

**TIGERS**  
Childcare



# A guide to stress and how to build resilience

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This guide is designed to help you identify the early warning signs that you are becoming overwhelmed by stress and offer some top tips on developing new coping skills to stay well.

**Free and confidential helpline**

**Freephone Ireland: 1800 903 542**

**Freephone UK: 0808 196 2016**

For further support visit <https://eap.spectrum.life>\*\*

**\*\*Access Code: EAPSPECTRUMLIFE**

## WHAT IS STRESS?

One of the more common myths surrounding stress is that it is an illness. It's true that unchecked, sustained stress of any kind can cause us to develop mental and physical health problems **but stress itself is not an illness**. Instead, it is a set of circumstances which can cause you to feel out of control, overwhelmed and ultimately, burnt out.

We cannot always control what happens to us during our day-to-day lives, but we can learn to manage stress in a proactive way. We can use techniques which not only get us through difficult times but also help us to develop coping skills when we inevitably face stressful events again in future.

Remember that we all have different 'tipping points' and some stressors are more difficult to cope with for some people than others. We are the sum of our life experiences, and we all have varying triggers and responses because of this.



## COMMON CAUSES OF STRESS

Stress can be caused by all sorts of things. Some events are life-changing such as a relationship breakdown or a bereavement, while other sources of stress can include a quarrel with a friend or partner, a poor performance review or short-term money worries.

**Remember you are not alone.** There are plenty of people you can call on to help you manage before you become overwhelmed:



### Spectrum EAP

Speaking with their trained & experienced team



### Friends & Family

Talking your worries through with a trusted friend or family member



### Your GP

Particularly if you are experiencing any physical or mental health problems.

### Does work related stress impact on our wellbeing differently to stress at home?

It is important to remember that whether the source of your stress is home or work related, your body's physiological and psychological responses are the same. In other words, your body and mind cannot tell the difference between the cause of the stress. However, the coping skills you can develop, and those you already use, will enable you to tackle the source of the stress and come through a more resilient person.

## EARLY WARNING SIGNS

It can be sometimes easier for us to identify that others are stressed before we notice the signs in ourselves. This is the paradox of stress: the more stressed we are, the less we notice what is happening within us. However, when we think about our own signs and write them down, it's much easier for us to be able to step back in the early stages and call upon both our internal resources, as well as seeking support from people who can help us.

Early warning signs that we need help coping manifest in three different ways:

- Emotional (and cognitive: the way we process information)
- Physical
- Behavioural

Consider that by the time stress is causing us physical illness, it has been going on for some time. We have all have 'vulnerable spots' in our bodies which are often the first to tell us that we are stressed such as cold sores, other skin problems, backache, headaches and tummy upsets.

**It is important to see your GP if your health status (mental and/or physical) has changed, or you are concerned that symptoms are becoming worse.**

## EXAMPLES OF EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Keep in mind that some signs such as tearfulness can be both behavioural (crying) and emotional (feeling like you want to cry). In fact, you might find that some of your signs fall under all three areas.

### Physical Signs

- Unexpected tearfulness
- Significant weight loss or gain in a short period of time
- Changes in sleep (sleeping too much or too little)
- Feeling totally drained

### Emotional or Cognitive Signs

- Feeling unable to face the day
- Lack of focus or feeling distracted
- Outbursts of anger
- Feeling snappy & impatient

### Behavioural Signs

- Drinking more than usual
- Withdrawing from other people
- Making regular mistakes at home or work
- Being late or missing work



### Write down your early warning signs to help manage your stress

Physical signs

Behavioural Signs

Emotional/Cognitive Signs

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## RESILIENCE: the antidote to stress?

Stress is something every human being deals with from time to time. Life is not always easy but when our foundations are shaky and we do not have coping skills to call upon, we can start to burn out and are very vulnerable to developing physical and mental health issues.

### What is resilience?

'Resilience is the ability to demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in fast-paced, pressured and diverse environments' Roden (2002).

Your ability to cope and manage pressure is determined by your resilience. The more resilient you are, the more you can cope with life's pressures and the more effective you become in managing issues.

More resilient people recognise the warning signs of too much pressure and can effectively employ mental coping strategies to deal with the circumstances when the pressure gets too much. This is because they have already developed the ability to:

- Lead a **balanced life**
- **Talk** and seek help from others when it is needed
- Employ **positive & proactive** coping strategies
- **Never take on more than you know you can cope with**
- **Organise your time better to get as much done as possible**
- **Schedule time for YOU**

### Living a more balanced life:

You may be experiencing stress because your life has become out of balance. You may be spending too much time and energy focused on work or caring for others, at the expense of your own health & well-being. The following strategies can help you live a more balanced and stress-free life:

- **Delegate or share your responsibilities at work and a home**
- **Learn to be more assertive – say NO**
- **Participate in regular exercise**
- **Eat a healthy & well-balanced diet**



### Accepting support from others:

One of the most effective things we can do when we are stressed is talk to a friendly listener who remains calm and listens in a way that makes us feel understood. Studies show that most people who are active socially are most capable of dealing with stressful

situations. To help reduce stress develop a network of friends and family members to turn to when stress threatens to overwhelm you.

- **Think of individuals who care about you and with whom you can share your most personal thoughts.**
- **Reach out to the people you feel close to – call them; make dates to see them; be open and available to them.**



### **Developing Proactive & Positive Coping Skills:**

Your attitude has a lot to do with whether events and occurrences produce a feeling of stress. Once you admit that you are not able to control everything, you will become better equipped to handle unexpected situations. Stress management comes down to finding ways to change your thinking and manage your expectations. Other important ways to adjust your attitude include:

- **Being realistic – shed the superman/superwoman image. Do not expect too much from yourself or others.**
- **Being flexible. Give in sometimes.**
- **Rehearsing/preparing for work & life situations.**
- **Thinking positively – look at each stressful situation as an opportunity to improve your life.**

- **Do not take work problems home or home problems to work.**
- **Laugh each day – rely on humour to relieve tension.**

## **TOP TIPS to help manage stress**

Things you can do to help yourself bounce back when you are feeling overwhelmed by stress and build resilience as you go.

### **GET ENOUGH SLEEP**

Between 7 and 8 hours of nightly sleep tends to be seen as the norm, although only you can tell if you are getting too little – or too much – sleep. Find out more on Health Assured's website.

### **EXERCISE**

Did you know that even 30 minutes of activity, five times a week, can lift your mood and reduce anxiety?



### **PLAN YOUR MEALS**

It is worth planning your meals in advance to ensure that you're giving your body everything it needs to work optimally. Avoiding sugar highs can also help.

## REMEMBER TO BREATHE

When we become stressed or anxious, we tend to breathe more erratically and quickly which in turn makes us feel more stressed. Find a comfortable position and breathe deeply.

## TAKE TIME OUT

Even 15 minutes of 'me time' a day brings positive benefits.

## THINK POSITIVELY

Turning negative thoughts into positive actions will make you feel more in control and able to manage the challenges that life brings.

## GET ORGANISED

Don't try to organise everything at once, just one task a day can bring a sense of calm to an otherwise overwhelming list.

## ASK FOR AND ACCEPT SUPPORT

Start with something small. You could ask your partner to do the grocery shopping once a fortnight for example.

## GET CREATIVE

Spending time creating something focuses the brain in much the same ways as meditation does, bringing calm and perspective.



## USEFUL RESOURCES

- For further support visit <https://eap.spectrum.life>\*\*  
\*\*Access Code: EAPSPECTRUMLIFE
- Free online stress control classes can be found at [stresscontrol.org](https://stresscontrol.org)
- Advice on mental health issues can be found on [hse.ie/mentalhealth](https://hse.ie/mentalhealth)
- Find information on meditation & breathing techniques on [headspace.com](https://headspace.com)