

WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS

It is very common to experience some anxious symptoms when stressed, such as when assignment due dates or exams are fast approaching. This could manifest in different ways, for different people e.g., worrying excessively, restlessness, feeling on edge, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension and sleep disturbance. The degree to which we experience these symptoms also varies between people. Some may experience them some of the time, whilst others may experience them most of the time. Anxiety is originally adaptive and helps us get things done, however it starts to become maladaptive when it begins to interfere with our social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Therefore, it is useful to have some strategies up your sleeve to help you manage when you are particularly stressed. These strategies can include the following:

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

An activity that increases your heart rate. This has been demonstrated to lessen symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress (Mikkelsen et al., 2017).

DEEP BREATHING

When you are a bit stressed or anxious you may experience an increase in your breathing rate, as the body prepares a flight or fight response to a perceived threat. This increased breathing rate occurs without any physical exertion. In this case, we breathe out too much carbon dioxide which can lead to dizziness, headache, light-headedness etc.

This is also a good life skill but needs practice:

Take a breath in for 3 seconds through the nose, hold for 2 seconds and breathe out for 3 seconds through the mouth while placing your hand on your stomach and feeling your stomach rise as you breathe out (Centre for Clinical Interventions, 2018).

MINDFULNESS

The ability to be fully present in the moment, aware of our thoughts and feelings without getting caught up with them. It involves focused attention, body scan, noting, loving kindness, skilful compassion, visualisation, resting awareness & reflection (headspace). This is a rather good life skill to develop but takes some practice and getting used to. There are a heap of available apps you can download with guided mindfulness e.g., Headspace, Calm, Smiling Mind, Simple Habit etc. Evidence suggests that practicing mindfulness can counter the effect of stress because excessive orientation to the future can be related to anxiety & improves symptoms of anxiety (Hoffman, et al., 2010).

SOME OTHER TIPS

- Take regular breaks
- Set daily tasks that are achievable
- Eat well
- Positive reinforcement - do things you enjoy when you complete your daily tasks e.g., watch your favourite episode on Netflix, speak to a friend, play a videogame. Positive reinforcement increases the likelihood of completing set tasks because you are being rewarded

If you feel like you need some extra help, it is brave to ask for it! See your GP for a Mental Health Care Plan to see a psychologist. You will be entitled to Medicare rebates for up to 10 individual appointments with an allied mental health service in a year.

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