

# STRESS IN 2013 AND HOW TO BEAT IT

Mark Shields takes a closer look

Doctors are saying stress will be the biggest drain on NHS finances in the UK. Bigger even than cancer. With more people off work due to stress than currently unemployed surely this situation is now unacceptable.

What is this condition called stress and how can we beat it.

## DEFINITION OF STRESS

The measurement of pressure and tension coupled with the demand on physical and mental energy from our perception of any given situation and how we strategically cope and feel.

## WHAT IS STRESS

Although we all talk about stress everyday, it isn't clear what stress is really about. Some doctors believe an element of stress is good for us, and this may be true.

Many people believe stress is something that happens to them, such as an event or injury. Others think that stress is what happens to our bodies, minds, and behaviours, in a response to an event. EG heart pounding, sweating, anxiety, nail biting.

While stress does involve events and responses to them, these are not the most important factors.

Our thoughts about the situations in which we find ourselves is the critical factor.

When something happens to us, we automatically evaluate the situation mentally. We decide if it is threatening to us, how we need to deal with the situation, and what skills we can use.

If we decide that the demands of the situation outweigh the skills we have, then we label the situation as stressful, and react with the classic stress response. If we decide our coping skills outweigh the demands of the situation, then we don't see it as stressful.

"It is human nature for many when presented with a choice will always stay within their comfort zone." Sir Richard Branson 1996

Everyone sees situations differently, and no two people will respond in the same way to any given situation.

Some situations in life seem less stress provoking, however once again it is our thoughts and thought responses that are key.

## FIVE MAIN CAUSES OF STRESS

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|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Work Pressure and commitment. | 33% |
| 2. Death and Bereavement.        | 24% |
| 3. Divorce                       | 14% |
| 4. Family Illness                | 11% |
| 5. Financial                     | 8%  |

The main symptoms of stress are insomnia, lack of appetite, and in more serious cases anxiety and depression.

It is important we keep our life and health in balance to avoid such symptoms but if we start to notice any of these symptoms we should contact a doctor or appropriate specialist immediately to avoid the stress getting out of control. If we allow this to happen and stress takes hold it can render us non functional without an ability to cope with everyday life.

## CONQUORING STRESS

### 1. YOUR GP

The first step to take is to ensure you contact your GP immediately. He will either prescribe appropriate medication or refer you to an appropriate specialist.

### 2. EXERCISE

Ensure you begin an exercise routine immediately however limited as exercise produces the bodies opiates endorphins which directly combats stress. Try and build up to a minimum of twenty minutes cardio vascular exercise three times a week.

### 3. DIET

How we fuel and put in our bodies is vitally important when dealing with stress. Ensure you drink three litres of water a day and cut out all stimulants such as coke or caffeine. These provoke adrenalin and will increase stress levels. A balanced diet is important and good supplements to ensure you take are Omega 3 fish oils which are said to assist depression and raise serotonin levels, and also vitamins B and C, Vitamins B also being suggested is good for any mental health issues.

### 4. ALCOHOL

Alcohol has the opposite effect on serotonin levels so avoid large amounts of alcohol. It can also act as a depressant and hangovers can be more intense when severely stressed and magnetise issues several times over.

### 5. RESTFUL SLEEP

Sleep plays a major part in keeping our minds and bodies balanced correctly. One of the first signs of stress is disturbed sleep normally because your mind is active and you cant switch off. Keep a notebook by the bed and write things down before you go to bed. Its important to get yourself into a bedtime routine not eating or drinking for at least four hours before going to bed. Caffeine can stay in the body for up to forty hours so cut all caffeine out if you can. Don't get hung up on feeling you need a

certain amount of sleep and if you don't get it you'll just worry more and add more pressure to your current stress levels. The body needs a minimum of four hours sleep a night to function correctly.

## 6. WORK / HOME LIFE BALANCE

Ensure you make the required changes to relieve your stress. This includes taking regular holidays, and regular daily breaks. Also ensure you have meaning and purpose in your life. Its good to have a twelve moth life plan to keep you focused and appropriately challenged.

And remember don't take yourself to seriously and beat yourself up all the time. Life is not about winning or losing, its what you learn that's important.

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