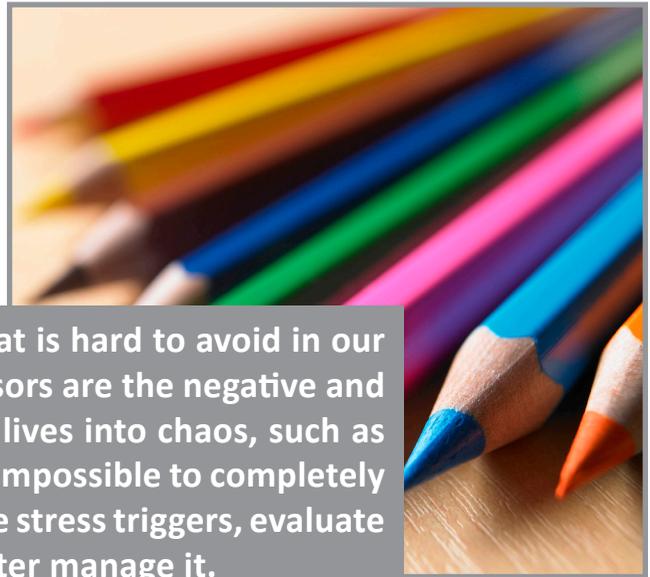


Coping with stress



Stress is a normal part of life and one that is hard to avoid in our ever-busy lives. Added to everyday stressors are the negative and positive occurrences that can throw our lives into chaos, such as moving house or extra tasks at work. It's impossible to completely avoid stress but you can learn to recognise stress triggers, evaluate your reactions to stress, and learn to better manage it.

Responses to stress include overeating, crying, anger, pessimism (worst-case-scenario thinking), depression, anxiety, insomnia, smoking, and often unexplained pain – this from unconsciously tensing the muscles in the shoulders and neck which can lead to headaches, spasms, migraines, back pain, and lack of sleep. Often people are not aware that these responses are due to stress as this can be an everyday part of life.

Tips for stressful days

Managing stress is about changing the stressful situation if you can, changing your reaction if you can't, taking care of yourself, and making time for rest and relaxation. There are many simple things you can do to help alleviate the impact of stress.

- **Build your defences.** Living a healthy lifestyle can help you reduce background stress levels which will make you more resilient, and means that you can cope with major stressors more effectively. So make sure you eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly.
- **Change your environment.** Work out what causes you to feel stressed and if possible, avoid those situations, or at least limit the amount of exposure to those situations.
- **Change your attitude.** Ask yourself: "Will this matter in 2 weeks, 1 month, 1 year?" Remind yourself: "I am in charge. I'm not going to let this get to me." Focus on your strengths and the things you feel confident about.
- **Socialise.** Isolation has been linked to not coping adequately with stress, heightened vulnerability to illness, and even premature death. So, get social.
- **Get rid of anger.** It is the single most damaging stress-related personality trait that precedes a heart attack. Seek help if necessary.
- **Set your priorities.** Allocate time to your loved ones and to your job. Be realistic about how much you can achieve in a day. And plan your time at the end of the day so you can start the next day on a good footing.
- **Be decisive.** Indecision prevents you from taking action, causing a loss of sense of control and thus intensifying stress.
- **Get some sleep.** Lack of adequate sleep can make you moody, angry, and more vulnerable to illness and the daily stressors that stalk you.
- **Encourage yourself.** Those who accept mishaps as normal parts of life have higher self-esteem and much lower stress levels.
- **Reward yourself.** Doing something you enjoy boosts your immune system for days.