

Stress

Information for patients

What is stress?

Stress means different things to different people. It can be described as feeling:

- Angry
- Anxious
- Distant
- Distracted
- Emotional
- Hassled
- Irritable
- Rushed
- Scared
- Tense
- Uptight.

Positive stress

A certain amount of stress is an important part of everyday life. Positive stress allows you to deal with emergency situations (fight/flight response) and to motivate you.

During the fight/flight response the body releases chemicals to prepare the body to either fight the emergency or to run away.

Negative stress

If stress becomes too high or prolonged, the body stays ready to fight or run. This can cause the body to struggle and develop negative stress. This prevents the body from relaxing and can make health problems seem worse. Stress and tension are very closely linked. If you feel tense you may notice that your pain levels increase.

Causes of stress

Stress is individual. There may be several causes, including:

- Work
- Money
- Relationships
- Family
- Life events
- Bereavement
- Pain
- Trauma.

Managing stress

The first step in managing stress is to recognise the situations that make you feel stressed.

You may notice that stressful situations make you feel tense. You may:

- Clench your fists
- Shrug your shoulder
- Flex your body forward
- Push your feet into the floor
- Tighten muscles.

When you start to notice stress, you can begin to use techniques to combat it.

Tips for managing stress

Some tips for managing stress include:

- Deep breathing
- Don't worry about situations that you can't control (e.g. the weather)
- Prepare for known stressful events (e.g. interviews and exams)
- Discuss and share how you are feeling with a partner or trusted friend
- Prioritise tasks
- Organise your time
- Set yourself realistic goals
- Exercise regularly
- Get enough sleep
- Do an activity you enjoy (e.g. walking, yoga)
- Laugh
- Complementary therapies (massage, acupuncture...).

This leaflet was compiled by the East Lothian Physiotherapy Department in association with the Patient Information Leaflet Group, NHS Lothian Physiotherapy Service.

Ref: Lothian.Stress.Sept.2025

It's OK to Ask

When you understand what's going on with your health, you can make better decisions around your care and treatment.

www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/its-ok-to-ask/



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