

STRESS

We use the term stress very broadly in our day-to-day lives to describe everything from our experience in peak hour traffic to the impact that serious illness and disease has on our wellbeing. In essence, stress is the psychological perception of pressure and our bodily response to it. We can all experience pressure; but it is how we respond to it which differs. Sometimes pressure can be motivating to increase performance and create high engagement, but at other times it escalate into stress when we feel unable to cope with a demanding situation.

What causes stress?

Stressors can arise in various areas of our lives and some examples include: a heavy workload, financial worries, job insecurity, relationship difficulties, separation/divorce, moving home, illness, taking on caring responsibilities and having unrealistic expectations of yourself and others. Common situations that cause stress are often characterised by uncertainty and/or a feeling of having no control over the matter.

What are the symptoms of stress?

1. **Physical symptoms:** Chest pains, headaches, tremors, nausea, indigestion, changes in weight, skin conditions.
2. **Emotional symptoms:** Feelings of anger, anxiety, guilt, helplessness, fear, shame.
3. **Behavioural symptoms:** Increased smoking or alcohol/caffeine intake, comfort eating, changes to sleep patterns, poor time management.
4. **Cognitive symptoms:** Worrying, confused, constant and repetitive thinking.

What are the effects of stress?

The way our bodies respond to stress has been described as a 'fight or flight' response. When we are confronted with a threat, certain hormones are activated, which alert us to potential danger and encourage us to either attack (fight) or escape (flight). This is an evolutionary response that our bodies still have when faced with non-life threatening situation. Prolonged stress can have significant consequences on our physical and mental health. Stress can be linked to a number of physical illnesses including heart disease, high blood pressure and strokes and can increase vulnerability to mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

How to manage stress

Once you recognise the symptoms of stress within yourself, you can plan ways to cope constructively, and avoid unhealthy methods such as excessive drinking. As well as seeking help, try some of the following suggestions and see what works for you:

- Exercise regularly to clear your mind
- Find a relaxation strategy that works for you (e.g. taking a bath, mindfulness, reading)
- Challenge negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones
- Plan your time actively and be clear on your priorities. Learn to say 'no'
- Stay connected with your support network

*For more information on our services, contact us on **02 8243 1500** or at **admin@cfch.com.au***