are very powerful and have been successfully used not only to manage stress but also to help medical conditions such as cancer, HIV, depression, anxiety, high blood pressure to name but a few. It is impossible to remove all the stressors in our lives, but this does not mean however that there is nothing we can do about them; fortunately there are a variety of proven ways to increase our ability to cope with stress.

We have three main strategies we can use to tackle stress and we will be teaching you these methods in the sessions of this course. These strategies are:

1. Doing something about the causes of stress.

2. Altering our thinking to a more stress resistant style of thinking.

3. Using cushioning techniques to protect us from the stressors that we cannot change; these are techniques such as relaxation, exercise, regular sleep, regular breaks, etc. You will be taught these techniques throughout this self-help plan.

1. Doing Something about the Causes of Stress

The causes of stress are many and varied. It is not possible to remove all the stressors in life but there are things we can do to remove or deal with some of them. We should aim to remove as many of the causes of stress in our lives as is practicable.

Some people under stress view their situation as one that they must deal with alone; often this can lead to ignoring the problem in the hope that it will go away, but in fact this usually only increases it. For example, ignoring a financial problem doesn't make it go away, the problem only gets bigger; but consulting a Citizens Advice Bureau financial advisor who can assist in negotiations with creditors, will help to deal with the problem. If we have relationship problems, ignoring them won't make them go away, seeing a Relate counsellor can help.

Stress is cumulative; we develop a stress problem and then very often make it worse by using negative coping strategies such as excess alcohol and caffeine. Reducing alcohol and caffeine, and eating a healthier diet will help to reduce our stress load and increase our ability to handle stress.

2. Altering our Thinking to a more Stress Resistant Thinking Style

Psychologists have found that our thinking style can increase our stress load. Learning a less stressful way of thinking, even though the causes of stress may still be there, can reduce our stress.

We have a tendency to believe that stress is caused solely by external situations and people. For example, "If he/she hadn't behaved in that way, I wouldn't have been stressed." But, by maintaining such views, we lose an important way of being able to reduce our own stress; we may not always be able to influence the behaviour and attitude of others, but we do have a powerful influence over ourselves and how we respond to challenging situations.

Some of the stressors we suffer can be generated by our own thinking style. By this we don't mean that we are the cause of all our own stress, but psychologists have found that stress occurs because of a transaction between ourselves and external events and stressors. Often our own beliefs, our thinking style, our explanatory (attributional) style, views about ourselves, other people and the world in general, can exacerbate our stress.

We have already covered this in the previous session of the Depression Self Help Plan called Depression Resistant Thinking.

3. Cushioning Stress Management Techniques

As well as removing as many of the causes of stress as are possible and practical to remove, research has shown that using cushioning techniques can also help us to cope more effectively with stress. There are a number of Stress Management Techniques we can use to help cushion us from stress such as healthy eating, brisk walking, Tai Chi, Yoga, Head Massage, Acupuncture, improving our Assertion levels, reducing Stressful Thinking, increasing Social support, etc.

For example, research indicates that people who use relaxation techniques on a regular basis, may still be in the same stressful situation and still secrete higher levels of stress hormones, but these stress hormones have a less negative effect on the body's systems and organs when compared to people who are under stress but who don't use cushioning techniques like relaxation, on a regular basis.

As we have previously mentioned it may be impossible to remove all the triggers of stress in our lives. For example if someone is caring for a chronically ill relative this can be very stressful and it would not be that easy to remove the stressor. But this doesn't mean there is nothing we can do. Using cushioning techniques such as practicing daily relaxation techniques, taking regular breaks, ensuring social support, etc., can help us cope more effectively with the situation and reduce our risk of developing a stress related health problem.

A number of these cushioning techniques – relaxation, exercise, nutrition and complementary therapies will be covered in the following sessions of the Depression Self-Help Plan.

Resources Session (3)

Action Plan: Managing Stress

	Yes	No
▪ Consider buying or borrowing the recommended book "The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook."	☐	☐
▪ Fill in the Cooper Stress Questionnaire and record your score.	☐	☐
▪ Carry on with the other techniques outlined in the previous sections.	☐	☐

Stress Questionnaire

Circle the appropriate number to show how often you have been troubled by the following:

0 = Never/rarely; 1 = Occasionally; 2 = Frequently; 3 = Always/nearly always

1. Constantly getting annoyed with people.	0	1	2	3
2. Difficulty in making decisions.	0	1	2	3
3. Loss of sense of humour.	0	1	2	3
4. Suppressed anger.	0	1	2	3
5. Difficulty concentrating.	0	1	2	3
6. Inability to finish one task before rushing into another.	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling you're the target of other peoples' animosity.	0	1	2	3
8. Feeling unable to cope.	0	1	2	3
9. Wanting to cry at the smallest problem.	0	1	2	3
10. Not interested in doing things after coming home from work.	0	1	2	3
11. Waking up and feeling tired after an early night.	0	1	2	3
12. Constant tiredness.	0	1	2	3
13. Lack of appetite.	0	1	2	3
14. Craving for food when under pressure.	0	1	2	3
15. Frequent indigestion or heartburn.	0	1	2	3
16. Constipation or diarrhoea.	0	1	2	3
17. Insomnia.	0	1	2	3
18. Tendency to sweat for no good reason.	0	1	2	3
19. Nervous twitches, nail biting, etc.	0	1	2	3
20. Headaches.	0	1	2	3
21. Cramps and muscle spasms.	0	1	2	3
22. Nausea.	0	1	2	3
23. Breathlessness without exertion.	0	1	2	3
24. Fainting spells.	0	1	2	3
25. Impotence or frigidity.	0	1	2	3
26. Eczema.	0	1	2	3

Scoring

Total score between 0-25 (Not many symptoms of Stress)

Total score between 26-52 (Moderate Stress)

Total score between 53-78 (Very High Stress)

Useful Self-Help Books, Websites, Audio/Videotapes: Stress

Books

Stress

- Cooper C. (1988) Living with Stress, Penguin.
- Davis M. (2000) The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Work Book, New Harbinger inc.
- McKay M. (1998) Thoughts and Feelings: The Art of Cognitive Stress Intervention, New Harbinger inc.

Work Stress

- O'Hara V. (1995) Wellness at Work, New Harbinger inc.
- Woodham A. (1995) Beating Stress at Work, Health Education Authority.

Websites

Student Stress

www.adm.monash.edu.au/community-services/counselling/selfhelp

Workplace Bullying

www.successunlimited.co.uk
www.bullyonline.org
www.workplacebullying.co.uk

Work Stress

www.workstress.net
www.hse.gov.uk
www.ruralstress.com
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg281.pdf
www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/stress

Stress Management for Children

www.master-quest.com

Audiobook

- Coping with Stress at work (www.talkinglife.co.uk)

Videotapes

(www.videosforpatients.co.uk)
☎: 0207 6105599

Stress

- Buckman R. (1996) What You Really Need To Know About Stress, Videos for Patients Ltd.

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