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Looking after our mental health

Overview

The World Health Organisation defines health as:

“.....a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.

What is stress?

Stress is how our bodies respond to threat when we sense danger, whether real or imagined.

We can all feel stressed when we are under too much mental or emotional pressure. We all have different stress levels which are based on individual experiences, personality and how we choose or have learned to respond to situations.

But stress can also be unhealthy and cause anxiety or depression, particularly if we are exposed to long periods of pressure and major life events that trigger our stress response.

Examples of external stress triggers include:

- the death of someone we love
- divorce
- losing a job
- financial obligations and pressures
- moving home
- serious illness or injury
- traumatic life events

Good stress vs bad stress

There are two types of stress: There's stress that motivates you to do better and that brings certain characteristics to the fore that is of benefit to you. This is good stress. However, you can also experience stress that causes anxiety and associated health problems. How can you distinguish between the two stresses?

Good stress – Take about 20 seconds and have a think about a moment in your life where stress has been helpful. For example, the first time you had to deliver a presentation at work, and how you felt stressed. Ultimately, that stress might have helped you to prepare, practice and perform better for that presentation.

Bad stress – Stress is problematic when it becomes disproportionate to your problems or fears, when you are feeling overwhelmed and overthinking everything. When we find



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ourselves in this situation too much, it might be a signal that you are stepping into a mental health challenge and into the territory of anxiety and depression.

What is anxiety?

Feelings of anxiety range from mild to extreme when we are worried or fearful about things that could happen. Anxiety is often classed as your body's natural response to stress, however, despite not being particularly nice, it is a normal part of everyday life. Think about job interviews, speaking in front of people and dating someone new, for example. It affects us all in different ways but it's that natural fight or flight response that helped keep our ancestors alert to danger and safe.

Anxiety affects us all physically and mentally or emotionally:

Some of the mental or emotional signs include:

- racing thoughts
- fear of losing control
- feelings of dread, panic or 'impending doom'
- feeling helpless or hopeless
- difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- uncontrollable overthinking
- feeling irritable or angry
- heightened awareness
- feelings of dissociation or being detached from oneself

Physically we may experience:

- sweating
- heavy and fast breathing
- palpitations and increased or pounding heart rate
- chills, hot flushes, or blushing
- shaking
- dizziness, light-headedness, feeling faint
- chest pains
- extreme tiredness
- lack of energy
- numbness or tingling
- stomach aches, sickness, nausea

When we have both mental and physical symptoms it can impact how we live and behave. Anxiety is to be expected and is normal in certain everyday situations, but anxiety is a problem when it becomes chronic, irrational and debilitating.

Part Two: Dealing with uncertainty



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Lost your job? Certainty is one a core human need. If your work, your finances or your personal relationships are in flux, the key is to be kind to yourself and to create psychological safety. This allows you to make better decisions and be less reactive.

Be your own best friend. Develop a kind, loving inner-voice to support yourself as you would support your friends, colleagues or partner. Your subconscious believes anything you tell it. So, if you feed your brain positive affirmations, it will start to believe it.

Create a support system

Think of three of the most important people in your life that can help you step back and provide clarity around any uncertainties and fears that you might have. Surround yourself with high-quality people, be mindful of who you're talking to, and select positive topics to keep a positive attitude going.

Turn your attention to positive routines

We all have positive coping mechanisms. Identify about three of those mechanisms and employ them to bring you back to centre. Eating healthier and focusing on foods that nourish your mind has a bearing on your brain's development. Perhaps you do yoga, perhaps you like to go for a run, exercise is proven to help you calm down and relieve stress. Run a warm bath, while lighting aroma-therapeutic candles. Write in a journal, if that's something you find helpful. Switch off from external factors that can affect your mood, which may include the news or other forms of media where negativity often reigns.

Connect with great listeners

If you're noticing you're down more than up, reach out for professional help before it turns into something more serious. Whether you connect with a counsellor or make use of apps like Better Help or MindLine, that have trained counsellors and listeners on the other end, connecting with great listeners in your time of distress or uncertainty can help you manage your fears.

Think yourself happy

Every time you have a thought, you are able to choose what you believe about that thought. Whatever you decide to believe becomes reality. Through techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy and mind management tricks you can also bring yourself back to centre.

Have a contingency plan in place

If you are anxious about being faced with unemployment or job uncertainty, get innovative and use this time to work on your resume, develop online contacts, write articles to show your areas of interest, focus on industries that are thriving and are recruiting, reach out to recruiters for help or work with your own coach.