

# How to Manage Stress

## What exactly is Stress?

Stress is considered something that causes strain to the individual whether it is mental, emotional, or physical. Whilst some stress can be healthy, too much stress can negatively impact on sleep and all aspects of health and wellbeing. Stress is associated with several chemicals but the two main stress hormones in our bodies are cortisol and adrenalin. Both of which are stimulating to our brains, muscles, and nervous system.

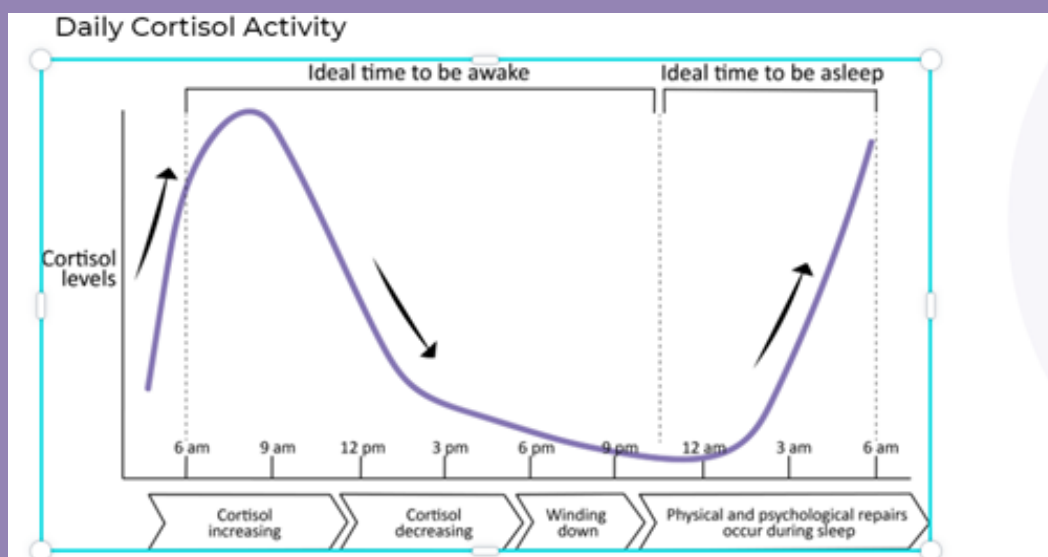
Stress is linked to:

- Altered brain responses.
- Changes in blood flow and metabolism in the brain and reduced brain connections over time.
- Reduced immune responses and increased inflammatory chemicals.

All of which can affect sleep!

## What role does Cortisol play in our lives?

- Cortisol is the main hormone released by the body in response to stress.
- Cortisol levels rise in the morning and help us feel energised and alert.
- Cortisol levels are naturally highest in the morning, then reduce throughout the day and are lowest at night during sleep.
- Cortisol levels drop about three hours after dark allowing our body to enter a period of rest & recovery, physical repair & regeneration.
- If we are stressed, cortisol can “spike” at the wrong time of the night making us alert when we should be sleeping.
- Elevated levels of cortisol at night can cause a racing mind, heart or busy limbs making it difficult to go to sleep.
- High cortisol levels also interfere with our ability to stay asleep, blocking the sleep hormone melatonin from allowing us to reach the deep the stages of sleep.
- If you find yourself waking at 1.00 am or 2.00 am cortisol may be out of balance.



## The link between Stress and Insomnia

- Researchers at the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine found out that stress hormones such as Corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH) and cortisol can profoundly negatively affect sleep.
- They found that "insomniacs with the highest degree of sleep disturbance secreted the highest amount of cortisol".
- Thus, the process that regulates the hormone cortisol which plays a positive role in our daily life by waking us up, keeping us alert can become out of balance when we are stressed, leading to sleep loss and inflammatory disorders.
- The research shows that any effective holistic insomnia management strategy needs to address stress by including daytime anxiety support, stress hormone control measures and night-time sleep aids. Simultaneous approaches will be more effective.

## Perspective

A small amount of stress can be a good thing. We all grow and move forward when we are in situations which challenge and ask more of us. But often the demands of these situations, work, study, relationships, home life, expectations, can get so big or go on for so long that they overwhelm us. As stress builds up we become less able to deal with it effectively and if we are not aware of the impact of stress we find that we are not coping or judging ourselves as “less than our best”.

## Causes of Stress

There are many situations that may make you feel stressed but the following are classic triggers of stress, especially if you are dealing with more than one at a time:

**To gauge your current level of stress, tick the number of potential stressors listed below that you think could be currently impacting your stress levels:**

- An excessive workload – yes this does include children!
- An uncomfortable physical environment, e.g. prolonged extremes of temperature or noise
- Not enough sleep. Not quality sleep
- Ill health
- Prolonged physical activity
- Financial difficulties
- Renovations
- A change in your living or working patterns:  
Leaving home, new flatmates or new job, moving house
- Pregnancy
- Bad self-image: ‘I’m too fat’, ‘... too dumb’, ‘... too ugly’
- Living or working or studying in an environment that is not of your culture or language
- Hostile, or uncomfortable emotional environments, e.g .restructuring, redundancy, unhealthy relationships·
- A break-up of a relationship
- The death or loss of a friend, relation or pet
- World news and the political environment
- Concerns about climate change and the environment

## Signs you are Stressed

Often, we are so used to living with our stressful lives we miss the signs and symptoms that our body naturally uses to signal to us it can't cope! Stress impacts the body and brain in a number of ways and these will be different for everyone. The key to addressing your stress is to first understand your unique stress signals that tell you to STOP and take action to mitigate your stress levels. By taking action you can prevent stress impacting your sleep and health in the long term.





# Stress Checklist

Tick the signs and symptoms below that you experience when you are stressed.

These are your personal stress signals.

- Headache
- Unexplained bodily pain or discomfort
- Unexplained sweating
- Racing heart rate or shaking
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Butterflies in your stomach
- Changes to bowel or bladder movements
- Unexplained changes in appetite
- Increased cravings for caffeine, sugar or refined carbohydrates
- Digestive pain such as bloating or reflux
- Brain fog
- Poor Memory
- Inability to make decisions
- Unexplained change in mood or emotions
- Being unreasonably critical, snappy or short tempered
- Less patience and tolerance for others and experiences
- Avoiding social situations
- Extreme fatigue or energy swings
- Acne
- Apathy
- Depression
- Decreased libido

## What to do when you are Stressed

When your personal stress signals tell you are experiencing an unhealthy level of stress, take action to balance your stress levels before it impacts your sleep, health and happiness.

- Stop.
- Assess your situation and work out exactly what is making you feel this way.
- It's important to remember that stress is a normal response but ignoring it is not a good idea, instead acknowledge it and think about what support you can give your body so that it may cope with the stress better BEFORE it becomes detrimental to your health and wellbeing.
- Take action to improve it. Ask for help! Start by talking a friend, family member or colleague you feel you can trust who can help you seek professional help if needed.
- Take control by consciously relaxing; through physical exercise, breathing exercises or doing activities you enjoy.
- Be creative in your approach to tasks. For example, if you feel stressed at the prospect of extra work in the office, ask the advice of your boss or tutor or another work colleague on the approach you need to take.
- Talk to some friends and take a team approach to problem solving.
- Never be afraid of asking for help. Everyone experiences stress at some time, it is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength to be able to reach out to others.
- Accept your failures and move on. See value in your mistakes: no mistake = no progress.
- Be encouraging and supportive of yourself. Always appreciate who you are and the unique qualities you have.
- Try to keep things in perspective. If a situation is getting on top of you, step back, adjust your goals and take action – do what you can and learn how to say no.
- Most of us are very good at giving advice. Try looking at your situation as if it were someone else's - a friend, perhaps. Think about the advice you would give them, and follow it yourself.
- Hydration levels keep the brain clear so you can make good decisions. Drink 30mLs of healthy pure water for every kg of body weight per day e.g. 70 kg person = 2100mLs. Consume no more than 200mLs per half hour. In other words drink regularly throughout the day.
- Certain vitamins, minerals and herbs have been shown to support Cortisol and the stress response as well as and the nervous system – speak to our Naturopath team for specific products we recommend.
- Find a range of stress busting activities that you enjoy and find relaxing to do as soon as you feel stressed. See our resource - Stress Busting Activities for more ideas.

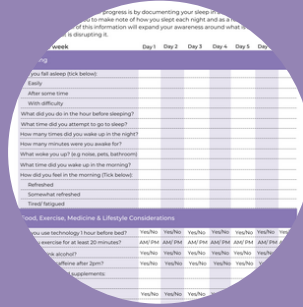
**“Stress is having a pervasive impact on our sleep, & robbing us of our health and happiness. Our team have developed a scientifically formulated range of sleep and stress products that help our customers get the best sleep possible, even when stressed. Let's reinforce natural, healthy sleep so we can live our best lives.” - Kirsten Taylor SleepDrops**

Founder

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# Resources



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