

## Self-Help Guide

### Information about stress

This is information on stress and anxiety to enable you to recognise the signs.

#### What is stress?

Stress is forces from the outside world impinging on the individual and these perceived events have exceeded one's ability to cope. Stress is a normal part of life that can help us learn and grow. However, when stress becomes overwhelming it can cause significant problems. Stress evolved from the stone-age times to prepare us for sudden physical effort.

This is achieved by the release of powerful neurochemicals which affect the nervous system. The hormones that prepare us to fight the danger or run away from the danger, create the fight or flight response. In the stone-age times this response would have maximised our chances of survival when confronted by a dangerous wild animal. Today, life has fewer physical stressors and more psychological stressors.

With no physical outlet for psychological stress in the long term it can increase the risk of ill health. If you do not take action to control your stress, the stress response can overwhelm the body and lead to health problems.

Prolonged, unexpected and unmanageable stresses are the most dangerous types of stress. Basically what that is saying is under a short stressful situation then returning back to normal an individual usually can cope. However, if an individual is repeatedly having their stress response triggered, constantly, over a prolonged period of time through ill health or other events the individual may struggle to cope. The stress starts effecting the way they react to situations and depleting their coping skills.



The three main stress hormones produced by the fight- or- flight response;

### **Adrenaline**

Flight Response; increases heart and breathing, increases blood pressure, redistribution of blood to the skeletal, muscle and brain, increases blood glucose levels and reduces flow to the digestive system and produces feeling of uncertainty.

### **Noradrenaline**

Fight Response; increases muscle tension, increases feeling of aggression, palms become sweaty, mental alertness increases, produces feeling of excitement and subcutaneous blood vessels constrict.

### **Cortisol**

This hormone works with both Adrenaline and Noradrenaline; increases blood sugar levels, releases fat stored for energy and suppresses the immune system, digestive system, reproductive system and the growth processes.

## **Warning Signs of Stress**

### **Physical Signs**

Stomach upset or feeling sick  
Trembling Difficulties sleeping  
More colds and infections  
Headaches  
Back pain  
Sweating

### **Mental Changes**

Feeling panic and anxiety  
Irritability  
Depression  
Poor concentration  
Feeling helpless  
Lack of confidence  
Not wanting to socialise

Continually feeling stressed can lead to feelings of anxiety so it is important that you are aware what stress is and how you can put coping strategies in place to help reduce the stress response.

*This self-help guide was brought to you through the experience built up from the professional staff team at Cancer Support Scotland. We are here to support your wellbeing.*

