



Managing Stress



Muslim Health Service

Supporting the NHS

What is Stress?

Everyday pressure, difficulties, disruptions and burdens we experience cause us to become stressed. We can become stressed because of a sudden event or it can be something that builds up over a period of time.

Stress can sometimes be a positive factor which motivates us to get things done. However, at other times it can negatively affect our bodies and minds. It can change the way we think, feel and act. These changes can in turn cause us to become more stressed – turning it into a vicious cycle.

Common physical effects of stress, that is, how it affects the body:

- tiredness
- restlessness
- sleeping problems
- breathlessness
- headaches
- fainting spells
- chest pains
- constipation or diarrhoea
- nervous twitches
- craving for food
- cramps or muscle spasms
- indigestion or heartburn
- high blood pressure

Common emotional effects of stress, that is, how it affects our feelings, thoughts and behaviour

How you may feel:

- sad/depressed
- nervous/irritable
- fearful
- dreading the future
- dreading failure
- losing interest in things
- believing you are bad or ugly
- cutting yourself off from others
- feeling lonely and no one to talk to

How you may behave:

- argumentative
- anger problems
- forgetfulness
- concentration problems
- avoiding situations
- in denial - saying there are no problems

Prevention is better than cure

Many of us live with stress without even realising. Before we can deal with stress, we first need to be able to recognise its signs. There are different ways of coping with stress depending on the type, cause and severity of stress involved.

Ultimately, the best way to deal with stress is to build a lifestyle which prevents stress from building up and provides us with enough relaxation and support to deal with stress.

The Five Pillars of Stress Management

- TALK
- WALK
- CREATE
- MAKE FRIENDS
- BE POSITIVE

Talk

Talking to someone about how we feel and what is causing us to be stressed can help us deal with stress. It can help us take the 'load off our minds' and also help us solve problems or contextualise our difficulties. Speaking to a family member or friend is one option. This can be particularly helpful as we may already feel close to this person and find it easier to talk to them. In other situations, it may be helpful to talk to someone neutral instead such as a counsellor. Such a person will be able to provide a more objective viewpoint and guidance.

Walk

Regular physical activity can help relax us and provides stress relief. Walking is a good form of exercise that people of all ages and different levels of fitness can enjoy.

Walking can be done with family and friends. It can then be a time for us to build on our relationships with our loved ones and enjoy quality time with them.

Walking can also be a time for reflection, as it provides the opportunity to think through problems we may be experiencing. It can also be an opportunity to spend time in parks and other green spaces where we can appreciate the world in which we live.

Walking can be done in a relaxed way or vigorously in order to increase our fitness.

Create

Often the reason we become stressed is that we do not make any time for ourselves. Making time for our selves is often at the bottom of our list of priorities. However, it is essential that we **create** some time for our selves to relax and 'let our hair down' regularly during the day. It is also important to take regular holidays and not allow a hectic work schedule to run us down.

Make Friends

Feeling isolated and alone can create stress and make stress worse. Building meaningful relationships with those people that are around us allows us to be supported in our lives and feel less stressed. It is important to spend quality time with our loved ones because just as they are source of support for us, we are a source of support for them.

Being helpful to people around us (even though we may not know them very well) and being friendly to people in our neighbourhood is also important in building our social networks. Simply smiling at the person next to us on the bus can help us feel more positive and a part of the community.

Be Positive

Thinking positively can help us solve problems and also cope with pressures that build up in our lives. People who are stressed often find themselves feeling more and more negative and therefore getting more stressed. Trials and tribulations are a part of everyone's lives.

However the stress they incur often causes more damage to us than the difficulties themselves. This is why it is important to remain positive in our thinking, feeling and behaviour despite the circumstances we find ourselves in.

What does Islam say about Stress Management?

According to Islamic teachings, a firm belief in God helps us to appreciate that everything is created for a purpose. This includes the difficulties we face in our lives. Islamic philosophy teaches that the trials and tribulations humans face act to purify them and make them better people.

2:155 And most certainly shall We try you by means of danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, of lives and of [labour's] fruits. But give glad tidings unto those who are patient in adversity

Prayer, Fasting and Zikr (remembrance of God) are all helpful in times of stress. As well as reminding us of our relationship with God, worship also strengthens the heart and allows us to face our difficulties with more patience.

Finally, striving to attain a better relationship with God has the effect of giving us true stability from the inside so we are not shaken by the difficulties we face. A person who has a close relationship with God is constantly aware that everything that they face is from God, and also because of their complete trust in God know that ultimately everything is for their benefit (either in this life or in the hereafter) even if life here and now seems very difficult.

God describes the state of the people who are close to Him in the Qur'an by saying:

10:62 Oh, verily, they who are close to God - no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve:

