

Diabetes *fact sheet*

Stress

Stress! What is it?

Some people consider stress to be something that happens to them. i.e. an event such as an injury. Others think that stress is what happens to our bodies, minds and behaviours in response to an event. I.e. pounding heart, anxiety or nail biting.

Stress is a combination of these and how we respond to specific situations. The word stress is used to describe both external events and the internal responses they cause.

In fact stress is the body's general response to any demand made on it, regardless of whether that demand is pleasant, unpleasant, emotional or physical.

Does everyone see stress the same way?

When something happens we automatically evaluate the situation and decide if it is threatening and how to respond.

If at this point we decide we do not have the skills to deal with the demands we react with a "stress response".

If we decide a situation is stressful we put into action our body's "fight or flight" reaction. We release adrenaline, a natural body chemical and are prepared to fight the situation or run away. We each have a particular way of responding to stress. Some of us have physical signs such as muscle tension and difficulty sleeping. Others may have more emotional reactions, such as outbursts of crying or anger.

Is all stress bad?

Not all stressful situations are negative i.e. the birth of a child, being promoted or moving house often not seen as threatening. How we perceive a stress provoking event and how we react to it determines its impact on our health. Some may motivate us while others that we see as stressful may have a negative effect on our physical, mental and social well being.

Signs of Stress

The signs of stress may differ from person to person. They can include:

- Anxiety
- Headaches
- Stomach complaints
- Exhaustion
- Chest Pain
- Irritability and hostility
- Difficulties with sleeping
- Loss of appetite
- Lack of Concentration
- Sadness/Depression

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Stress and Disease

Stress and its relationship to disease is still being investigated but many people suffering from excessive stresses have symptoms of poor health. There is evidence to demonstrate that individuals with high stress levels or prolonged stress have:

- Higher blood cholesterol levels
- Increases in blood pressure
- Increases in blood glucose levels and
- At risk of poor health outcomes i.e. heart disease and stroke.

Stress and Pre Diabetes

Stress filled lifestyles make it difficult to make or maintain resolutions/changes to lead to a healthy lifestyle. Some people respond to stress by over eating, eating unhealthy foods, excessive alcohol consumption, smoking or taking drugs. Such negative reactions to stress may make you feeling temporarily better but they only mask the stress. These reactions increase the risk of developing diseases such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes and lead to poor health.

What to do!

Most of us get stressed at sometime, it does not matter whether it's because of school, work, family or relationships. There are some things we can do to help reduce our stress and deal with the stress in our life.

- ✓ Look at your lifestyle and develop a lifestyle that meets all of your needs including physical, mental and emotional.
- ✓ Ensure you get enough exercise, sleep and nutrition.
- ✓ Take time out each day for rest and relaxation.
- ✓ Establish some supportive friends/relationships
- ✓ Put off big decisions – if you are really stressed it's probably not the best time to make major changes in your life and keep things balanced.
- ✓ If you are busy and stressed learn to say no to more work and stress.

These will not only help reduce your stress and enable you to cope better, they have the added benefit of assisting in weight loss/maintenance. Finally if you are not coping with your stress seek help try talking with a friend, doctor or a counsellor. Becoming aware of your stressors and learning how to deal with them will help you to get on the right track to a healthier lifestyle.

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Other Resources

- Local Doctor
- Community centres – counsellors
- Social Workers
- Friends and Family
- Beyond Blue www.ybblue.com.au