

TOOLBOX TALK

BEAT STRESS AND ANGER

1. How many people will get a mental health problem this year?

- A. 1 in 10 B. 1 in 8 C. 1 in 6 D. 1 in 4

2. How many suicides are male?

- A. 1/4 (25%) B. 1/2 (50%) C. 3/5 (60%)
D. 3/4 (75%)

3. How many people treated for mental health problems are men (compared to women)?

- A. 1/4 (25%) B. 1/2 (50%) C. 3/5 (60%)
D. 3/4 (75%)

4. Which of these are a sign of stress?

- A. Eating more B. Drinking more
C. Not wanting to see people D. Anger
E. Poor concentration F. Erection problems
G. All these

I'M GETTING WORRIED ABOUT MY MOOD SWINGS— EVERY TIME I GET IN A MOOD I TAKE A SWING AT SOMEBODY.



Talking Points

Stress is good for you.

Ignore stress and it will go away.

Stress only affects weak people.

I can't be an addict. I only drink at week-ends.





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Key fact

- Too much stress can damage your immune system and heart; increase your chances of serious health problems; reduce life-expectancy; and damage your sex life. (Even if you don't notice you're stressed.)

Top Tips

- We're all different. Learn what pushes your stress and anger buttons.
- Walk away rather than lose your temper.
- Be honest with yourself. It will enable you to be honest with others.
- Talk about what's on your mind. Don't bottle it.

Quiz Answers

1. D 2. D 3. A 4. G

The full SP

What is stress?

Stress is normal. It is what we feel when a situation is hard to handle.

Adrenaline rushes through the body, increasing heart rate and boosting mental and physical alertness. We feel sweaty, tingly and get butterflies. This 'fight or flight' response was very useful to our ancestors coping with physical threats such as a marauding mammoth or sabre-toothed tiger.

Today's 'threats' are often far less serious but far more

frequent. However, stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol are harmful when we don't need them. Over time, they can damage the immune system and the heart and reduce physical and mental well-being.

This means it's not healthy - or practical - to go into 'fight or flight' mode every five minutes. It's much easier - and healthier - to respond in a less stressful way. But how do you do that? If we can figure out how we feel and what has caused it, we can respond more smartly.

Too much stress can:

- damage your immune system and heart
- increase your chances of serious health problems
- reduce life-expectancy
- damage your sex life.

Why does understanding stress matter?

Stress causes mental health problems.

One in four of us will have a mental health problem this year. They're responsible for half of all long-term absences from work.

Unchecked mental health problems can be very serious. About 3/4 of the people treated for depression are women but about 3/4 of the people who commit suicide are men. Since depression is a major cause of suicide, something doesn't add up. Is it us? Talking about stress is not a sign of weakness. It takes balls.

What causes stress?

Here are some of the common causes of stress today. Which of them push your buttons?

- Work (or Unemployment) • Money
- Bereavement and other endings including moving house, splitting up with a partner, changing job or children leaving the family home
- Your health and mood • Weather
- Partners and friends (and their absence: loneliness)
- Sex and sexuality • Drink and drugs
- Addictions

Short-term ups and downs are normal but when you

start having long-term problems in one or more of these areas, the stress will mount. That's not because you're weak; that's because you're normal.

You may react by getting out of a situation (the 'flight' response) and in some cases a new start might be what you need. But if you keep changing jobs, partners or moving home, it may be that it's not the situation that needs to change but your reaction to it.

What are the warning signs?

A relentless build-up of pressure, without the opportunity to recover, can lead to harmful stress. The important thing is to recognise the warning signs while you can do something about it. Common signs are:

- Eating more or less than normal
- Mood swings
- Low self-esteem
- Feeling tense or anxious
- Not sleeping well (or wanting to sleep all the time)
- Poor memory or forgetfulness
- Excessive drinking and/or drug use.
- Feeling really tired and lacking in energy
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Behaving out of character
- Finding it hard to concentrate and struggling at work
- Losing interest in things you usually enjoy
- Having unusual experiences, like seeing or hearing things that others don't.
- There may be physical signs too like headaches, irritable bowel syndrome or aches and pains.

How do I talk about how I'm feeling?

We all know how good it is to talk when you really connect with someone. For some of us, social media can only go so far. Indeed, research suggests social media can make some of us miserable.

'A problem shared is a problem halved' is a cliché because it's true. It's not about other people telling us what to do or being needy. It is simply that talking lets us see the solution for ourselves in a way thinking alone can't. We're not alone. We often share the same problems.

Having a chat about something doesn't have to be a big deal. Share an activity with the person you want to chat to and talk while you're doing it: washing-up, cleaning

the car, painting a fence, playing a computer game.

Even if it barely involves talking, connecting with others and feeling part of something in whatever setting feels good: sport, leisure, the pub. Meet new people through a local club, group or internet meet-up - especially if social media are dominating your life.

Be honest with yourself, especially if you're often angry or feel disrespected. Then, if you can, find someone else you can be honest with. It doesn't have to be a mate or family member.

Feeling uncomfortable in your own skin won't get better with time. Most likely it will get worse. Old-fashioned ideas of what it means to be a man can make it difficult to talk honestly. Some of us can't even ask for directions in the street. But silence isn't a sign of strength. Silence is easy: you just shut up. Being honest is the real strength. Accept yourself as you are and be fine with it.

If you're not hurting yourself or anyone else, what's wrong with being yourself? (Even if that is different from what you think society and other people want.)

How do I help a mate with problems?

If you think a mate is bottling something up, do something together. Get him to give you a hand. Feeling wanted makes us all feel better. You don't have to talk but if you want to, doing something together makes it easier. Open up yourself - if you think he has work issues, perhaps talk about your work. Try to:

- Keep it real: take it seriously but don't make it a big deal.
- Ask 'How's it going?'.
- Keep in touch more: text or email.
- Doing stuff is as good as a chat: let your mate see that you know he's still the same person.
- Talk. Don't ignore the difficult stuff if it comes up - you don't need to solve it, you just need ears.
- Be there: ask if you can do anything.

Should I see a GP?

If symptoms are making you unwell it would be advisable to seek help without delay. You could speak to your GP, the practice nurse at the surgery, the occupational health nurse at your workplace (if there is one) or a stress counsellor. You should certainly consult a health professional if you are depressed because of stress, or if stress is causing you anxiety or leading to panic attacks.