

ALL ABOUT STRESS AND STRESS REACTIONS

INTRODUCTION

How you feel in your mind and body is influenced by the circumstances in which you live. When your living circumstances change, the way you feel can change. When, for example, the weather is very hot, your body will start to sweat. When you are frightened, or when someone scares you, your heart will beat harder.

Bad experiences and unpleasant living conditions can disturb how you feel in both mind and body. When this happens you are experiencing “**STRESS**”.

WHAT CAN CAUSE “STRESS”

When everything in your life goes well, you feel happy and relaxed. When things do not go well, or when you worry that things will not go well, you may notice that you feel differently. This could be caused by:

Loss

- * Being forced to leave your home and your belongings behind you
- * Being forced to leave your family or other people you love
- * Losing family members or friends because

they were arrested or killed

Violence

- * Being threatened, hurt or tortured
- * Being sexually intimidated or abused
- * Seeing others treated cruelly, especially family members or friends
- * Seeing others killed, especially family member members or friends

Insecurity:

- * Making a journey in unsafe circumstances
- * Worrying about whether you can stay in this country
- * Worrying about money or about having somewhere to live
- * Not knowing what the future will bring

Powerlessness:

- * Having to stay in a place that is not your home
- * Not being able to change your living conditions
- * Being forced to do things that you do not want to do

WHAT EFFECTS CAN “STRESS” HAVE ON YOU?

People suffering from **stress** sometimes describe some of the following effects:

Stress reactions of the mind:

- * Sadness, crying, despair
- * Feeling ashamed
- * Worry
- * Getting angry easily
- * Nervousness and being very jumpy
- * Poor concentration
- * Loss of interest in life
- * Thinking about what happened to you over and over again
- * Feeling as if a bad thing that happened is happening again

Stress reactions of the body:

- * Sleeping problems
- * Nightmares
- * Tiredness, exhaustion
- * Body aches and pains
- * Tense muscles
- * Heart palpitations
- * Poor appetite
- * Feeling sick
- * Pains in the abdomen
- * Diarrhoea
- * Breathing problems
- * Dizziness
- * Uncontrollable body shakes
- * Changes in sex drive

Stress reactions in behaviour:

- * Reduced activity, lethargy
- * Getting easily irritated
- * Overactivity, restlessness
- * Using alcohol or drugs more
- * Avoiding other people, withdrawing into yourself

Stress reactions in relationships with other people:

- * Loss of interest in other people
- * Arguments, disagreements, violence between husband and wife

If you are under **stress**, you may experience some of these things, which are linked to the difficulties in your life. You may find that your behaviour and your feelings have all changed at the same time. However, not everyone suffers from all the effects described above, as different people react to stress in different ways.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU SUFFER FROM STRESS

If you do not feel well in any of the ways mentioned in this brochure:

- This may be because of the misfortune that you have suffered, in the past or today
- What you are feeling is normal given the abnormal situation that you are in, and

will, in most cases, lessen with time. It does not mean that you are “going mad”.

- You may find that when you are busy with something, that the effects of stress do not bother you so much. Keeping active can be a good way to feel better
- Make sure you find out about all the services which can help with any practical problems you have. Your community group should know more about these services and can give you further details.
- Your community group may be organising activities and may be able to advise you about opportunities for training or studying, as well as being able to give you advice about practical problems.
- If you find that these effects are very strong or have lasted for longer than several months, then you might like some help.
- If someone you know is worried about the effects of stress, you can help them by explaining about stress and how it can make you feel and act differently.
- You can help others who are suffering from stress by passing on any good ideas you have for dealing with this problem.

For further help with the difficulties discussed in this leaflet, speak to your community group or your GP.

ENGLISH

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Information for refugees

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