

STRESS

Stress is one of the most common conditions in modern Ireland. A little bit of pressure is good as 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.

Complications

Too much stress for a prolonged period can lead health problems including anxiety, depression, insomnia, high blood pressure, stomach and duodenal ulcers, asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, and over-active thyroid (hyperthyroidism).

Tips to relieve stress

Just say no

It is important to say no at times and know your limits. It is a trait of many of us to try do everything. If tasks or commitments are becoming too much of a burden, it is important to learn when to ask for help. Stress is deemed a health & safety hazard by the Health and Safety Authority. Therefore if you feel stressed due to your work responsibilities it is important to discuss this with your employer at the earliest opportunity. Most employers will be understanding and help address any concerns you have.

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. 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. More information on healthy eating can be obtained for free by calling into Whelehans or at www.whelehans.ie.

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.

Laugh

You won't hear this too often from healthcare professionals but laughter is a great way to relieve stress. Watch funny movies. Read funny stories. Meet up with friends who you can have a good laugh with. Laughter causes the release of neurotransmitters called endorphins in the brain which reduce stress by giving a feeling of well being.

Be Realistic in Expectations

Don't expect everyone to be like you or behave as you want them to. Don't expect to be right all the time. You can't expect harmony all the time. In reality, life will have conflicts in it. Be willing to confront conflict, state your needs then work at coming to a mutual compromise.

Just the Tonic!

Deficiency in the B vitamins is associated with nerve related conditions such as stress, anxiety, depression and irritability. The B vitamins keep the central nervous system functioning well so are important in fighting stress. Anti oxidant vitamins are also

important during periods of stress. The body produces more free radicals during stress which affect our immune system. Anti oxidant vitamins such as vitamin C and E prevent free radical damage to the body so are also important during stress. Fruit and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and beans are good sources of B vitamins and antioxidants. If you feel you need an extra boost of B vitamins during a stressful period, Whelehans Traditional Tonic can help. It not only boosts energy levels but also fights stress due to it B vitamin content.

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.

Anti-anxiety drugs such as benzodiazepines may be prescribed and can sometimes be beneficial for anxiety and stress. Treatment should be limited to the shortest possible dose for the shortest possible time. Benzodiazepines are safe for the short periods of use of five days or less. Unfortunately, in too many cases in Ireland over the years, patients have been prescribed benzodiazepines such as Valium[®] and Xanax[®] long term and this has led to dependence problems. Their effect is reduced if used for too long.

Betablockers which are mainly used for high blood pressure are sometimes prescribed for anxiety caused by stress as they reduce heart palpitations and tremor. 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[®] and Rescue Remedy[®]. Their efficacy is questionable.

My next article in the Topic will be about how exercise can make us feel great and full of energy.

Disclaimer: Please ensure you consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans, log on to www.whelehans.ie or dial 04493 34591. You can also e-mail queries to info@whelehans.ie.

