

# Coping with Stress

A certain amount of pressure is helpful, as it keeps us motivated and focussed. However, for many people stress has become an issue. For many compulsive gamblers, stress is a key trigger.

Whilst we cannot avoid stress completely, we can learn to deal with stress more effectively and make choices that lessen the impact we experience.

- Stress is your individual response to a situation where you feel an inappropriate amount of pressure.
- Stress is a bodily response that occurs automatically – the key to managing stress is to recognise the symptoms of rising stress levels (physical sensations, feelings, ideas) before they escalate.
- We often do not notice that we are experiencing stress, until it has reached alarming levels.
- Stress makes relapse into previous behaviour like compulsive gambling more likely.

Relapse can be prevented by either **reducing** the sources of stress or **increasing** our capacity to cope.

Your body will respond in the same way, whether the pressure you are feeling is an objective reality or whether you put yourself under pressure by the way you view a situation.

## What causes stress?

- Major life events (both positive or negative)
- Daily hassles and uplifts (day-to-day events which can be pleasant or upsetting)
- Tension between our 'wants' (activities carried out for pleasure, satisfaction or self-fulfilment, which may or may not be good for us) and 'shoulds' (chores or obligations).



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## **Avoid Unnecessary Stress**

- Manage your time proactively – limit your 'to-do' list and learn to say 'no' when you can't manage an additional task
- Avoid/reduce contact with people and situations which stress you
- Take control of your environment, and avoid hot topics
- Express your feelings in a respectful, assertive way, and find a compromise if possible

## **Adapt to the stressor, change your expectations and attitude**

- Reframe your thinking – adjust your perspective and eliminate self-defeating thoughts
- Adjust your standards (aim for 'good enough' rather than perfect)
- Refocus your energy where you know you can make progress

## **Accept the things you cannot change**

- Do not attempt to control the uncontrollable, such as the behaviour of others

- Look at challenges as opportunities for growth, and mistakes as learning curves
- Move on – let go of resentment for things you cannot influence

## **Look after yourself**

- Make time for relaxation and things you enjoy in your daily routine
- Spend time with people who enhance your life
- Learn to laugh at yourself
- Strengthen your health (exercise, diet, reduce caffeine/sugar/alcohol; avoid self-medicating with drugs/cigarettes/alcohol; aim for quality sleep)
- HALT – watch out for Hunger, Anger, Loneliness and Tiredness
- TIPS (Truth: be honest about your feelings; Information: know what you are coping with; Priorities: remember your goals; Support: Who can support you and how?)

# How Stress Manifests for You

How many of the following do you experience when you are stressed?

	Never	Sometimes	Often
Do you notice an increase in your gambling?			
Do you notice an increase in drinking / smoking?			
Do you eat more or less than usual?			
Do you feel hyper / elated / restless?			
Do you have difficulty concentrating or finishing tasks?			
Do you find it difficult to make decisions?			
Do you find it hard to sleep?			
Do you start to avoid people / activities / work?			
Do you feel grumpy / irritated / angry?			
Do you speak more loudly or quicker than usual?			
Do you overreact more easily?			
Do you experience back pain / stiff or tense muscles?			
Do you experience indigestion / stomach aches / nausea?			
Do you experience headaches?			
Do you experience skin rashes?			
Do you experience chest pain?			
Do you worry without reason / get panic attacks?			
Do you judge yourself or others more harshly?			