

Understanding Stress

Are you feeling stressed? You're not alone.

Signs of Stress

- Nervous and “stressed”?
- Upset because something unexpected happened?
- Feel like you can't cope with all you have to do?
- Angry because things are out of your control?
- Thinking about things you have to get done?
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep?
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions?
- Major changes to your appetite or eating patterns?
- Frequent urges to use the bathroom?
- Frequent headaches, upset stomach, or other aches and pains?
- Using alcohol or drugs to escape or feel better?
- Feeling tired all the time?



We tend to feel stressed out when the demands of our daily life feel like too much for us to manage.

Common sources of stress are:

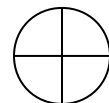
- Daily pressures and responsibilities of school, work, family and parenting, money problems, illness (mental and physical), relationships, homelessness, home life issues.
- A major life event or change such as a death, health change, job loss, personal trauma (or trauma to family member or friend).

Both positive and negative events can be stressful – especially those that involve major changes or upheavals to our routines.

Aboriginal people have other stresses due to generations of oppression and injustice toward their culture and identity.

- Racism and/or a lack of understanding of culture and history
- Political issues such as land claims, self-government, justice issues
- Loss of determinants to health –culture, language, history, land, healthy family and community, spiritual healing practices
- Many losses, generations of abuse/poverty/addiction problems
- Identity problems (due to loss of culture or lost connection to family or community)

Stress effects the body, mind, emotions, and spirit



Why does stress feel so awful?

Sometimes stress can have a negative effect on the basic parts of our health –our thoughts, our body reactions, our feelings, our behaviours.

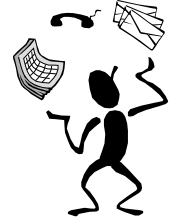


Stress is more likely to have a negative impact on our health when:

- We feel threatened or at risk of danger or loss
- We respond to the stress in an unhealthy way (i.e. drug or alcohol use, ignore the problem, don't seek help if we need it, etc.,)

Stress is more likely to have a positive effect on our health when:

- We have an attitude that the situation is a challenge to overcome
- We respond with healthy behaviours that help us



10 Ways to Cope With Stress

1. **Focus on what you can do.** Don't give up. Get help and try something. Doing nothing makes things more stressful.
2. **Manage your emotions.** Sadness, anger and fear are most common when coping with stress. Expressing feelings in healthy ways (no harm or injury to self, others, property or animal) helps.
3. **Seek out support.** Let people who care about you know what you are going through. Accept help. Seek information to help you.
4. **Focus on the positives.** Identify your strengths, see things as challenges and life lessons, and try to keep a sense of humour.
5. **Make a plan of action.** This involves problem-solving. Identify and define the problem. Select a goal. Think of possible solutions. Consider pros and cons. Put your plan into action. Evaluate plan if needed.
6. **Use self-care.** Balance work and play. Eat healthy. Exercise. Avoid drugs and alcohol. Take breaks. Plan to have fun. Get sleep.
7. **Take care of your relationships.** Family, friends and co-workers are effected by your stress and can cause you stress. Be assertive about your needs. Accept responsibility and apologize when needed. Talk to others with a respectful and calm manner.
8. **Practice spiritual or religious activities.** Pray or meditate. Seek guidance from an elder or healer. Go to a sacred place. Gather with others with the same spiritual beliefs.
9. **Have an attitude of Acceptance.** Learn what you can and cannot change. Sometimes all you can do is manage your distress.
10. **Distract yourself.** Take breaks from your stress. This is part of self-care. Distraction with unhealthy behaviours (drug/alcohol use, gambling, overworking, overeating) leads to more stress. Try walking, reading, watching movie, hobbies, art, time with friends, gardening or housework.

Do you need help?

- ✓ Contact your doctor, traditional healer, counselor, talk to someone you trust
- ✓ Use a crisis line. Mental Health Crisis Service.. 519-433-2023
Parenting Help Line..... 1-888-603-9100
Kids Help Line..... 1-800-668-6868

