



## Information Statement – A Plan For Relaxation

**Just about everybody feels stressed at some time or another. One of people's major health concerns is stress - the ailment of modern day living.**

**'Worrying has become such a worry, many people are literally worrying themselves sick about it!'**

### What Is Stress?

We all have loads of things to think about. But when one of those loads, or a combination of them, becomes too heavy... we find ourselves reacting to the pressure - and that's stress.

Stress automatically activates our body's Red Alert switch or our Fight or Flight mechanism. Therefore some of our physical responses to stress are:

1. Adrenalin: pumped into blood to energise you
2. Glucose: released from liver to fuel you
3. Sweat: released from glands to cool you
4. Stomach muscles: tightened to protect inner organs
5. Wrist, arm, shoulder and jaw muscles: tensed to action
6. Digestion: halted or accelerated
7. Heart: pounding to provide the brain with oxygen
8. Breathing: increasing to take in more oxygen

In brief, we can often tell when we are under stress because our heart beats faster, we breathe more quickly, we may perspire more freely and we may tremble. Sometimes if our stress level is very high, we may also feel dizzy and sick.

### Some Stress Is Good For Us

Moderate amounts of stress and tension experienced from time to time do no harm at all.

These amounts of stress keep the body's survival mechanism in trim, increasing alertness, muscular strength and other physical and psychological abilities. Life would be unbearably dull without any stress whatever.

Most of us need to experience moderate, time-limited amounts of stress and tension to stir us up to perform at our best - for example, when we play sport or sit for an exam.

### When Is Stress Harmful?

The optimum amount of stress varies from individual to individual - it depends on our experience and coping abilities, level of health, comfort, hormone balance and social support.

Generally, stress is harmful when we experience it for prolonged periods of time without relief or when we experience large doses of it at regular and frequent intervals. This type of excess stress can lead to anxiety or depression.

**Anxiety** is that tight feeling. A vague worry that something bad is going to happen.

**Depression** is that heavy feeling. You're so down you wonder if you'll ever get up again. A feeling of gloom. Although people sometimes successfully suppress their feelings of tension in the short term, in the longer term, stress-related or tension symptoms break through.

### How To Recognise Excess Stress

You can recognise excess stress by the psychological warning signs, such as:

1. Irritability and intolerance.
2. Worry, insecurity and anxiety.
3. Sadness and depression.
4. Nightmares and sleeping difficulties.
5. Restlessness and concentration difficulties.

Also by the physical warning signs, such as:

1. Tiredness and lack of energy.
2. Headaches, neck and back aches.
3. Indigestion and diarrhoea.
4. Skin problems.
5. Lowered resistance to infection and viruses.
6. Raised pulse rate and raised blood pressure.

Prolonged, excessive stress increases our susceptibility to:

1. High blood pressure.
2. Migraine.
3. Heart disease.
4. Back problems.
5. Ulcers.
6. Asthma.

to name a few illnesses. So it is the interests of your physical and psychological well-being to reduce your stress levels.

## Reducing Stress

Here are some hints on how you can effectively deal with stress and tension. Determination, persistence and time will help you use them successfully.

### Talk it out

1. When something worries you, talk it over with somebody you can trust, a good friend, your spouse, a parent, a counsellor or a clergyman.
2. Talking it out will relieve your tension and help you to see the problem more clearly.

You will then find it easier to do something about it.

### Take one at a time

1. Sometimes the load of work or worry is so great, it seems impossible to cope.
2. Don't try to do it all at once, but take a little at a time.
3. Set priorities by tackling the most urgent problems or task while you set the rest aside.
4. As you complete this task, then take the next most urgent one, and so on.

What was an insurmountable whole becomes a manageable group of pieces.

### Don't try to be a super-being

1. No-one can be perfect in everything.
2. Setting goals beyond your abilities can result in constant tension and unhappiness.
3. Know those things you do well and those you do not so well, and then set realistic goals for yourself.
4. However, don't blame yourself for not reaching these goals - failure is designed to teach us how to improve on our performance next time.

### Make time for recreation

1. Many people drive themselves so hard that they allow no time for the recreation essential for good physical and mental health.
2. Allow yourself time to forget all about work and enjoy some activity such as a hobby or sport.
3. This will allow you to return to work with a clearer mind and relaxed outlook.
4. You will feel better and work will be so much easier.

### Resolve conflict

1. Conflict with other people and feeling angry towards them happens to all of us from time to time.
2. Talk it over - calmly and honestly - with the other person to try and resolve the situation.
3. State your position and feelings as calmly as possible, and listen to the other point of view.
4. Sometimes we're so angry we can't discuss the conflict constructively.
5. Work off your anger in some physical activity such as gardening or cleaning, so you can cool down and view the situation more clearly.

## Give in sometimes

1. Stand your ground on issues of which you are sure and which are important to you, as you must retain your self-respect.
2. However, if you are frequently quarrelling and arguing, you COULD sometimes be wrong.
3. Sometimes you will gain more co-operation from others by yielding.

## Take time out for exercise

1. Regular exercise helps "burn off" daily tension. It also improves fitness and physical well being, enabling you to cope better with your stress.
2. Sophisticated exercise programs or joining a fitness club is not necessary, although you may find sharing your activity adds to your enjoyment and motivation.
3. Pick some activity which is realistic for you considering your present level of fitness, time available, and the environment in which you live.
4. Walking, cycling, swimming, playing tennis, or whatever turns you on! Remember, however, that to be effective your exercise activity needs to be done regularly each day.

## Practise Healthy Eating Habits

1. Experiencing stress and nervous tension uses up many important nutrients which, if not replaced or eaten in adequate amounts, can leave us feeling tired, rundown, and irritable and less able to cope with our stress.
2. Practise eating three regular meals a day, taking time to enjoy the meal before going on to the next activity. Skipping meals to save time will catch up with you at the end of the day.
3. Select nutritious foods from a wide choice of fresh fruit, vegetables, whole grain cereals and breads, some dairy food and some protein (meat, fish, chicken) each day.
4. Certain foods can in fact cause or increase nervous tension e.g. tea, coffee, chocolate, coca-cola, and high sugar foods. Unfortunately we often crave these foods when under stress because they tend to give us a temporary "lift". Why not try fruit juice to drink or nibble some dried fruits, nuts, raw vegetables or a piece of fruit?

## Avoid Additional Pressures

1. Learn to say "no" sometimes.
2. Looking after everybody else's needs and wants and neglecting your own causes stress.
3. Try to avoid being "used up" or taken advantage of by people - you'll respect yourself more eventually, and they will too.

## Practise Relaxation Methods

1. There are any number of these, some mystical, most very down to earth.
2. Choose the one that personally suits you the best
3. Regular, daily relaxation practice is one very good way to lower your stress level and help you cope.

### Relaxation Exercises

Modern living brings with it tension. Tension in itself is not bad. It helps us meet the demands placed upon us. **Continual or sustained tension is bad.**

You can learn to be relaxed.

The following exercises will relax body and mind.

1. Lie on back with cushion under knees, hands by sides, establish slow, deep regular breathing.
2. Breathe in, filling lower lungs by pushing out the abdominal muscles, middle lungs by expanding middle rib area; upper lungs, by slightly raising shoulders. Pause a moment.
3. Breathe out in same order. Draw in abdomen, contract middle ribs, relax shoulders. Repeat several times to establish a pattern then endeavour to maintain.
4. Tighten muscles of feet, relax feet, repeat twice. Be aware in your mind that feet are relaxed.
5. Tighten calves and relax, repeat twice, be aware of calves relaxed.
6. Press knees and thighs onto cushion and relax, repeat twice, mind aware of relaxed legs.
7. Tighten buttocks and relax, repeat twice, mind aware of relaxed buttocks.
8. Clench hands into fists and relax, repeat twice, mind aware of relaxed hands.
9. Squeeze shoulder blades together, relax and repeat twice, mind aware.
10. Press head on floor, relax and repeat twice, be aware of neck relaxed.
11. Frown and relax, repeat twice.
12. Screw up nose and relax, repeat twice.
13. Clench teeth and relax, repeat twice.

Consciously relax your whole body. Check that deep breathing is being maintained. Stay relaxed for at least ten minutes.

Don't expect an instant cure! Value each success, they all count.

Remember, small changes, bit by bit, are the keys to reducing stress.

### Community Resources for Stress Management

Why not enrol in a Stress Management Course, go to a film or discussion night on the subject? You might like to try to contact some of the following:

#### Relationships Australia (previously COPE)

(08) 8245 8100  
www.relationships.com.au  
1800 638 749 (SA country)

#### WEA

www.wea.sa.com.au  
(08) 82231979

#### Glandore Community Centre

(08) 8371 1139

#### Noarlunga Health Village

(08) 8384 9262

Your local community health centre or local council to find out what is available in your area.

If you feel you would benefit from individual counselling, contact:

#### flindersfertility Counselling Service

131 IVF (131483)

#### Inner Southern Community Health Service

(08) 8277 2488