



## Part 1 - Your First Aid Kit For Stress

### Stress: What is it?

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- [What is Your Stress Index?](#)
- [Understanding Stress](#)
- [The Stress Response](#)
- [Coping with Stress](#)
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Although we all talk about stress, it often isn't clear what stress is really about. Many people consider stress to be something that happens to them, an event such as an injury or a promotion. Others think that stress is what happens to our bodies, minds and behaviours in response to an event (e.g. heart pounding, anxiety, or nail biting). While stress does involve events and our response to them, these are not the most important factors. Our thoughts about the situations in which we find ourselves are the critical factor.

When something happens to us, we automatically evaluate the situation mentally. We decide if it is threatening to us, how we need to deal with the situation, and what skills we can use. If we decide that the demands of the situation outweigh the skills we have, then we label the situation as "stressful" and react with the classic "stress response". If we decide that our coping skills outweigh the demands of the situation, then we don't see it as "stressful".

Everyone sees situations differently and has different coping skills. For this reason, no two people will respond exactly the same way to a given situation.

Additionally, not all situations that are labelled "stressful" are negative. The birth of a child, being promoted or moving to a new home may not be perceived as threatening. However, we may feel that situations are "stressful" because we don't feel fully prepared to deal with them.

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Some situations in life are stress-provoking, but it is our thoughts about situations that determine whether they are a problem to us.

How we perceive a stress-provoking event and how we react to it determines its impact on our health. We may be motivated and invigorated by the events in our lives, or we may see some as "stressful" and respond in a manner that may have a negative effect on our physical, mental and social well-being. If we always respond in a negative way our health and happiness may suffer. By understanding ourselves and our reactions to stress-provoking situations, we can learn to handle stress more effectively. We hope that this booklet will help you to build better coping skills for managing stress.

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### Understanding Stress

To understand stress, we need to look at the events that occur, our thoughts about them, and the way we respond

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**Stressors: Situations that are considered stress-provoking are known as stressors.**

There are many major events that occur in our lives: moving, leaving school, changing jobs, and experiencing losses. These "life events" can be stress-provoking. We also face many "daily hassles". These are events that occur routinely. They also contribute to the levels of stress that we experience. Daily hassles include events such as being stuck in traffic, deadlines, conflicts with family members, and dealing with bust city life. Between life events and day-to-day hassles, we are faced with many stress-provoking situations each day. Our attitude towards these situations determines our response.

Coping effectively requires an understanding of the situations we perceive to be stressful. What day-to-day hassles or life events have you experienced recently?

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## The Stress Response

If we decide that a situation is stressful, we put into play the body's "fight or flight" reaction, causing the release of adrenalin, a natural body chemical. This starts the first stage of the stress response.

We each have a particular way of responding to stress. Some of us have physical signs such as muscle tension and difficulty sleeping (insomnia). Others may have more emotional reactions, such as outbursts of crying or anger. Understanding your response to stressful situations is one of the first steps in developing your ability to lower your stress levels.

Knowing what you do when you are under stress is the first step. To cope with stress, you need to know when it is happening. These signs of stress can give you clues you can use to change your response to stress. The next time you feel that you are getting "stressed", take the time to check your body, your emotions and your behaviour. If you recognize some of your usual signs of stress, then you have a clue that you need to do something to cope.

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Book stores are filled with books that tell us how to cope with stress. Each of these books offers its own perspective on stress along with various coping techniques. To make the most of the information on coping skills, you need to understand what coping is all about. Coping is simply a way of short-circuiting the stress cycle: stopping the stress response.

There is no single right way of coping with a given situation. Each of us must figure out what works best for us. What works best will depend, in part, on your coping style. There are three main styles. None of these styles is better than the other and some people use a mixture of them.

The first step in coping is to know yourself. Begin by deciding which of these may be your style.

Task-oriented: you may feel comfortable analyzing the situation and taking action to deal directly with the situation.

Emotion-oriented: you may prefer to deal with your feelings and find social supports.

Distraction-oriented: you may use activities or work to take your mind off the situation. Keep this style in mind as you read the information on coping skills.

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## Stages of Stress

In response to stressful events, you can experience one, two or all of the following stages:

### Stage 1: Mobilization of Energy

All bodily activity is increased in response to a stressor that is frightening, such as a near car accident. This starts the body's "fight-flight" reaction, causing the release of adrenalin. You feel your heart pounding and your palms feel sweaty. This is called primary stress.

It can also be the result of a situations where you choose to put yourself under stress (e.g. the night before your wedding). This is called secondary stress.

#### SYMPTOMS:

- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- rapid breathing
- sweating
- decreased digestion rate, creating butterflies and indigestion

### Stage 2: Exhaustion or Consuming Energy

If there is no escape from Stage 1, the body will begin to release stored sugars and fats, using up its bodily resources.

#### SYMPTOMS:

- feeling driven
- feeling pressured
- tiredness and fatigue \* increase in smoking, coffee drinking and/or alcohol consumption
- anxiety
- memory loss
- acute illnesses such as colds and flu

### Stage 3: Draining Energy Stores

If the stressful situation is not resolved, you may become chronically stressed. The body's need for energy resources exceeds its ability to produce them.

#### SYMPTOMS:

Serious illnesses such as:

- heart disease
- ulcers
- mental illness As well as:
- insomnia (difficulty sleeping)
- errors in judgement
- personality changes



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### Effects on Health

Many people suffering from excessive stress have symptoms of poor health. People with very high stress levels have feelings of being tense or anxious. In addition, headaches, stomach complaints or symptoms that mimic old illnesses are common.

In an attempt to cope with stress, some people drink too much alcohol, abuse drugs, blame others (e.g. spouse or parent), and may become physically violent, most often with family members.

### Mental Health Problems

Depression and anxiety may be the result of chronic stress. If mental health problems are ignored, they can develop into serious mental illnesses. Clinical depression, left untreated, leads to suicide in 15% of cases. Anxiety disorders take a variety of forms, ranging from general anxiety to panic attacks. Anxiety can become severe and disabling.

For further information about depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses, contact your [local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association](#).

### Cardiovascular Disease

Although the relationship between stress and heart disease is still being investigated, preliminary evidence suggests that stress may contribute to the development of heart disease and stroke. It is thought that certain individuals with high levels of stress or prolonged stress may:

\*have higher blood cholesterol

\*experience increases in blood pressure

\*have blood platelets that are more likely to clot (clump together inside the blood )

Further, it is known that stress-filled lifestyles make it difficult for a person to make or maintain resolutions to lead a healthy life. Instead of exercising to relieve stress, some people respond by overeating, eating unhealthy foods, excessive alcohol consumption or smoking. Such negative reactions to stress merely increase the risk of developing heart disease and stroke. Becoming aware of your stressors and learning how to deal effectively with them will enable you to get on the right track for a healthier lifestyle. For further information about heart disease and stroke contact your local chapter of the [Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada](#).



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In this chapter, you will find anti-stress strategies. Some will give you temporary relief from symptoms of stress while others will help you get at its cause. Living to avoid excessive stress is the ideal but sometimes we all need a little emotional first aid. Before you decide which coping skill to use in a situation, ask yourself the following three questions:

- 1) Is this an appropriate thing to do in this situation? Meditating by chanting mantras may help you calm down, but may not be the best choice if you're in an interview.
- 2) Is this a positive way of coping? Not everything that we do to take the stress away is good for us. Drugs and alcohol are obviously coping strategies that will cause problems. Also, if you use anything to excess, even if it appears positive, then it can have negative effects (e.g. excessive exercising or dieting).
- 3) Is this going to help in the long run? We don't always need a long term solution. However, if you choose a short term solution, then it is important to decide whether that will be enough.

*There are five types of coping skills: physical, mental, social, diversions and spiritual. You will notice as you go through the list that some skills overlap; for example, meditation falls into more than one category. The following skills can be used to help you deal with the stressors you have identified.*

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### Physical Skills

These are things you can do for and with your body. This includes making sure that you take good care of your body as well as using physical techniques to help get rid of stress. Physical relaxation techniques are useful in preventing stress and lowering your physical signs of stress. Aim to set aside 20 minutes in your day to relax.

#### A. Breathing Exercises

You can calm yourself by consciously controlling your breathing. Try one of these exercises:

##### Exhalation breathing

This slows your breathing to help calm you down.

1. Lie on your back with your arms at your sides.
2. As you begin to breathe in, raise your arms towards the ceiling (elbows bent). Move your arms all the way up and over your head to the floor as you inhale.
3. Reverse the order: breathe out (exhale) slowly and smoothly as you return your arms to your sides. \* After you have done this several times slowly inhale and exhale without moving your arms. You can do this exercise for ten minutes or longer -- it's up to you.

##### Deep Breathing

Breathing can be done anytime, anywhere. Deep breathing provides extra oxygen to the blood and causes the body to release endorphins, which are naturally occurring hormones that re-energize and promote relaxation.

1. Slowly inhale through your nose, expanding your abdomen before allowing air to fill your lungs.
2. Reverse the process as you exhale. Do this exercise for three to five minutes whenever you feel tense.

#### B. Progressive Relaxation

This is a technique to help relax tense muscles.

1. Sit or lie down on your back in a comfortable, quiet room. Close your eyes.
2. Make tight fists, hold for five seconds, then relax your hands. Do this three times. Pay attention to the different sensations of tension and relaxation.
3. Repeat step 2 with all of your muscle groups: arms, shoulders, chest, abdomen, back, hips, thighs, lower legs and feet. \* At first, it may take about 20 minutes. With practice, you'll be able to do this in about five minutes.

#### C. Stretching Exercises

If done correctly, stretching can promote relaxation and reduce stress. Never bounce when you stretch - you could injure your muscles. Do these exercises for five or ten minutes.

##### Stretch 1: Decide what muscles to stretch.

1. As you stretch, think about one area being stretched; imagine the tension leaving as you gently take these areas to their comfortable limit.
2. Exhale into the stretch; inhale on the release. Breathe deeply and slowly - do not hold your breath.
3. Close your eyes for better awareness of your body's responses.

##### Stretch 2: Here's a stretch to relieve stiff muscles.

1. Sit up straight and inhale.
2. Exhale as you let your head move down to your chest. You'll feel a gentle stretch on the back of your neck and your shoulders.
3. Roll your right ear toward your right shoulder while inhaling. Drop your chin to your chest again while exhaling. Repeat to the left.
4. Drop your arms to your sides and push both shoulders forward. Slowly raise them towards your ears and circle them back and downward to the starting point. After two or three rotations, change directions.

#### D. Walking

Going for a walk can clear your mind, reduce tension and increase energy. Walking can help by providing a needed escape and it may increase the brain's production of endorphins (naturally occurring chemicals that relax and re-energize you).

#### E. How to Sleep Better

Can't sleep? Well, get up. Don't even try to sleep. All that tossing and turning and watching the clock is not for you. It will only succeed in making you more tense. Get out of bed and into a comfortable chair. Read a book, watch television or play solitaire. Stay up as late as you like. Enjoy yourself. Before you know it, you will be dozing. If you don't actually fall asleep, at least you will be relaxed. The point

is to reduce your anxiety about not sleeping and therefore make it easier to do so.

Other Tips:

- resist the urge to nap during the day, no matter how tired you are
- don't exercise in the evening when you should be winding down
- avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, hot chocolate, or cola ) past 2 p.m.
- try drinking a mug of hot milk before bed



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## Mental Skills

These are things that you can do in your mind to help you cope with a situation. What you think about a situation shapes your response to it. This makes your thoughts one of your most powerful coping skills.

## Meditation

Meditation helps settle the mind so you can think calmly throughout the day. The goal is not for immediate relaxation but to increase serenity. Meditation puts you in control of your thoughts by forcing you to be present in the moment and to observe your thought processes. There is no point in starting to meditate unless you intend to make it a habit; you won't reap its benefits unless you practice on a regular basis.

In the early stages, meditate for 10 to 15 minutes once or twice a day. Increase this to 20 minutes no more than twice a day. Avoid meditating just before going to bed or you'll be too energized to sleep.

There are several meditation techniques. Do some research at a library if you're interested in learning methods in addition to the one that follows.

1. Choose a quiet room where you won't be interrupted.
2. Take time to relax; don't rush into it.
3. When you are thoroughly relaxed and breathing slowly and evenly, close your eyes. Slowly repeat a pleasant-sounding word over and over in your mind as you breathe in and out. Continue in this state for 10-20 minutes.
4. To come back: begin saying your word out loud, deliberately and slowly. Pay attention to your breathing. Be aware of your body and your posture. Open your eyes and look around the room. After a minute or so, stand up and stretch.

With practice, you will eventually reach the point when you'll feel detached from your body and your physical surroundings while meditating. The word will fade from your awareness; you'll be in touch with your innermost self, deeply relaxed and thoroughly energized.

*NOTE: Meditation can be overdone to the point where you are completely cut off from feelings of anxiety. This isn't healthy. Everyone needs a certain amount of stress in order to function.*

## Social, Diversional, and Spiritual Skills

Social skills involve relationships. People and pets are an important source of comfort: spend more time with them. Diversional skills are distractions. These don't require dealing with the problem directly; but are a way of taking your mind off what's happening.

Spiritual skills involve getting in touch with yourself to find meaning in your life. Tending to your spiritual life is an important way of dealing with stress, particularly if you experience a sense of loss in direction or meaning. Spirituality is not limited to religion. Take some time to connect with yourself and with nature.



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### Preventing Stress

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#### 1. Make Decisions- here are two techniques:

##### A. Can't make up your mind? Maybe your subconscious can help you.

Before going to bed, think about your problem and the various choices you could make. Think about each choice clearly in your mind. Tell yourself you're going to make the decision while you sleep.

You may not name the solution the next morning but if you keep trying, you will eventually awaken with your mind made up.

##### B. Sit down with a pencil and paper and make some lists.

1. List your options.
2. List the consequences of each option.
3. Write your response(s) to this question: What will happen if I don't choose at all? If you don't make a decision, that's a decision in itself and it also has consequences. Once you realize that something is going to happen whether you make a decision or not, you may find the decision easier to make.

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### 2. Avoid Procrastination

If procrastination causes stress in your life, learn to stop putting things off. People don't do their best work under pressure. However, some people convince themselves that if they do so they can avoid dealing with their habit of procrastination. Make a weekly schedule and fill it with lots of time for leisure as well as work. That way, you'll enjoy your playtime because you'll be doing it at the right time, not when you should be working. And when you are working, you won't resent it because you'll know that your leisure time is coming up soon.

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### 3. Delegate

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People who haven't learned to delegate often feel needlessly stressed. Some are poor delegators because of too little or too much ego. Delegating isn't a matter of dictating to others; it's asking others to assist you by doing tasks they can handle. This gives you more time to do those tasks that perhaps only you can do.



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## 18 Tips for Dealing With Stress and Tension

Stress and Tension are normal reactions to events that threaten us. Such threats can come from accidents, financial troubles and problems on the job or with family.

The way we deal with these pressures has a lot to do with our mental, emotional and physical health.

The following are suggestions to get you started on managing the stress in your life. Resources to help you in each of the following areas are identified in this booklet.

1. Recognize your symptoms of stress
2. Look at your lifestyle and see what can be changed -- in your work situation, your family situation, or your schedule
3. Use relaxation techniques - yoga, meditation, deep breathing, or massage
4. Exercise - Physical activity is one of the most effective stress remedies around!
5. Time management - Do essential tasks and prioritize the others. Consider those who may be affected by your decisions, such as family and friends. Use a check list so you will receive satisfaction as you check off each job as it is done
6. Watch your diet - Alcohol, caffeine, sugar, fats and tobacco all put a strain on your body's ability to cope with stress. A diet with a balance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and foods high in protein but low in fat will help create optimum health. Contact your local branch of the Heart and Stroke Foundation for further information about healthy eating
7. Get enough rest and sleep
8. Talk with others - Talk with friends, professional counsellors, support groups or relatives about what is bothering you
9. Help others - Volunteer work can be an effective and satisfying stress reducer
10. Get away for awhile - Read a book, watch a movie, play a game, listen to music or go on vacation. Leave yourself some time that's just for you
11. Work off your anger - Get physically active, dig in the garden, start a project, get your spring cleaning done
12. Give in occasionally - Avoid quarrels whenever possible
13. Tackle one thing at a time - Don't try to do too much at once.
14. Don't try to be perfect
15. Ease up on criticism of others
16. Don't be too competitive
17. Make the first move to be friendly
18. Have some fun!! Laugh and be with people you enjoy!



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### Recreation and Leisure

It Refreshes, Restores, Renews!!

#### *What is leisure?*

There is a lot of truth to the saying "all work and no play...". Many of us work hard and take play time for granted. We don't recognize the importance of leisure in our daily lives. Just as stressors wear you down, leisure can refresh, restore and renew you.

Recreation and leisure consist of any form of play, amusement or relaxation that takes place outside of your usual work. Different people prefer different forms of leisure, ranging from knitting to hiking. Pull out your phone book to make use of the following suggestions.

#### Newspapers

Check your local newspaper for a section on things to do; these activities are often free of charge.

#### Recreation Departments

Check if the recreation department of your local municipality publishes a list of local events and programs.

#### Libraries

For many, reading a good book is refreshing and informative. Some libraries also lend films, videos, records, cassettes, compact discs, and art.

#### Community and Neighbourhood Centres

Some centres offer a wide range of community resources geared to the special needs of different age groups. Many local community centres offer a variety of free or low cost programs. Special Interest Clubs Many hobby and special interest clubs exist, ranging from model airplane building to bridge clubs. Check the special events listings in your local community newspaper or the bulletin board in community centres and libraries.

#### Community Colleges

Some community colleges offer a range of courses in leisure-related or special interest areas.



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## Coping by Learning

One way to begin coping with the stress in your life is to learn more about it. You can read books, view films or videos, or take courses. In this section there are some suggestions to help you increase your understanding of stress and learn how to manage it.

### Books

There are many informative books about stress and stress management. Check your local public library or any bookstore for the following books:

- The Stress of Life - Hans Selye, M.D.
- Stress Without Distress - Hans Selye, M.D.
- The Stress Solution - Samuel Klarreich Kicking
- Your Stress Habits - D. Tubesing
- Joy of Stress - Peter Hanson
- Coping with Stress - D. Meichenbaum
- The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook - M. Davies, M. McKay and E. Eshelman
- No-Gimmick Guide to Managing Stress - E. Neidhardt, M. Weinstein and R. Conry
- Stress Management - E. Charlesworth and R. Nathan
- Working Woman's Guide to Managing Stress - J.R. Powell
- Getting Organized - S. Winston The Power of 5 - H. Bloomfield
- Managing Stress - U. Markham

### Films and Videos

Seeing a video or film can increase your understanding of stress and stress management. Some of those available in 16 mm and video include:

*Living with Stress*

*Managing Stress*

*Taking it in Stride: A Positive Approach to Stress Management Beyond Stress*

You may obtain stress-related films or videos at your local public library or from the National Film Board of Canada.

### Courses

Some stress management experts claim to have the only method that works. The truth is, there are a variety of effective stress management techniques. Many courses on stress and related topics are offered by private companies and non-profit organizations.

### Community Colleges

Continuing education departments of community colleges offer many interesting courses. Some are directly related to stress while others teach relaxation techniques or other coping skills. For more information, call your local community college or college of applied arts and technology.

### Board of Education or School Board

Evening and weekend programs are often sponsored by your local board of education or school board. These programs may include anything from woodworking and crafts to swimming, dance, aerobics, and yoga. For more information about courses and programs, call the continuing education department of your local board of education or school board.

### YMCA and YWCA

Fitness, health and recreation programs are offered at many YMCA and YWCA centres across the country.



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## Counselling and Support

Sometimes, when we are feeling depressed, anxious, confused or unable to cope, talking to supportive friends, family members, or joining a support group may be very helpful.

But if that isn't enough, you should consider seeking professional counselling. While counselling cannot fix all the problems in your life, it can help you sort things out so that you feel more able to cope. A therapist can help you learn more about yourself, so that you can use your own strengths to regain a feeling of control over your life. Remember, it is how we think of, or react to, life's events that make us feel over-stressed -- not just the events themselves.

Counselling can also be called therapy or psychotherapy.

Finding the right help for stress can be a stressful experience. This section outlines the kinds of help you can seek in your area.

*NOTE: Call your provincial health insurance organization ( i.e. OHIP in Ontario, Alberta Health, etc.) to check which services are covered by your plan.*

## The Family Doctor

Your family doctor can help you identify your health problem. A thorough look at your health profile and a complete medical examination can establish the reason for your ill health (mental or physical). Your symptoms may be the result of an illness that may or may not be due to stress.

Your doctor may prescribe a treatment, or suggest that support and a few ideas about how to manage your situation may be all you need. If your family doctor suggests the use of tranquilizers, make sure you are well-informed about their purpose and their side effects before you decide whether to use them.

Therapists You or your family doctor may decide that talking to a therapist will help you deal with your feelings. You might be referred to a counsellor at a community agency or in private practice, or to a psychiatrist or psychologist who works in a hospital or has a private practice.

Clinically trained psychiatrists and psychologists are professionals with approximately the same amount of formal training. The basic difference is the type of training received.

## The Psychiatrist

Psychiatrists complete a degree in general medicine. They have an additional four years training in diagnosis and treatment of emotional and behavioural problems. Because they are medical doctors (M.D.s), psychiatrists are licensed to prescribe medications. Their fees are covered by your provincial health care plan. To see a psychiatrist, ask your family doctor for a referral. If you don't have a family doctor, you can call a local hospital or community health centre to ask about their mental health services. In many communities, there is a branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. Call them to ask how you can find a psychiatrist.

## The Psychologist

A clinically trained psychologist holds a doctorate (PhD.) in the study of human behaviour, as well as in the treatment of behavioural and emotional problems. Most provinces do not license psychologists to prescribe medication and they may not be able to bill their fees to your provincial health insurance plan. However, many private health care insurance plans cover the services of registered psychologists. Check with your insurance company.

## The Social Worker

A social worker has a university degree in social work. Most are employed by hospitals or community agencies. However, some have taken additional training in psychotherapy and are in private practice. Your doctor may refer you to a therapist who is a social worker.

## The Stress Specialist

There are many organizations and individuals that provide stress management education and treatment. Some are psychologists, others are physiotherapists, occupational therapists or people with other kinds of training. To find out what's available, look in the yellow pages of your phone book under "stress management". Phone and ask about services and fees. Some accept only those referred by family physicians. Some directly bill your provincial health care plan while others charge the patient/client.

## What is Psychotherapy?

Psychologists, psychiatrists and some social workers practise psychotherapy. Getting treatment by psychotherapy means talking with a trained person who helps you solve problems by developing more positive thoughts and feelings. There are many different theories and schools of thought regarding effective psychotherapy techniques.

Common techniques include:

a) Group Therapy-Several people talk about their problems and receive help from each other's remarks. A trained therapist leads the group.

b) Individual Psychotherapy- The individual talks about problems without going deeply into the subconscious mind. (Note: the "subconscious" is that part of the mind which is not fully conscious, yet is able to influence our actions.)

c) Psychoanalysis- Therapists seek to uncover causes of mental health problems by searching into a person's early experiences. Dream analysis and free association (talk about anything that comes to mind) are used to get to the subconscious mind. Other Counselling Services

### **The Public Health Nurse**

Most neighbourhoods are served by a public health nurse. Public health nurses are involved with individual, family and small group counselling, and education regarding personal health. They often work with hospitals, local doctors and neighbourhood centres.

Public health nurses can give you information about how lifestyle relates to your stress level and about health-related resources in your community. They can refer you to other sources of information or help.

Contact a public health nurse through your local department of health.

### **Addiction Counselling**

If you are concerned about your use of alcohol, tranquilizers or other drugs, there are people who can help. Talk to your doctor or look in the phone book for Alcoholics Anonymous (a self help group) or an addiction foundation or centre in your area.

### **Individual and Family Counselling**

In many communities there is a family services organization or community health centre where individual or family counselling is available. Check with your local community information centre or your local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association for information about services in your area.

### **Financial Counselling**

There are a number of credit counselling services available to provide counselling for persons involved in credit difficulties. These counsellors may act as a go-between for you when dealing with agencies or people to whom you owe money. Look in the yellow pages for "credit" or "financial" counselling and planning.

### **Self-Help Groups**

Sometimes people really feel the need to belong to a caring community. Many self-help groups (also called mutual aid groups or support groups) have developed across the country in the past few years.

Many people find they need the opportunity to take charge of their own situation.

Sometimes, understanding can only come from someone else who has experienced the same type of problem.

In self-help groups, people experiencing similar problems get together to share information and help each other cope. Members use their individual strengths to support the others. Often, they use their collective strengths to advocate for social change.

For some, membership in a self-help group is an alternative to professional therapy. However, for many people a support group is useful in addition to formal helping services.

To find out about self-help groups in your community, contact your community information service.



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## Evaluating Educational and Helping Services

While the majority of educational and helping services associated with stress are competent and ethical, others are not. The following are some questions you should ask an organization before becoming involved with it:

1. What is the nature of your organization or services?
2. Briefly describe what will take place in a typical session.
3. Who will lead the sessions? Will this person be supervised? What are the supervisor's qualifications? To whom are these people accountable?
4. How much of my time will be involved and for how long?
5. Can I drop out if I wish?
6. What is the total cost of the service? Is it covered by my provincial health care plan?
7. How does your organization ensure that confidentiality is respected?

Avoid the following situations or organizations:

1. An organization whose contact person will not answer questions clearly or to your satisfaction.
2. When your involvement is due to pressure from a third party.
3. If you are promised money as a reward for participating.
4. If you are asked to sign a document that might compromise your civil rights (e.g. testimonials, contracts with fixed obligations).
5. If success is "guaranteed".

If you are already getting help...

but things are not working out, a number of things may be happening. It may be that you are not yet willing to accept a problem or focus on its solution. However, it may be because you have chosen a resource that's not "right" for you.

If you have a "helping" person who:

- doesn't give you time to explain your problem,
- doesn't seem to hear you, or
- suggests something you feeling is inappropriate,

then consider seeking a second opinion or a different kind of "helping" resource. Getting help to cope with stress may require a few attempts in order to fit the right resource to meet your wants and needs.



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Internet Links to Stress Resources(all links will open in a separate window)

### General Stress Information

- [CMHA Mental Health Pamphlet Series - Stress](#)
- [Canadian Health Network - Stress](#)

### Articles On Stress

- [CyberPsychologist - Stress Management](#)
- [How Stress Affects The Immune System](#)
- [Humour: An Antidote for Stress - A short article.](#)

### Relaxation

- [Relaxation Resource Directory - Part of the excellent tAPir site.](#)
- [Meditation Life Therapy - Meditation resources.](#)

### Stress in the Workplace

- [Reducing Occupational Stress - Workplace changes that can reduce stress](#)
- [Canadian Health Network Feature article on stress in the workplace](#)

### On-line Stress Management Resources

- [Mindtools - Shareware stress management resources and online stress management guides](#)
- [LessStress - An online stress management course with lots of good links and resources](#)

### Women and Stress

- [Women and Stress - canoe.ca](#)
- [Women's Health - Your Mind](#)

### Stress Tips

- [After a Disaster: Self-Care Tips for Dealing with Stress](#)

### Products

- [The Institute for Stress Management - A list of free resources from a company selling stress management products.](#)
- [Drumming Away Stress - Stress management through percussion](#)
- [The Monetary Stress Institute - Manage your money , manage your stress](#)



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### Stress Stoppers

#### Stress Stretch

When you are under stress, tension accumulates in your neck and jaw. Take a minute to gently and slowly move your head from front to back, side to side, and in a full circle. For your jaw, stretch your mouth open and slowly move your lower jaw from side to side and front to back.

(NOTE: If you notice any pain or if you have had any injuries to your back, neck or jaw, check with your doctor first.)

#### Set a SMART Goal (and achieve it!)

Unrealistic goals that never seem to be reached add to your stress level. Try setting one goal for yourself this week using the SMART approach:

Specific - Pick one small goal and write it down. Measurable - Can you count it or check it off a list? Achievable - Is it realistic? If not, make it smaller. Rewarded - Decide how to reward yourself when you reach your goal. Time-limited - Set a specific, realistic date to finish or achieve your goal.

#### Comedy Break - Laugh at Stress

Set aside some time for laughter, your body's natural stress-release mechanism. Rent your favourite comedy video. Tape a TV show that you know makes you laugh and keep it on hand for stress emergencies. Go to the library and borrow a book by an author who can make you laugh. Read the daily comics in the newspaper. Or, phone the funniest person you know!

#### Walking Breaks

Walk away from Stress Instead of sitting down for another cup of stress-inducing caffeine on your coffee break, lunch hour or when you're at home...try going for a stress-relieving and energizing walk. If you don't like walking by yourself, try forming a walking club with two or three of your co-workers or friends.