



Depression and Stress Management

“In a Nutshell”



Everyone experiences some symptoms of depression or stress in their lives at some point. The two are very much interlinked and one can lead to the other because of the symptoms experienced.

Before we can look at developing skills for the management of depression and stress, we need to be able to identify what our symptoms are so that we can act accordingly when we become aware of their presence. It is advisable to talk to family or friends in order to gain a better awareness of changes in ourselves, which we may not always recognise initially. Are they aware that you tend to become more withdrawn, that you are less tolerant, or that you are rushing things?

It is important to also become aware of how we talk to ourselves. Are you constantly calling yourself “stupid” or “mad” or berating yourself for being “unable to cope whilst everyone around me is coping?” How do you know everyone else is coping or is without problems? Think about how you talk to others who are low in mood or stressed, you would not talk to them like that so don’t talk like that to yourself.

Some symptoms of depression and stress:

| Depression: | Stress: |
|--|--|
| Loss of interest Helplessness Hopelessness Tearfulness Poor concentration / memory Tiredness Sleep disturbances Disturbed appetite Withdrawal from social activities Difficulty carrying out routine activities Loss of energy | <u>Physical symptoms</u> which include: - sweating, palpitations, nausea, chest pain. <u>Changes in thoughts & feelings</u> which include: - low mood, lack of confidence, feelings of inadequacy, feeling badly about oneself. <u>Changes in behaviour</u> which include: - lack of interest, tearfulness, smoking or drinking to excess, rushing things, lack of concentration. |

What triggers the symptoms?

At the severe end of the scale people often experience more marked physical symptoms and it seems likely that this is related to bio-chemical changes in the brain. Quite often however, symptoms are triggered by life events which people find difficult to cope with.

- Major life issues such as bereavement, separation from a partner or children, unemployment, work issues, financial problems, moving to a new house can all contribute to feelings of depression and/or stress.
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs can cause chemical imbalances, which will affect mood levels and contribute to feelings of stress.
- Seasonal changes – (SAD). It is now recognised that changes in the seasons can affect peoples’ mood and their functioning.
- Hormonal issues such as pre-menstrual syndrome, childbirth and menopause are known to affect mood and stress levels.

Some people are more vulnerable than others and are therefore more prone to periods of Depression and feelings of stress. Some factors have been identified which can reduce peoples' vulnerability. These include: -

- A high self-esteem based on self-worth, not achievements.
- Practising positive thinking.
- Assertively expressing needs, thoughts and feelings.
- Using an established social support network.
- Reducing unnecessary stress.



Fight or Flight?

The brain interpreting a situation as being threatening or dangerous triggers the physical symptoms we experience when under stress. The “Danger” message is passed through the nervous system to the adrenal glands and adrenaline is released into the blood stream.

As the adrenaline passes into the bloodstream the body prepares itself for “Fight” or “Flight”, to either fight the perceived fear or to run away from it. This is fine if the fear is real, e.g. if a bull is rampaging down the street ahead, you know you must run. However, it is not good if we are facing an unreal threat such as a supermarket. The physical symptoms are a natural response to a threatening situation but, in this case, it is the brain’s interpretation of a situation being threatening that causes us to feel this way.