How Do I Manage Stress?
**Why is stress important to talk about?**
Feelings of stress are often your body’s way of protecting you and letting you know that you are feeling worried. Having a health condition and undergoing treatments might lead to times when you feel stressed or worried.

**How can managing stress help me?**
There are lots of things that you can do to help reduce feelings of stress and its’ unpleasant symptoms, to help you feel better in your body and improve your mood. This also enables you to more effectively manage the stress(es) that you are currently experiencing.

**How can you use this toolkit?**
This toolkit is designed to provide you with information about what stress may look and feel like, to help you identify if and when you are feeling stressed. It also aims to provide you with some handy tips that you can use to help you reduce feelings of stress. At the end of the toolkit there are also links to further information and support if you wish to explore this area in more detail.
What is Stress?

Stress is something we can all experience at one time or another in our lives. There are lots of different things that can cause us to feel stressed and lots of different symptoms to suggest that you may be feeling stressed. Some examples of causes of stress include:

- coping with illness, e.g. side effects of the condition and/or its treatment and fitting in hospital appointments
- life changes e.g. divorce, retirement, bereavement
- managing work and/or home tasks
- encountering change - this can be anything from moving house, getting married, expecting a baby or being diagnosed with a health condition
- juggling a combination of tasks or demands at the same time
- maybe you can think of some other examples?

How can you tell if you are stressed, what are the symptoms?
Stress can alter the way we feel in our body (physical symptoms), our mood (emotional symptoms), our thoughts (cognitive symptoms) and sometimes things we do (behavioral symptoms).

Physical symptoms can include:
- muscle tension e.g. tightness across your shoulders
- headaches
- feeling lightheaded
- breathlessness
- feeling sweaty
- skin rashes
- digestion difficulties and diarrhea

Emotional symptoms can include:
- irritability
- frustration
- feeling anxious, worried or ‘on edge’
- mood swings or big changes in the way we feel
- feeling low in mood or depressed

Cognitive symptoms can include:
- frequent, racing thoughts e.g. worry about lots of different topics
- difficulty concentrating
- memory difficulties e.g. forgetting things, or word finding difficulties

Behavioral symptoms can include:
- disrupted sleep
- absences from work and/or missed deadlines
- decreased productivity or doing less
Top Tips and Strategies

Here are some techniques that you can try to help reduce your stress:

1. **Is there a pattern to when you are feeling stressed?** Identifying a pattern can help you act to reduce stress sooner and lessen its effects. What makes it worse/better?

2. **Schedule regular breaks** and make sure you keep a balance of leisure and work activities.

3. **Identify one specific problem at a time to solve** – do this by brainstorming possible solutions, list the pros and cons of each, then pick one option to try out.

4. **Practice relaxation techniques** regularly, such as progressive muscle relaxation or breathing relaxation.

5. **Develop a regular routine** and schedule regular physical activity, such as a walk to your local park. Most people find that completing regular, gentle physical activity helps them to feel more energetic and improves their sleep. Always consult a healthcare profession before undertaking physical activity to check what is manageable for you.

6. **Notice when you are thinking negatively and ask yourself about these thoughts;** often we tend to focus on what’s not going so well and what we’re not achieving, rather than the things that we are doing well. Be aware of challenge unrealistic expectations that you may hold, e.g. ask yourself ‘would I expect the same of a loved one or friend in the same situation as me?’ – often we tend to be far less critical of others and put greater pressure on ourselves, which may be adding to our stress.

7. **Talk to people** - share your concerns with family/ friends/colleagues - they may be able to help you problem solve and often talking about a concern can help us to see it from alternative perspectives, which helps us to challenge negative thoughts (see above bullet point).

8. **Identify previous strategies that have been helpful** when you or someone you know has been stressed can be useful to generate extra ideas for useful coping techniques.

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