



Moore Health Physiotherapy Managing Stress

Everyone Experiences Stress.

Stress is the body's way of dealing with any kind of demand. Rather like an airplane powering up for take-off, the body is placed on high alert when responding to stress. Whilst many people think of stress as only being caused by 'bad' experiences (such as overworking, worrying about family issues, or being fired from your job), stress can also be caused by experiences that are positive or rewarding (such as commencing a new relationship, stepping out on the playing field for a sports game, or getting promoted). Our response to stress can be both physical (eg muscle tightness, headache, sweating palms, fast heart rate) and emotional (eg inability to concentrate, irritability, mood swings). The severity of our reaction will largely depend on the personal resources that we believe we possess to 'manage' or 'control' the situation. In other words, if we believe that we have enough personal resources (such as time, support mechanisms, financial capability etc) to cope with a situation then we are unlikely to be stressed by it, however if we feel that we don't have enough of these resources our response is likely to involve some level of stress and or anxiety.

Stress can be experienced as both a short-term (i.e. acute) or long-term (i.e. chronic) response.

Good Stress

While there are often negative connotations associated with stress, stress can actually help us achieve difficult goals by performing at our best. Good stress – also known as 'eustress' – is the excitement of scoring a goal, the thrill of a scary theme-park ride, and the delight we experience in a race well run. Whilst all of these activities are likely to involve a surging heart rate, high arousal levels, increased perspiration and a myriad of other common 'stress' responses, we fail to label these feelings as 'stress' because, in that context, we consider our reactions to be normal and or pleasant. It is important to remember that stress is a day-to-day part of everyone's life and that if nothing in life caused any stress or excitement, boredom would be the likely result. Eustress helps keep us alert, motivates us to face challenges and drives us to solve problems.

Simple Tips for Reducing Stress

When we are feeling stressed, we can forget to take care of our bodies, which can lead to us experiencing even more stress! Remembering to take care of the basics is an important first step to keeping our stress levels under control. While you may have heard this before” it never hurts to be reminded!

- Maintain a **healthy and balanced diet**
- Ensure you are getting **adequate sleep**: Consider the use of short daytime ‘power naps’ if you are truly unable to get adequate sleep at night.
- **Exercise!** Physical activity is a distraction from our worries and can provide a natural outlet for frustration. Exercise releases a range of ‘feel good’ chemicals (endorphins) that can give your mood a natural boost.
- **Learn Meditation**: It helps your heart rate and breathing to slow down. While meditating, your blood pressure normalises and you use oxygen more efficiently. All of these will have a positive effect on your level of stress.
- **Try Yoga**; Yoga utilises many of the techniques that have been found to positively impact upon stress including controlled breathing, physical movement, stretching, mental imagery and meditation.
- **Plan Pleasant Events**: Having a goal or something to look forward to can help us deal with everyday stressors. Regular scheduling of pleasant activities (such as hobbies, short breaks, movies with friends, alone time and vacations) into your routine can provide things to look forward to and assist us in managing the ‘stress of now’.
- **Environmental Changes**: Creating a positive atmosphere can help decrease external stress. For each of us, it is likely that certain music, colours, smells and images will produce positive feelings. Consider incorporating as many of these things as you can into your everyday environment.
- **Maintaining the Right Attitude**. Our attitudes and the ways we perceive things have a lot to do with the way we experience stress. Looking on the bright side of life, maintaining a sense of humour and letting go of angry thoughts can all help with decreasing stress. Strategies like talking about your feelings with a trusted friend and or writing down your feelings can help you to ‘decompress’ and look at a stressful incident from a different (and potentially positive) perspective.