



# Victim Services of Waterloo Region

Fact Sheet on Stress

## What is Stress

The Canadian Mental Health Association defines stress as “the physical, mental and emotional response people experience while under pressure”. In some situations stress can give us motivation, and the energy to face challenging situations. However, we interpret many situations as stressful, and the continued stress becomes overwhelming. This stress, instead of helping us to overcome obstacles, can become hazardous to our health if not dealt with.

## Who gets Stressed?

Everyone experiences stress at some point in their life. Our society is fast paced, filled with deadlines, and being constantly on the go takes its toll. Everyone interprets situations differently, so what stresses you out may not cause someone else the same response. Some causes of stress are:

- Financial difficulties
- Health difficulties
- Loss of a loved one
- Relationship troubles
- Job changes or threats
- Large events (e.g. a wedding)
- Taking on too many tasks

How we look at a stressor determines how much stress it will cause us. A person who has a negative outlook, or is already under a lot of stress will likely interpret an event as more stressful.

## Symptoms

Our body knows when it is experiencing a high level of stress, and sends us messages that it is time to start taking better care of ourselves before our health deteriorates. Some of the signals are:

- Dizziness
- Frequent headaches, back and neck pain
- Difficulty falling/staying asleep
- Fatigue
- Changes in appetite
- Irritable/Easy to anger
- Anxiety (mild to intense)
- Raise in blood pressure

## Keeping it under Control

Pay attention to your body. If your mood starts to change, you feel generally unwell or are noticing changes to your usual patterns it may be time to take action. Everyone has different stress triggers and motivators to repair stress damage. Some ways to help yourself feel better are to:

- Take care of your health (rest, relaxation, eat right and exercise).
- Talk through your problems, or keep a diary.
- Strive for balance – don't spread yourself thinly.
- Prioritize your tasks, and manage your time effectively to include time for yourself.
- Don't be hard on yourself. You are your own worst critic.



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- Learn a relaxation technique (e.g. Yoga, tai chi, deep breathing etc.).
- Spend time on your hobbies – join a club, volunteer or take a class. It can be a great way to relax and make friends with similar interests.
- Know when you need help from a professional, and that there is no shame in asking for it!

## Bad Ways of Coping

Sometimes, when times are tough, people fall back on or develop coping strategies that make things worse, not better. The following are coping strategies to avoid:

- Drinking alcohol in excess.
- Abusing illegal or prescription medications.
- Watching hour after hour of television.
- Taking medications to calm the symptoms, and not dealing with the root of the problem.
- Withdrawing from friends and family.
- Oversleeping.
- Increasing your caffeine intake.

These techniques generally try to mask or escape from the symptoms of stress, and allow it to worsen. Some of them can also lead to additional personal problems, which can become stressors as well.

## Is Stress Self-Induced?

**The following are some condensed words of wisdom from Dick O'Brien, M.A.S.c.**

The first step to healthy living is to take ownership of your life and behaviors.

When we ask, "Where does our stress come from?" The answer is always, ourselves.

Your work, the environment or other people do not cause your stress. It may often seem that way but the truth is that stress is a reaction by you to a perceived threat in your environment. It originates not in your circumstances but in your thinking.

Change the way you think and you will change your life. Become less demanding, less of a perfectionist, less hurried and more compassionate and you will become less stressful.

"Change what can and should be changed. Accept what cannot be changed. Cultivate the wisdom to recognize the difference." ... it is your attitude that determines who will come out the winner.

Stress is a fact of life and a part of life. There is no escaping it. But there is an escape from a negative attitude. That is the way to protect you from the risks of stress. These tips will help you make it through the day -- and the night:

- Set your alarm clock at least 15 minutes earlier in the morning to avoid last minute rushing and start the day in a more relaxed and less stressful way.
- Eat breakfast. It should be wholesome but easy to prepare. Do not gulp down your food.
- Have all of your most important chores written down. This will take much of the frenzy out of your life.
- Resolve that you will be as honest as you can throughout the day, because little white lies will come back to haunt you and hurt you.
- Make certain that you have your daily essentials with you at all times. Misplacing an item can cause stress when you need it.

## Resources

### The Canadian Mental Health Association

[www.cmhawrb.on.ca](http://www.cmhawrb.on.ca)

Kitchener (519) 744-7645

Cambridge (519) 740-7782

Ayr (519) 632-9737

### Dick O'Brien's Website (Stress Resources)

[www.theresilientjourney.com](http://www.theresilientjourney.com)



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