

# STRESS

Stress is one of the most common conditions in modern Ireland. Stress is the way you feel when pressure is placed on you. A little bit of pressure is good, it gives you the motivation to perform better. However, too much pressure on a prolonged period can lead to stress which is unhealthy for the mind and body. The good thing is that stress is more recognised by the medical profession nowadays and is easily treated.

## Complications

If you are very stressed or you experience stress over a long period of time you may develop other conditions as a result. These conditions can include:

- anxiety,
- depression,
- insomnia,
- high blood pressure,
- stomach and duodenal ulcers,
- asthma,
- rheumatoid arthritis, or
- over-active thyroid (hyperthyroidism).

## Self Help

### Deep breathing

If you feel yourself getting stressed, try to halt those feelings in their tracks by relaxing your muscles and taking deep breaths. Start by inhaling for three seconds, then exhale for a little longer. This will help to remove the older oxygen from your lungs and replace it with fresh oxygen that will improve your circulation and alertness.

### Healthy eating

It is important to eat a healthy, balanced diet when you are stressed because food and drink can have a big influence on the way that you feel and act. Some people find that stress causes them to snack on sugary, unhealthy foods such as crisps and biscuits. This gives your body a sugar rush followed by a sharp drop in your sugar and energy levels. However, this can make you feel tired or irritable, as well as making it harder for you to concentrate. You should also try to reduce the amount of caffeine and alcohol that you drink because they can have similar effects on your body as stress and anxiety.

## Exercise

The benefit of exercise to relieve stress is often underestimated. Exercise releases a chemical called serotonin, which makes you feel happier and less stressed. Exercise also allows you to take out your frustration and anger in a constructive way.

## Sleep

It is common for your sleep pattern to be disturbed when you are feeling stressed and this invariably leads to more stress. If you are having difficulty sleeping, you should contact your GP to discuss your sleep pattern and any potential causes of stress. In Whelehans, I have some self help guides with information on how to re-establish normal sleep rhythm.

## Quit smoking

Contrary to popular belief, smoking does not help to combat stress. In fact, it can make stress worse and it causes damage to your body. For more help in giving up smoking, visit your local pharmacy or ring the Smokers Quitline, 1850 201 203.

## Relaxation

When you are stressed, your muscles often tense, which can cause muscular aches to develop later on. When you feel yourself getting stressed, shrug your shoulders a few times and shake out your arms and legs. This will help to loosen your muscles. A massage or reflexology can also be very beneficial.

## Treatment

### Counseling

Counseling involves talking to someone about a range of issues, such as the triggers for your stress. A counselor will encourage you to discuss your feelings and they can help you to find solutions to your problems. They can also help you to discover ways to deal with stress and its effects.

### Medication

If stress is affecting your mood, your doctor may prescribe antidepressants. There is sometimes a taboo about taking antidepressants but they can be very beneficial in most cases. If you are suffering from anxiety, there are several options which can be used temporarily to get you through this period. There are many natural medicines available which can help mild anxiety and stress. These contain natural ingredients such as hops and valerian. Examples available in Whelehans include Kalms<sup>®</sup> and Rescue Remedy<sup>®</sup>. The B vitamins, especially vitamin B are beneficial for combating stress. Whelehans Traditional Tonic can be helpful for fighting stress as it contains all the B vitamins.