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## Stress

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### What is Stress?

Stress is the way you react physically and emotionally to just about everything good and bad that happens to you or around you, for example, getting stuck in traffic, running late, relationship problems, caring for someone who is ill.

Some stress is good for us. It helps us succeed and it gives us excitement. When people say they feel stressed, that is when their reaction to stress has gone from positive to negative. If you don't recognise the situation and do something about it eventually illness may occur.

Our reaction to stress is influenced by many things, our personality, hereditary factors, our finances, previous experiences and our health. Everyone reacts differently to similar situations and has their own need and limit to stress.

### The Stress of Caring

People who care for their loved ones at home have a variety of problems. Men and women undergo changes of roles. Men frequently have to perform unfamiliar household tasks with which their wives have coped with for years and become a nurse.

*The biggest problem is not being able to get away from being a carer.*

Women undergo the opposite role change, having to learn new skills in coping with household maintenance, dealing with tradesmen and other responsibilities which were previously undertaken by the husband.

The carer stops having people around for dinner or evenings or dining out because they become embarrassed by the person's lack of table manners or conversation. You cannot do things you like doing because the person does not want to and you can't leave him or her alone at home. You tend to become less involved in the normal social world. Explanations to family friends and neighbours become exhausting

because it is hard for them to understand unless they have lived in similar circumstances.

All this has a stressful and strong effect on the carer and feelings of anger, guilt, frustration, helplessness, embarrassment, grief, depression, isolation are living with them constantly.

*Asking for help is never easy. The following actions may help with coping with stress:*

- Acknowledge the stressfulness of your situation
- Tell others whom you trust that you are feeling stressed
- Take time away from caring
- Acknowledge your needs – not just those of the person you are caring for
- Find out what assistance is available
- Regularly review the demands caring places on you

*It is important that carers have support from a variety of sources.*

- Consider carefully how you can reduce the stress of caring

### Warning Signs of Stress

*Physical Signs:*

- Tiredness, fatigue, chronic exhaustion
- Knotted stomach
- Lethargy, lack of energy
- Difficulty catching breath, shallow breathing
- Muscle tension: clenched or jutting jaw, frowning, stiff neck, high shoulders, difficulty keeping still, wringing of hands
- Pains in lower back, chest, shoulders, neck, joints and other parts of the body
- Frequent urge to urinate
- Increased illness, persistent colds, skin itches and small rashes
- Headache, migraines
- Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing
- Diarrhoea, stomach upsets and ulcers
- Weight changes
- High blood pressure

### *Emotional Signs:*

- Tiredness, difficulty sleeping
- Mental disorientation, difficulty in making decisions, difficulty concentrating, forgetting things
- Loss of interest in family, friends, work
- Anxiety
- Weepiness
- Loss of motivation and zest for life
- Sudden mood changes
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Resentment
- Feelings of isolation
- Low self esteem and loss of confidence
- Feelings of loss of control

## **Dealing with Stress**

**Say no:** Take control of what is happening to yourself. Learn to give a friendly no to requests from others.

**Talk:** Talk things over with someone, sometimes it can be an understanding friend but it can also be a stranger or professional.

**Relax:** To overcome tension, teach yourself to relax and have daily recreation. Try a massage, meditation, walking or a hobby.

**Exercise:** The tension can also be worked off by playing a sport or gardening. Also develop good eating and rest habits.

**Know yourself:** Recognise your talents and skills and use them. Know your limitations and seek the right balance. Enjoy the successes, accept the failures and learn from the mistakes.

**Seek the cause:** Don't just deal with the superficial issues. Seek advice and expose the cause. Get a good overview of what is happening.

**Support:** Support from friends and family is most important. Share your thoughts, concerns and suggestions. Get professional advice from a minister, social worker or a doctor.

## **Where to go for Support**

### **Caring for Carers**

Joining a carer support group can relieve some of the stress you are under as a carer. The constant tasks, the concerns, grief, drama, moments of joy, frustration and exhaustion are all part of the day to day existence of a carer.

Feelings of helplessness, fear, anger, guilt and despair are all normal. It is important that the carer has an outlet for these feelings, like having someone to talk to. The chance to share with others who understand and are also, or have been carers lightens the load and may be all that is needed. *Caring for Carers* provides support to carers by providing a way

to communicate feelings that it would not be appropriate to discuss with friends, family or the caree.

As a carer, it is important to remember that you are an individual with needs of your own. Ensure that you take care of yourself by arranging your day so that you have some time for yourself. Meeting with other carers can also ease the loneliness that carers can often experience.

*Caring for Carers* has a Newsletter and several support meetings each month and ongoing telephone support. These services are provided to help make your job easier.

*Caring for Carers* is situated:

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221 Gloucester Street, Christchurch.  
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Phone: 377 8426  
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