

What is Stress?

Stress is a natural human response to pressure when faced with challenging and sometimes dangerous situations. That pressure is not only about what's happening around us, but often also about demands we place on ourselves.

Experiencing stress is part of being alive and some stress helps increase our alertness and energy to meet challenging situations.

If stress lasts a long time or overwhelms our ability to cope, it can have a negative affect on our health, wellbeing, relationships, work and general enjoyment of life.

Stress doesn't have to control our lives. We can improve our knowledge about stress and increase our resources to become more resilient. Here are some tips about what to look for and how to help yourself or get help.

How does stress affect us?

Stress is helpful when it increases our ability to be alert, energised, switched on and resourceful in facing challenges we enjoy or have to deal with. But stress becomes unhelpful when it leaves us feeling fatigued, tense, anxious, burnt out or overwhelmed. The tipping point between helpful and unhelpful stress is different for each of us and can also depend on what's happening in our lives.

Stress is unhelpful when we:

- Can't switch off – feeling alert and anxious even when we want to be resting.
- Can't cope – even small things get us down, leave us exhausted.
- Withdraw from relationships, work or fun activities or become irritable.
- Have difficulty concentrating.
- Have aches and pains unrelated to exercise or any medical condition.
- Have difficulty eating or sleeping properly.

Sometimes stress builds up and takes on a life of its own – so that we feel anxious, even when not facing difficult situations.

What helps?

- **Be aware** – monitor your levels of stress and ask whether they are helpful or getting you down.
- **Take stock** – think about things in your life or pressures you place on yourself that may be increasing your stress.
- **Take charge** – deal with unhelpful sources of stress before they build up and become a bigger problem.
- **Make choices** – look at areas in your life where you could manage your situation better or change the way you respond.
- **Learn about some good ways to deal with stress.**

For example:

- Talk to someone you trust, call a friend, phone Lifeline
- Have a health check with your GP
- Get exercise
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet
- Make time for things you enjoy

These are ways to help you bounce back and become more resilient. Sometimes, it can help to see a counsellor to talk about stressors in your life and find better ways to cope.



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Find out more

Call Lifeline – **13 11 14** to talk about your stress and find better ways of dealing with it. Visit **www.lifeline.org.au** to find Lifeline's Overcoming Stress Tool kit and links to other helpful resources.