

## **Managing Stress.**

Everybody encounters stress in their lives. Getting married, noisy neighbours, bereavement, difficulties at work and moving can all contribute. In fact a certain level of stress is needed to motivate us into action.

Each experience of stress depends on the individual concerned. An intolerable situation to one person may stimulate another. Stress is not caused by the events alone but also how we perceive and react to them.

The body reacts to emotional and physical stress in the same way, the "fight or flight" reflex. Rapid changes in the muscles and organs of the body are involved, due to hormones that the body produces, including adrenalin.

### **Your body may react to too much stress in the following ways:**

tendency to sweat; breathlessness; fainting spells; chest pains; cramps or muscle spasms; high blood pressure; feeling sick or dizzy; constant tiredness; headaches; restlessness; nervous twitches; constipation or diarrhoea; craving food; pins and needles; indigestion or heartburn; loss of appetite; sleeping problems; sexual difficulties.

### **You may feel:**

aggressive; a loss of interest in others; taking no interest in life; depressed; that there's no-one to confide in; fearing diseases; a loss of sense of humour; neglected; fearing failure; irritable; bad or ugly; dreading the future.

### **You may behave in some of the following ways:**

frequently crying; finding decisions difficult to make; have trouble concentrating; biting your nails; denying there's a problem; avoiding difficult situations; unable to show your feelings.

### **Ways to improve your stress levels**

Plan your days and make time for leisure. Physical activities use up the adrenalin and other hormones the body produces under stress and relaxes the muscles. Healthy eating and having fun will also help. Identify your best time and carry out tasks that need more concentration then. Make a list of things you have to do and arrange them in order of importance. Try to take tasks one at a time, until each is finished. If you can, vary your tasks in a day. Act positively.

### **Ways to reduce the effects of stress on sleep**

Worries about problems make it difficult to fall asleep, and sleep may be disturbed by vivid dreams. Have your surroundings as stress free as possible. Wake up at the same time in the morning and go to bed at the same time at night. A bed-time routine with relaxation and deep breathing can also help prepare for sleep.

Depression may make it hard for you to sleep, or wake you early feeling anxious. Contact your GP to discuss this. Or consider counselling to explore any underlying cause. Massage and meditation can also help relieve stress and aid relaxation.