

- **Make time to exercise.** Get active at least three times a week – walking, swimming, zumba, waka ama or anything you enjoy. Exercising outdoors is especially helpful.
- **Take time out.** Some people find it hard to take time out for a holiday or a weekend. Give yourself a breather every now and then – even just a short break during the day at mahi or at home. Do something you really enjoy.
- **Practice relaxation and mindfulness.** Try yoga, meditation, mirimiri or massage. Listen to music, enjoy time in nature. Learn what works for you and practice it regularly.
- Use **online tools or apps** like smallsteps.org.nz, justathought.co.nz, or Mentemia. For more, see mentalhealth.org.nz/digital-tools.
- **Get good sleep.** A walk in the evening, meditation or practicing relaxation can help. Avoid taking sleeping tablets as they will disrupt your sleeping pattern even more.
- **Organise your work habits.** Get up 5 or 10 minutes earlier so you don't have to rush, set aside time for processing email, break large projects down into small steps. Spend time at the end of the day preparing for the next day.
- **Solve problems.** Try to find a solution to conflict, rather than letting it fester. You can build communication skills (through books, workshops or online programmes) to become more assertive and able to say no. These skills will also help find compromises, and reduce frustration and anger.
- **Learn to feel better about yourself.** Identify what you do well, and recognise and acknowledge your qualities and characteristics. Practice positive self-talk.
- **Put fun and laughter in your life.** This is good for our health and it feels good!

If you are experiencing high and persistent levels of stress and would like further information or support, talk to your doctor or health professional.

There are a range of free helplines that you can call or text 24/7 if you need to talk to someone.

Free call or text **1737** to talk with a trained counsellor

**Lifeline** 0800 LIFELINE (0800 543 354)  
or free text HELP (4357)

**Youthline** 0800 376 633 or free text 234

For a full list, visit [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines)

### Resources

The Mental Health Foundation has a range of information on mental health and wellbeing including pamphlets, postcards and CDs available to order from our website: [shop.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://shop.mentalhealth.org.nz)

The **Relax for Health CD** is designed to help you relax deeply and leave you feeling refreshed and more energetic. You can also find it free on **Bandcamp** (search for Mental Health Foundation of NZ).

### Contact us

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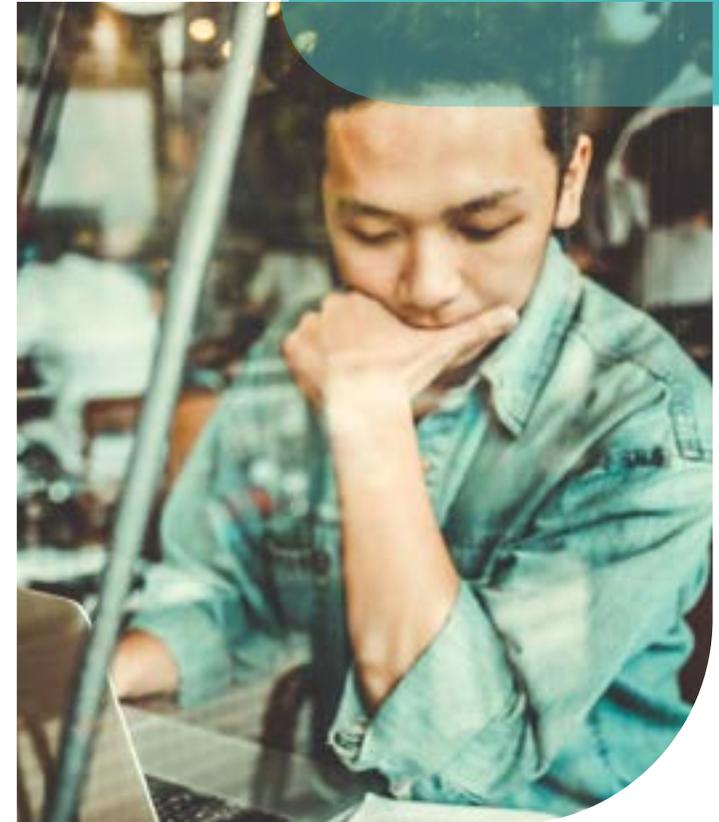
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The Mental Health Foundation is a charity and we rely on donations to support our work. Please consider giving us a donation so that we can continue to help others. Options for donation can be found on our website [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)

Mental Health Foundation 2021

This resource was produced with input from many people. Special thanks go to Natasha de Faria ([www.best-practice.co.nz](http://www.best-practice.co.nz)).

## Stress and how to manage it



 **Mental Health Foundation**  
OF NEW ZEALAND  
*mauri tū, mauri ora*  
[www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)

Our vision: a society where all people flourish.

**"It's not the stress that kills us;  
it is our reaction to it."**

*Hans Selye, pioneer stress researcher*

## What is stress?

'Stress' describes our physical, mental and emotional response to a situation that we experience as a demand or pressure – called a 'stressor'. Many stressors are external, from our environment, such as work, finances, relationships, parenting and day-to-day inconveniences and busyness. However, stressors can also be internal, such as negative thoughts, beliefs or attitudes.

Not all stress is bad. Stress is a natural occurrence in life and everyday stress is necessary for growth and development. Most people enjoy being stimulated or challenged, and stress can help with motivation, focus, energy and performance. If we can unwind and recover afterwards, there are no harmful effects. The problem lies in too much stress or prolonged stress.

At first we may become tired and irritable, but if the stress continues and is not dealt with effectively, the result can be physical and mental ill-health. Sometimes we also respond to stress in ways that add more stress on our bodies – for example by smoking or drinking.

Of course, the stresses of daily life can be immense – financial worries, workload, childcare and whānau care responsibilities, traffic woes and more. Stress levels are individual – what one person may experience as energising, another may find stressful. If you notice that you are not coping well, it's time to take action. Support is available, and you can make changes that will help.

## How can work contribute to stress?

One of the major causes of stress in the workplace is feeling that things are beyond our control. Advances in technology bring many advantages, but they are also a major contributor to daily stress. People may also find travelling to and from work very stressful.

Other stressors in the workplace can include:

- Overload – too much work, too little time
- Relationships – conflict with colleagues or boss
- Conflicts between work roles, job demands, and juggling the balance between work and home life
- Long hours, shift work, being unclear about work roles
- Complicated tasks, poor training, feeling isolated, unsupported or undervalued
- Changes in role or organisation (e.g. restructuring); lack of communication between managers and workers or between departments
- Bullying or harassment
- Not being able to talk openly about stress, health or mental health problems
- Physical environment – noise, dirt, dangers, lack of air, poor equipment, messy workspace

**Make some time for exercise such as walking, swimming, team sports or anything else you enjoy doing.**



## What are some warning signs of stress?

### Physical, in the body:

- Shortness of breath or shallow breathing
- Indigestion, stomach upsets
- Headaches and pains in lower back, chest, shoulders or other parts of the body
- Skin itches or rashes for no clear reason
- Frequent colds or flu
- Nervous 'twitches' or muscle spasms
- Memory or concentration problems
- Changes in your sleeping patterns

### Emotional, in your feelings:

- Feeling impatient or irritable
- Losing confidence
- Feeling anxious, tense or tearful
- Losing your joy and energy for life

### Behavioural, in your actions:

- losing interest in family/whānau, friends or work
- Poor self-care
- Relying on drugs, alcohol, caffeine or overeating
- Finding it hard to make decisions

Any persistent symptoms should be checked out by a GP or Māori health provider.

## What can I do about stress?

One way to reduce stress is to change the stressor (cause). The most drastic way is to change your environment – where you live, where you work. Of course, this is not always possible. Instead, you can think of changes to those parts of your environment which are causing the most stress.

Another way is to cope differently with stress. Here are some ways to help you reduce and prevent too much stress and tension. But you have to practice!

- **Talk your worries over** with a friend, your partner, whānau, counsellor, a helpline, someone you trust.
- **Set realistic goals.** Let go of unreasonable expectations. Be selective and use your energy to do the most important and possible tasks.
- **Eat well.** Eat a variety of fresh foods in a well balanced diet. Some foods will increase nervous tension (e.g. coffee, tea, chocolate, soft drinks).