

1. DEALING WITH STRESS AND ANXIETY

Stress is the body's natural response to a potentially dangerous or challenging situation. It gives us the ability to perform as effectively as possible when facing a 'threat' by confronting it or running away – the “fight or flight” response.

The body primes itself to face the threat by releasing chemicals into our system which speed it up ready for action. This can be a beneficial thing in the short term to allow us to achieve peak performance when required, and to help us be more aware, concentrated and effective.

Too much stress, however, can be harmful. When this happens our thinking, planning, analytical 'front brain' switches off and our automatic, instinctive, emotional 'back brain' switches on. With the front brain switched off we struggle to plan or make rational decisions or access our natural stress responses. This is when we experience negative reactions to stress, and what is generally meant when we say we are “stressed”.

Key things to help manage stress and anxiety:

- Keep the body systems regulated.
- Eat and drink a balanced diet, if not daily then over the course of each week.
- Take daily exercise- even 3 sessions of moderate exercise a week will help reduce stress and anxiety.
- Develop good sleeping habits and bedtime routines.

- Learn to enjoy mindful relaxation as well as active fun.
- Connect to others, especially people you trust rather than bottling things up.
- Give to others - even small acts of kindness and care towards others can make us feel better.
- When experiencing unpleasant feelings such as anxiety or sadness, notice what you are thinking and saying to yourself. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Is there really any evidence for thinking this way?
 - Are there other ways of thinking about this situation?
 - Is my thinking faulty? (e.g. Am I concentrating on my weaknesses and ignoring my strengths?)
 - How is thinking in this way affecting me?
- Replace negative thoughts with more balanced rational and positive thoughts.

Finally: Tackling and eliminating the things in your life that cause unnecessary stress is a good thing. It is important to go about this in the right way, otherwise this can be adding to your stress burden, rather than reducing it. So remember:

- **deal with one problem at a time**
- **be kind to yourself**
- **recognise each day is a new beginning**

See the Counselling and Wellbeing website for helpful online resources on Stress and Anxiety: students.leeds.ac.uk/counsellingandwellbeing