

LIFE STYLE CHANGES TO MANAGE STRESS AND ANXIETY

Regularity Regularity refers to your daily and weekly routine. It includes: times for getting up and going to bed, meal times, the time to go to and leave work or school, exercise, grocery shopping, recreation, relaxation and all other parts of daily life that are routine and can be planned. Research has shown if we have a daily and weekly routine which we basically stick to, we can handle the unexpected events that occur – and hence cause stress – more easily. As our time is more organised, mentally we are more relaxed – because we already have a routine which takes care of the ordinary things that happen each day or week.

Exercise Research has shown that exercising at least 30 minutes a day reduces stress as it helps to reduce the stress hormones. The level of exercise is important – a brisk walk has been shown to have more therapeutic value than a gentle stroll – and both have been shown to be more beneficial than doing nothing at all. The good news is that the exercise doesn't have to be all in one block – it can be broken up into three 10 minute blocks and still have a beneficial effect!

Diet Diet and nutrition are very important as stress has been shown to deplete the body of some nutrients and to be aggravated by some foods. In addition, stress can contribute to the development of a number of conditions such as: cardio vascular disease, metabolic syndrome, diabetes and irritable bowel syndrome – all of which list good diet and nutrition as preventive factors.

See the separate sheet on diet and nutrition for stress for more information.

Sleep Sleep is essential to the body for growth, regeneration and memory processing – it is also essential to help break the stress cycle as the stress hormones decrease during sleep.

See the separate sheet on good sleep habits for more information.

Meditation The word “meditation” conjures up images of someone sitting in lotus position chanting mantras – but meditation simply means focusing your concentration on a particular thing. There are many types of meditation but the two which are most beneficial to managing stress are relaxation meditation and mindfulness meditation.

See the separate sheet on meditation for more information.

Breathing Exercises Breathing is something we do all day, every day but there are certain things we can do with our breath that help us to relax. Most of these are simple techniques that can even be incorporated into meditation or done while preparing to go to sleep.

See the separate sheet on breathing exercises for more information.

Relaxation

Relaxation includes any activity that helps to relax the mind. It may include: listening to music, tai chi, yoga, recreational reading, drawing or craft work. It does not include watching television or working on the computer as these appliances emit blue light (which is mentally stimulating). At least 30 minutes a day should be spent on a relaxing activity – preferably close to bed time to help relax the mind in preparation for sleep.