Switch Off Stress Handbook

Introduction
At home or at work, you can only give your best if you don’t feel stressed and feel confident about all aspects of your life. You can learn to cope with stress so you feel:

- in *control* instead of harassed
- *calm* instead of nervous
- at *peace* instead of angry
- *refreshed* and *renewed* instead of worn out
- *alive* instead of burned out

What is stress?
Stress is:

- an automatic physical reaction to a danger or demand
- tension, the kind you feel when faced with a new, unpleasant or threatening situation
- caused by how we react to life and work – how we deal or do not deal with a problem
- colours the way you think and feel about yourself, other people and the world in general

Facing up to difficulties can release enormous amounts of positive energy which can usefully be channelled into life, work and relationships.

Symptoms of stress
You may be suffering from stress if you have:

- lack of care in personal appearance
- a poor self image
- a wary attitude
- excessive annoyance at minor irritations
- inability to concentrate
- changes in sleeping, eating & sexual habits
- mood changes
- frequent arguments with colleagues
- high level of errors in work
- inability to slow down and relax
- frequent lateness, sickness, absenteeism
• increased smoking and/or drinking

**How to control harmful stress**

If after reading this leaflet you think you are suffering from stress then the following steps could be taken:

• plan your life – at home or at work decide what is more important to you and do this first, this may mean saying 'NO' to some requests
• do something you enjoy
• increase exercise like walking, swimming, jogging, cycling, aerobics, though if you are over 40 or have health problems consult your doctor before undertaking strenuous exercise.
• try deep breathing. Get in a comfortable position close your eyes, take deep breath and exhale. Concentrate on your breathing and put aside all stressful thoughts
• work out anger by doing a useful physical activity
• eat properly by increasing fibre, fresh foods and cutting down fats and salt
• take a break from what you are doing once in a while
• talking things over with a trusted friend and getting things into perspective

**Where to get support**

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness or self-indulgence. It is the wise thing to do, and will probably make you feel better so:

• talk to your manager, they may not be aware that you are suffering from stress and that you require additional support
• contact a First Call- Staff Support Network volunteer
• talk to a Harassment/Bullying Contact
• contact Counselling Service or Occupational Health Service
• make an appointment with your own doctor