



CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE
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Fact Sheet

STRESS

Although this Fact Sheet was created with input from consumers of mental health services, psychologists and psychiatrists, the information is of a general nature. More comprehensive information can be obtained from libraries, including Ontario Division, and your local CMHA branch.

WHAT IS STRESS AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR HEALTH?

Stress can be defined as one of the body's responses to the ever-changing environment. It is the physical, mental and emotional response people experience when under pressure. Stress can provide us with energy, motivation, and challenges, that can be healthy and rewarding. It is how we perceive any potentially stressful situation that determines if or how our body will react. When stressful situations overwhelm us on a continual basis, stress can become dangerous.

WHO FEELS STRESS?

Virtually everyone in our society experiences stressful situations. There has never been a period in history when society has changed so quickly, and the pace of life is becoming faster all the time.

- Your credit card bill is in the 4-digit range
- You have not spoken to your children in weeks
- Traffic is a nightmare
- The economy is in a mess
- Work deadlines are approaching fast
- Love seems to come and go in your life

Do any of these sound familiar?

WHAT CAUSES STRESS?

Stress means something different to everyone. If you are making commitments beyond your capacity, you may feel overwhelmed. Stress then becomes unhealthy and can lead to trouble.

- Are you always in a hurry?
- Are you often critical of yourself and others?
- Do you feel hostile or get angry easily?
- Are you highly competitive?

- Do you always feel responsible?
- Do you often bring home problems from your work environment?

A major cause of stress can be sudden or unpleasant change:

- Difficulties with your job or lack of job security.
- Financial problems
- Changes in relationships or lifestyle
- Loss of a loved one

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

When we are stressed our body may give us early signals:

- Chronic headaches, back and neck pain
- Dizzy spells
- Persistent fatigue
- High blood pressure
- Irritability
- Overwhelming anxiety
- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in appetite

WHAT CAN WE DO TO CONTROL STRESS?

Knowing our own needs, and how to satisfy them, can help us to direct or manage stress. What motivates you? What fulfills you? What do you value? Can you use your energy so that energy comes back to you in the form of fulfilment? Stress management techniques include:

- Maintaining good health habits(exercise/healthy diet)
- Striking a balance between work and home life
- Going easy on the self criticism
- Not overextending yourself
- Learning to relax more through breathing exercises
- Improving work habits and learning to say “NO”
- Talking over problems with someone you know and trust
- Joining a volunteer group and making friends

If your stress cannot be controlled and it is causing physical or emotional problems, you may want to contact your family physician or other clinicians, or your local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association for information and referrals.