What is stress?
Stress is an unavoidable fact of life and it is normal to feel stressed or anxious at some time. A certain amount of pressure can be a good and positive thing as it keeps you lively and enthusiastic. Too much stress causes strain and tension and if these feelings persist or affect your life it is important to seek help. Although people react to stress in different ways, the effects on our bodies is often the same.

Excessive stress can affect you...

**Short term effects**
- Pale face
- Dry mouth
- Muscle tension
- Faster breathing
- Less sensitive to pain
- More sensitive to touch
- Wide eyes & flared nostrils
- Edginess and feeling irritable
- Constant "run-down" feeling
- Frequently passing water
- Short-tempered or angry
- Lack of concentration
- Faster heart beat
- Sweaty hands
- Feeling cold
- "Butterflies"

**Long term effects**
- Headaches
- Heart disease
- Back ache
- Leg aches
- Appetite loss or eating too much
- Finding life hard to cope with
- High blood pressure
- Anxiety, fear or panic
- Indigestion & ulcers
- Skin conditions
- Poor circulation
- Chain smoking
- Sexual difficulties
- Drinking excessively
- Sleeping badly or waking early
- Neck or shoulder aches/tension

Everyone experiences stress living in our modern world which encourages ambition, competitiveness, impatience, dissatisfaction, constant decisions or choice. If there are too many pressures or difficulties to solve at once, people feel they cannot cope. It is not surprising stress is a real problem and can be harmful so take time to relax, know your limits and find a balance in life that is right for you.
The main causes of stress

- Moving house or moving away from family and friends
- Childbirth, new baby or family demands
- Unemployment, redundancy, job insecurity or change of job
- Death of a loved one, separation or divorce
- Retirement, isolation, loneliness or lack of challenge
- Money difficulties, low pay or Christmas pressures

Finding a balance in life

The management of stress is important and this can be done by:

- Learning to know your limits
- Identifying the causes of your stress
- Recognising and being aware of stress dangers and signs
- Avoiding too many changes in your life at one time
- Becoming more assertive and knowing what it is you want
- Taking time out to relax and keeping some time for yourself
- Trying to regain the balance of your life

Coping with everyday stress by:

- Planning ahead – don’t leave things until the last minute
- Setting goals and priorities which are realistic – don’t be too ambitious
- Identifying the source of a problem – consider how you can change things
- Talking worries over – find support from family, friends or a local group
- Taking up a new hobby – get involved in something you enjoy
- Becoming more active – regular exercise helps you feel fit and relaxed
- Looking after your body by eating healthily – try pampering yourself
How to deal with stress

Avoid too many changes at any one time - new house? new job? new partner?

Plan your work efficiently

Distract yourself - get involved in something you enjoy

Try to deal with tensions before they become too severe

Take time out and pamper yourself

Learn to relax - take up yoga or meditation

Don't be too ambitious

Take a break from routine - chill out!

Exam stress - be realistic and try not to set yourself too high standards

Exercise regularly - try a brisk walk or cycling, dancing or join a sports team

Talk problems over with a partner, family or friends

You can do a lot to keep tension within normal limits
stress
Where to get help

your G.P.'s surgery:
Doctor, Practice Nurse or Health Visitor

or

NHS Direct
Tel: 0845 4647
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

MIND Info Line
Tel: 08457 660163
www.mind.org.uk

Depression Alliance
Tel: 0845 123 23 20
www.depressionalliance.org

Relate
Tel: 01788 573241
www.relate.org.uk