

MS Society of Tasmania



Stress Management and Dealing With Difficult Emotions

What is Stress?



Stress can be defined as our mental, physical, emotional and behavioural reactions to any perceived demands or threats.

The subject of *stress* has become a common topic of conversation. We often hear friends, colleagues, and family members talk about the problems they have in managing the stresses of everyday living. We say we feel "burned out," stressed out, overwhelmed, angry, irritable, depressed, anxious, and on the verge of "losing it."

The "Fight or Flight" Response



When pressures seem threatening to us -

- Our bodies react to supply protection by "turning on the juices" and preparing to take action
- A physiological reaction is known as the "fight or flight" response

In the days of the cavemen, the fight or flight response was key to their survival. When faced with a threatening tiger, for instance, a caveman had two main choices. He could fight the tiger or he could run away. Either way, his body had to prepare quickly to respond. The caveman's heart began to race, his breathing rate increased, his pupils dilated, his muscles became tense, and his mind processed information rapidly. This natural response to danger helped the cavemen to protect himself and to survive.



Common Stress Responses

Physically

- You might experience: *racing heart, *clammy hands, *excess perspiration, *shaking or trembling, *rapid or shallow breathing, *clenched jaw, *light-headedness, *changed posture ~ stooped or tensed, *excess fatigue, * weight gain or loss * and much more...

Behaviourally

- You might: *avoid eye contact, *overreact, *act on impulse, *have trouble finding the right words *use alcohol or drugs, *withdraw from relationships.



Cognitively

- *Your mind may go blank, * your thoughts might race wildly or be quite irrational, * may have difficulty concentrating.



Emotionally

- you might: *feel very anxious, angry or fearful, or *have frequent mood swings

General Stress...



...Is a Normal Part of Life

Experiencing some amount of stress in our lives is protective and adaptive.



Our responses to stress help our minds and bodies to prepare for difficult challenges, and to react appropriately in a time of crisis.

In fact, a certain amount of stress is necessary to help us perform at our best.

Stress can add flavour, challenge and opportunity to life. Without stress, life *could* become quite dull and unexciting.

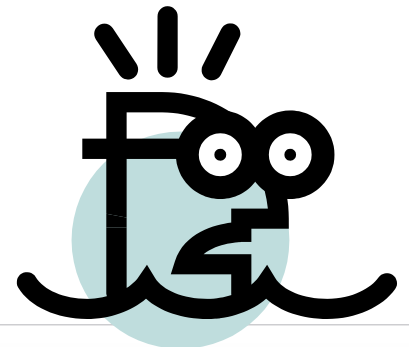
Stress and MS Symptoms



Many people with MS note that symptoms seem to worsen during times of stress.

People report common stress factors such as:

- The unpredictable nature of MS
- Appearance of new symptoms
- Concerns with health insurance and health costs
- Concerns with employment
- Concerns about impact on family
- Concerns about needing help from others
- And many more...



Choose a photo that represents **Stress** to You

- Can represent the difficult emotions you may experience
- Can be a picture that just speaks *stress* to you
 - ~ *Discuss and list difficult emotions*
 - ~ *Discuss and list strategies to manage*

Stress management techniques provide effective ways to cope with or alter stressful situations



***Learning to recognise when you are stressed – and
what you can control and what you can't control**

Ask: “Is this something I have control over?”

YES: Take action that you know will relieve stress –
might be something as small as saying “NO”

NO: ‘let go’ of the situation that is causing stress

Not easy – *Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot
change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to
know the difference*

Reinhold Niebuhr

What Can I Do To Reduce Stress?

- **Seek support from someone you can trust**
- **Keep a positive attitude**
- **Accept there are events you cannot control**
- **Be assertive instead of aggressive**
- **Monitor your negative self talk and thinking styles by challenging the way you think**
- **Set realistic goals and plan ahead**
- **Keep a stress diary for 2 months**
- **Learn relaxation techniques – BREATHE!**
- **Exercise as regularly as you can**
- **Eat well; Rest well; Sleep well**
- **Redefine relationships**





AUSTRALIA

A final thought...



Inner Peace:

- If you can start the day without caffeine,
- If you can always be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains,
- If you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles,
- If you can eat the same food every day and be grateful for it,
- If you can understand when your loved ones are too busy to give you any time,
- If you can take criticism and blame without resentment,
- If you can conquer tension without medical help,
- If you can relax without alcohol,
- If you can sleep without the aid of drugs,

..Then

.....YOU probably are.....

The Family Dog!

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