

## WHEN TO FIND HELP

1. If you feel you cannot handle intense feelings or body sensations.
2. If your stress reactions do not lessen in the weeks following the event.
3. If you continue to have nightmares and poor sleep.
4. If you have no-one with whom to share your feelings when you want to do so.
5. If your relationships seem to be suffering badly, or sexual problems develop.
6. If you become clumsy or accident prone.
7. If after the event, you increase the use of cigarettes or alcohol, or take more medication, or use other drugs.
8. If your work performance suffers.
9. If you are tired all the time.
10. If things get on top of you and you feel like giving up; if you have thoughts of self harm or suicide.
11. If you take it out on your family.
12. If your health deteriorates.

## WHERE TO FIND HELP

1. If your organisation has a peer support network, we recommend that you contact them for help and advice.
2. By consulting your GP.
3. The designated point of contact within member organisations who provide CISM services can be obtained through the National Steering Committee of the Network.



CISM Network Ireland would like to express its thanks to the National Ambulance Service CISM Committee and the Defence Forces for allowing us to adapt their information leaflets for Network use. Small sections of this leaflet are also adapted from "Critical Incident Stress Management for Emergency Personnel."

The most current list of Network members is available on the Network website:  
[www.cismnetworkireland.ie](http://www.cismnetworkireland.ie)

# STRESS & STRESS MANAGEMENT



*How to recognise stress in yourself and colleagues  
 How to seek help*

Your experience was a very personal one but this leaflet will help you to know how others have reacted in similar situations. It will also show how you can help normal healing to occur and to avoid some pitfalls.

## WHAT IS STRESS?

- Stress is the normal mental and physical response resulting from exposure to any demand or pressure in our lives.
- The greater the demand, the more intense the stress reaction.
- Prolonged or excessive stress can cause distress.

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON SIGNS OF EXCESSIVE STRESS?

These can include:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Loss of motivation
- Dreading going to work
- Becoming withdrawn
- Racing thoughts
- Confusion
- Difficulty making decisions
- Poor concentration
- Poor memory
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Racing heart, breathlessness and rapid breathing
- Feeling hot and flushed, excessive sweating
- Dry mouth, churning stomach
- Diarrhoea and digestive problems
- Frequent desire to use toilet
- Muscle tension
- Restlessness, tiredness, sleep difficulties, headaches
- Increased drinking or smoking
- Over eating, loss of appetite
- Loss of interest in sex
- Self-neglect

Everyone may have these feelings. Experience has shown that they may vary in intensity according to circumstance. Nature heals through allowing these feelings to come out. This will not lead to loss of control, but stopping these feelings may lead to other and possibly more complicated problems.

## SOME DO'S AND DON'T'S

- DO** express your emotions
- DO** talk about what has happened as often as you need to
- DO** find opportunities to review the experience
- DO** discuss what happened with colleagues
- DO** look to friends and colleagues for support
- DO** listen sympathetically if a colleague wants to speak with you, unless it is too distressing
- DO** advise colleagues who need more help where they can get appropriate help
- DO** try to keep your life as normal as possible
- DO** keep to daily routines
- DO** drive more carefully
- DO** be more careful around the home
- DON'T** use alcohol, nicotine or other drugs to hide your feelings
- DON'T** simply stay away from work – seek help and support
- DON'T** allow anger and irritability to mask your feelings
- DON'T** bottle up feelings
- DON'T** be afraid to ask for help
- DON'T** think your feelings are signs of weakness

## ACTIVITY

Helping others may give you some relief.

It is also important to remember that exercise is crucial in stress control. Exercise has the following benefits:

- Increases muscle strength, lung capacity and physical stamina
- Lowers blood pressure and increases blood flow to tissues
- Reduces the severity of injuries, should they occur
- Reduces the potential for injury during emergency operations
- Reduces the level of stress chemicals in the body

## SUPPORT

It can be a relief to receive other peoples physical and emotional support. Sharing with others who have had similar experience can help.

## PRIVACY

In order to deal with feelings, you may find it necessary at times to be alone, or just with family and close friends.

## FAMILY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

New friendships and relationships may develop. On the other hand, strains in existing relationships may appear. The good feelings in giving and receiving may be replaced by conflict. You may feel that too little or the wrong things are offered, or that you cannot give as much as is expected. Accidents are more frequent after severe stress. Alcohol and drug intake may increase due to the extra tension.

## SOME STRESS RELATED DISEASES

Chronic stress can be associated with:

- Coronary heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Strokes
- Migraine
- Ulcers
- Increased vulnerability to common illness