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## **Stress Management Part 1 – Helen Dudeney MEd, Educational Consultant**

### **What is Stress?**

Stress is the emotional and the physical way we respond to pressure when faced with difficult, dangerous or challenging situations such as

- Starting a new job or project.
- Meeting deadlines
- Learning a new computer program or procedure
- Getting a new boss
- Getting organised or up to date before taking annual leave
- Financial problems

This pressure can come from within, the expectations we place on ourselves, and from the environment – from families, work or other day to day demands.

Stress is a normal part of living, we need it. It can be productive in that it can increase our alertness, focus and provide energy to respond to the challenge of the situation. It can also have a negative impact on our ability to cope. This is more likely to occur if a person experiences stress over a long period of time or if they have not developed good skills to manage stress and recover from it once the challenge or danger passes. Each person experiences stress in different situations and to a different degree.

Stress produces both physical and mental symptoms, these are involuntary changes in the body designed to prepare you to handle the situation.

The mental or emotional symptoms can include:

- Inability to concentrate
- Irritability
- Tension
- Feeling excessively tired
- Sleep problems
- Inability to think clearly

The physical symptoms can include:

- A pounding heart

- Difficulty breathing
- Dry mouth
- Stomach upset
- Headache
- Frequent urination
- Sweating palms
- Tight muscles that may cause pain and trembling

### **Purpose of stress:**

Stress response is the automatic response our body has when faced with danger or something that throws you off balance. An event that is unexpected and requires you to make a change in order to maintain balance or control. These circumstances are called 'Stressors'. This automatic response is also called the fight – or - flight response. The physical symptoms we experience are due to the chemicals released or the muscles preparing to either fight or flight. A third reaction is the 'freeze' response. These are suitable responses if we are in physical danger but less useful if the challenge is an impending deadline or a performance review meeting.

Stress can be experienced and handled appropriately, without having a negative impact on our wellbeing. However, stress that is not handled and lasts for a long time becomes chronic and this can have a negative impact on relationships, health, work and our enjoyment of life.

### **When do you need to do something about the way stress is impacting on your life?**

- When you feel controlled by it.
- When you are experiencing ongoing issues related to the physical and mental symptoms listed above.

### **What should you do about it?**

- Become aware of how stress affects your body and your mind
- Be attuned to the warning signs
- Learn and practice some good stress management techniques
- Seek medical attention if it is chronic.

Common strategies that can reduce your reaction to stressors include breathing exercises and humour. For more ideas check out this article for [5 Minute Stress Relief Strategies](#).

For more information about our StressAce program contact us

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