

# Stress & Relaxation



The Flora Project



## The tell-tale signs of stress

- Do you feel guilty when relaxing - uneasy if not 'on the go'?
- Do you lie awake worrying about tomorrow?
- Are you tense... does your neck feel 'knotted-up'?
- Are you impatient or irritable - do you interrupt when others are talking?
- Do you feel that you have a lot on your mind - have difficulty concentrating?
- Are you smoking or drinking more - do you eat in a hurry?
- Does life seem full of crises - are you always having rows?
- Do you find it difficult to make decisions?
- Do you feel frustrated when people don't do what you want?
- Do you frequently experience a butterfly stomach, a dry mouth, sweaty palms or a thumping heart?

If you have said yes to some of these, read on...



## What is stress?

Some stress is part of everyday life. In fact, it is essential - it helps keep us on our toes and out of danger - after all, we need to be alert when crossing a busy road.

Unfortunately there are times when we all feel we can no longer cope with our stress and it becomes DISTRESS. It is as if we develop a 'hair trigger' and become tense in everyday situations such as traffic jams, or when the morning paper is five minutes late. Even simple things make us 'blow a fuse'.



Stress can prime our bodies to run from things we can never escape. After all, no matter how tightly you grip the steering wheel, you will still be stuck in that rush hour jam. These pent-up feelings can push up blood pressure and put a strain on the whole body including the heart.

If you think you are a stress sufferer, **DON'T PANIC!** Medical problems are not inevitable and there are many ways you can get your stress responses back in tune.

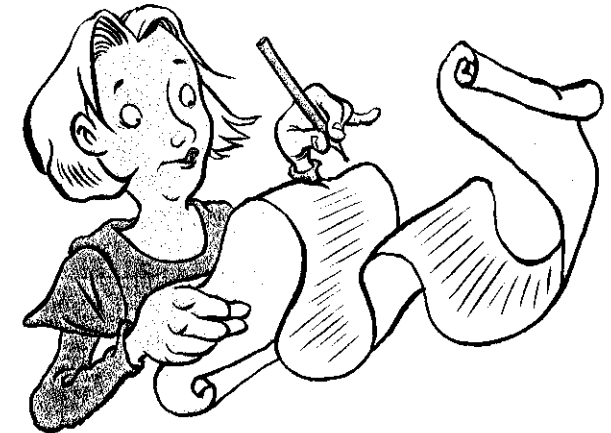
## Who is prone to stress?

If you answered "yes" to some of our questions 'The tell-tale signs of stress', there's a good chance that your stress level is a bit high. You are probably hard working, have a lot of drive and enjoy a challenge but you may need to take a more relaxed attitude to life and its problems.



A good way to start is to list all the things that cause you stress. Is it the train that's late (again!); the neighbour's dog that barks; the person that lights up in the no smoking section; the complicated wedding arrangements; the queue or the traffic jam; the rude receptionist; the search for a new home?

Make your list and learn to recognise your stress triggers. Once you have identified your 'triggers' consciously try to relax in these situations, and, where possible, learn to tackle the source of the problem.



# Be Pro-active

## Learn to relax



Remember that stress is one of several risk factors for heart disease - there are five others to bear in mind.

Collect all 6 leaflets in this series: **Smoking, Blood Pressure, Weight, Eating to Manage Your Cholesterol, Physical Activity and Stress and Relaxation.**

### What can I do?

1. Remember your 'stress situations' and when you get caught up in one, use it as a cue to relax. When the traffic is making you 'tense up', do the opposite. Give your arms and neck a stretch - try smiling.
2. How much physical activity do you get? Gentle rhythmic cycling, jogging or swimming are ideal ways of reducing the tension caused by stress. They help release all that pent-up energy and will encourage deep refreshing sleep.
3. Yoga, body conditioning classes or relaxation techniques may also be helpful (read our leaflet on physical activity).
4. When the phone is engaged, or the taxi ignores you, take a deep breath and exhale slowly - think how silly it seems that minor hassles like these can make you uptight.
5. Try to cut down on drinking and give up smoking. If you use these to 'unwind', the relief can only be temporary. They will not solve the problems that make you tense (if you smoke read our leaflet on smoking).
6. Stop trying to do more than one thing at a time. Take jobs in order of importance and try to plan ahead. Take control and have a positive action plan. You'll soon find that instead of doing everything at the last minute, you can get things done at a relaxed pace.
7. Instead of talking *at* other people, try having conversations *with* them and listen generously to what they say. Over lunch, eat more slowly, savour your food, forget work problems and have a good look around.

### Planning for Change

Whilst reading this leaflet you may have found things which you feel you could change - why not record them here. Remember that it is easier to make one small change at a time than trying several big changes all at once. Make your changes simple and achievable.

I Will...

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....

### For more information...

...Speak to your family doctor or practice nurse

Or contact any of the organisations below:

**British Heart Foundation**, 14 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 4DH


**Health Education Authority**, Trevelyan House, 30 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 3HW

**ASH - Action on Smoking and Health**, 16 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 9PL

**QUIT - The National Society for Non-Smokers**, Victory House, 170 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 0HA

**Sports Council**, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0QP

**Your Local Leisure Centre**



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