

Beating Stress

If your stress is mild, short term or temporary, taking steps to reduce the symptoms may be all you need to do.

- exercise even if you feel tired; it gives a natural release to the hormones that prepare you for physical action,
- eat the healthiest and most varied diet you can afford,
- cut out, or reduce, cigarettes and alcohol; they just add to the strain on your body,
- learn relaxation techniques and use them regularly,
- have fun every day; laughter decreases stress hormones and increases infection-fighting antibodies,
- get a good night's sleep,
- learn to say NO politely but firmly – and mean it.

You can carry out many of these suggestions yourself. But to beat long term or severe stress successfully and permanently it can take more. You may have to review your whole lifestyle and learn new coping skills to avoid putting yourself under so much pressure in the future.

Unfortunately, stress can affect the very things that will help you do this: motivation, and your ability to think clearly and to plan ahead. So don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it.

Your GP can check out physical symptoms and offer treatment if it's appropriate.

And a professional therapist or stress manager can give you all the skills you need to help yourself, putting you back in control. For now, and for the future.

If you would like to learn more, visit my websites, or give me a ring, the details are on the front of this leaflet. I offer appointments in person in my office in Normanton (WF6) and on Zoom.

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The Symptoms of Stress



What they are ...

... and how to beat them!

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Why are we affected by stress?



Most of the stresses faced by our primitive ancestors were short sharp shocks: the sort of danger that threatens if a predator attacks.

To survive, our ancestors either had to be able to run faster than the predators or fight better.

Over time, they evolved what we now refer to as 'fight or flight syndrome' (or 'the stress response') to help them do this. This reaction is still a part of us; it means that in times of danger, our bodies automatically get ready for action.

What happens when we're stressed?

When we get a shock, or feel threatened, our bodies release hormones (e.g., adrenalin). These cause physical changes:

Increased...

- Heart rate
- Blood pressure
- Breathing rate
- Digestion of sugars
- Blood supply to muscles in the arms and legs
- Blood clotting ability

Decreased...

- Digestion (except sugars)
- Blood supply to the skin
- Blood supply to the language parts of the brain
- Immune system (protection from disease)

You can feel some of these effects for yourself if you watch a scary film, or someone shouts BOO and makes you jump.

The overall effect is to increase, divert and transport energy and oxygen to those parts of the body we use when we fight and/or run. This strengthens and speeds up our reactions, giving us a greater chance of surviving the danger.

In the short term, that makes perfect sense. And if nothing else alarming happens, our bodies return to normal within a few minutes.

Why is stress a problem?

Few stressful situations nowadays need a physical response. In fact, running away or fighting will often make things worse.



Unfortunately, our hormones can't tell the difference between a hungry tiger and an angry boss. So, under stress, our bodies get ready for action, just when we need to sit still, think clearly, and feel calm.

And the physical changes that were intended by nature to last for just a few moments can be prolonged for days, weeks, months or even years if the stress keeps on coming.

The symptoms of long-term stress

If you were to rev the engine of your car for a moment, with the gears in neutral, it might be noisy, but it would do no real damage. Revving it for hours would burn out your engine.

That's what happens to your body when you are under long term stress.

Here are just a few symptoms that can be stress related:

- frequent coughs, colds, and other illnesses,
- digestive problems; diarrhoea, constipation, ulcers,
- heart disease,
- tiredness, and/or being unable to sleep,
- changes in appetite, sudden weight gain or loss,
- difficulties concentrating or thinking clearly,
- lack of motivation, difficulties planning ahead,
- feelings of depression, anxiety, or panic,
- increased irritability, anger, or aggression.

You can see how closely these relate to the physical changes listed on the left. For example, if your immune system isn't working well, it's logical that you might catch more infections.

If you ignore these symptoms for too long, you are likely to become emotionally, psychologically, and physically exhausted, and to be unable to function without help.