

## STRESS

### IDENTIFYING STRESS

Initially you may not even recognise that you are feeling stressed, you may attribute any low mood or negative feeling to the injuries or any pain you feel. However for the majority of us, stress rarely keeps a low profile for long, and if not dealt with early can present itself in volatile ways such as extreme irritability or anger towards those around us, feelings of depression and anxiety, or possibly even thoughts of self-harm or suicide. You may also notice changes in your appetite and interest in things, or you may find that you begin to feel unwell aside from your injuries, or find that your recovery begins to decline.

It is therefore key that individuals are aware of the possibility for, and the symptoms of stress, and once it has been identified there are many things that can be done to help combat it.

### WHAT STRESS MAY YOU FACE?

- **Effects of the injury** – In a number of cases it is not until people get home that they really come to recognise how their injuries may limit their lives; things that were relatively simple before, such as washing and dressing may become monumental tasks after a traumatic accident and these limitations can cause emotional distress and frustration.
- **Not being able to go back to work** – this causes stress on many levels, it not only affects people financially, but also takes away a sense of purpose in our lives which can be very frustrating and stressful to deal with.

An individual's experience of stress is likely to vary wildly depending on a variety of things including.

- The type of accident they have had
- Their home environment
- Social support (or lack thereof)
- Their own personality
- Financial pressures

## TIPS FOR PREVENTING AND BEATING STRESS

### GET IT OFF YOUR CHEST!

**Talk to someone** – this may be a friend or relative, or may be a professional counsellor, but having someone around to express your worries to can really help to relieve stress; ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’ as they say.

- **How can I learn more?** Many people find that talking to friends or relatives helps, but if you would prefer to talk to someone impartial you may find it helpful to contact services such as **The Samaritans** or you may wish to discuss your circumstances with a **qualified counsellor** (see links below).

**Write it down** – for some talking to others may not appeal or be practical, but they may still feel the need to get things off their chest, and writing down thoughts and feelings can be an excellent way to do this. Being able to express yourself freely can be very empowering and this in itself can be an excellent remedy for stress.

- **How can I learn more?** Nothing more than a pen and piece of paper is really needed for this, but some people find it more enjoyable to purchase special stationery for this purpose. Additionally you may decide that rather than just vent your frustrations, you wish to chronicle your experiences and use them to inform and benefit others, in which case you may choose to do some research on different writing styles as well as potential publishing options (individuals can **publish books on-line** for the kindle with relative ease – see links below).

**Get help** – there aren’t many people who would happily admit that they can’t do something or they’re struggling, our society has somehow cultivated a view that asking for help is a bad thing. But let’s be honest, we can’t do everything on our own, and we shouldn’t have to, especially if you are recovering after an accident. If you are struggling after your accident it is OK to ask for help. Sometimes our reluctance to ask for help may be due to not knowing where to look, but there is always someone somewhere who will be able to help. It may mean having to ask your GP, a friend or relative, or even joining a forum on the internet, but once you ask for and get the help you need, it reduces a whole world of stress. Remember – ‘if you don’t ask you don’t get’.

- **How can I learn more?** Deciding where to go for help will depend on the type of assistance you require. If you are having issues to do with your injury or pain, your GP or surgeon will often be the best place to start. For more practical issues you may wish to turn to friends or relatives. But for those who do not have support around them there are many options available. For issues around finances for example, including benefits and compensation the **Citizens Advice Bureau** (see link below) can usually offer assistance or direct you to the most appropriate service. Alternatively your local council should be able to advise you on the services available in your area, this may be especially important for those who require assistance at home following their accident.

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

**Exercise** – this may not be possible depending on your injuries, but even gentle exercise such as walking, swimming or yoga can have huge benefits on stress levels.

- **How can I learn more?** It is important to check with your GP/surgeon prior to commencing any exercise, but once you are given the go-ahead the possibilities are virtually endless. Most gyms and local leisure centres run exercise classes, some of which may be tailored to specific injuries. There are also many local groups running yoga/Pilates classes which may be preferable to begin with and of course walking can be done with no equipment or financial commitment. Searching online is often the best way to obtain information on local exercise clubs and options.

**Eat well** – for many of us one of our biggest comforts when we feel stressed or low is food, unfortunately rarely do we turn to the right foods to help us. Usually it is sweet, fatty, junk foods that we turn to because they have an immediate effect in raising our mood. The trouble is it doesn't last and often we feel worse afterwards. It is always advisable to eat a healthy balanced diet, but this becomes even more imperative when recovering from an accident or illness as our bodies need nutritious food in order to recover. If we only supply it with junk our bodies don't have the chance to repair properly, which will only lead to further illness and thus more stress.

- **How can I learn more?** Often you can discover the effects of food on your mood and stress levels simply by observing your own habits and mood. However there are many resources available which can help educate you on what foods will be most beneficial and what will be most harmful to your psychological and physical well-being. A report from the **Food and Mood project** (link below) shows how powerful the connection between these things is. Speaking with a registered nutritionist or dietician may also be helpful in altering eating habits, your GP may be able to refer you, or you can search the internet for professionals local to your area.

**Mindfulness/meditation** – research has shown repeatedly the benefits of meditation and mindfulness in reducing stress, it helps focus the mind on the here and now rather than dwelling on issues in the past or future which may be causing stress and that we can't do anything about.

- **How can I learn more?** There are numerous websites and books offering tips and guidelines on both mindfulness and meditation. There is are **online courses for mindfulness** (links below) and there are various YouTube videos and even apps on smartphones which offer guided meditation for stress, many of which are free to download.

**Positive thinking** – admittedly this can be difficult at the best of times when you're feeling stressed, and even more so after a serious accident, however many people will attest to how powerful this method is. If you are able to be aware of and control the thoughts that develop in your mind, and direct them towards being more positive, this can bring about a radical change in not only stress levels, but your overall perspective on life and your general well-being.

# AfterTrauma

- **How can I learn more?** Many books on self-help and self-development include sections on positive thinking, these can often be obtained for free at local libraries, and many bookshops have extensive selections. There are also a number of books on the topic which can be downloaded for free or very low prices for those with e-book readers (Kindle, Kobo etc.), as well as a variety of online resources (link below).

## DO SOMETHING!

**Engage in a hobby** - We all know how time can fly if we really focus on something, particularly if it is something we really enjoy, so taking time to pursue a hobby that really engages you can help put worries and stress out of your mind and cheer you up at the same time.

**Take time to relax/have fun** – whether it's a long bath, reading a book, watching a comedy, or getting away somewhere different, doing something nice for yourself is essential in combatting stress at any time, and more so when you are recovering from injury or illness.

## Useful Organisations

- The Samaritans: <http://www.samaritans.org/>
- British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapy: <http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/therapists/>
- How to publish books on-line: <https://kdp.amazon.com/>
- Citizens' Advice Bureau: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>
- The Food and Mood project: [http://www.comfirst.org.uk/files/food\\_mood\\_survey\\_summary.pdf](http://www.comfirst.org.uk/files/food_mood_survey_summary.pdf)
- Online mindfulness courses: <http://www.bemindfulonline.com/>  
<https://www.headspace.com/>
- Examples of positive thinking books: <http://www.successconsciousness.com/>
- Mind – mental health charity: <http://www.mind.org.uk/>
- Assist – trauma therapy service: <http://assisttraumacare.org.uk/>