



## Information Sheet: Stress

### What is Stress?

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. Stress is what people feel when the demands placed on them are greater than their ability to cope. Stress is not a medical diagnosis but, if it is severe and continues for a long time, it can lead to mental health problems such as depression or anxiety.

Broadly speaking, stress is caused by situations involving change, particularly where people feel they have no control over them. Stress triggers can include major life events such as divorce, unemployment, moving house and bereavement, or more day-to-day situations such as money worries, problems within personal or work relationships. Stressful situations can also be happy ones e.g. planning a wedding but because of the unusual demands they can lead to stress also.

Stressful events that are outside the range of normal human experience, for example, being physically or sexually abused or being involved in war situation, severe accidents or natural disaster can sometimes lead to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Some stress can be positive: a moderate level can make us more alert and help us in challenging situations e.g. job interviews or public speaking. But stress is only healthy as a short-lived response. Excessive or prolonged stress can lead to physical illness and emotional exhaustion.

### Symptoms of Stress:

**Physical changes:** You may feel breathless, sick or dizzy, have headaches, feel constantly tired, suffer fainting spells, restlessness, chest pains, sleeping problems,

increased sweating, constipation or diarrhoea, cravings for food, lack of appetite, aches and pains, high blood pressure and sexual difficulties. Longer term you may be risk from heart attacks and strokes.

**Emotional changes:** You may experience feelings such as anxiety, fear, anger, frustration and depression, which can lead to physical symptoms - making you feel worse. You may also feel irritable, neglected, imagine you are ill, dread the future, take no interest in others or life, believe you are bad or ugly, lose your sense of humour and feel you have no-one to confide in.

**Behavioural changes:** When stressed you may behave differently. You may become withdrawn, find it difficult to make decisions or become inflexible in your thinking. You may have trouble sleeping, become snappy or tearful or have difficulty concentrating. Your libido may be adversely affected. Normally mild-mannered, you may become verbally or physically aggressive.

## **Treatment:**

There are many things you can do to help with stress including:

Learn to relax, breathe properly, take exercise, focus on the positive aspects of your life, take regular breaks, or confide in someone – a friend, your GP or a counsellor.

Do not be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if you feel that you are no longer able to manage things on your own.

**How CCL can help:** We offer a free brief counselling service (six sessions) to people, aged 16 and over, living in Ryedale and, where appropriate, in Scarborough who are referred by their doctor or another NHS worker. We work with a wide range of presenting issues, including stress.

**Other sources of information:** [www.stress.org.uk](http://www.stress.org.uk); 'Self-Help for your Nerves: Learn to relax and enjoy life again by overcoming stress and fear' by Dr. Claire Weekes