October 2018 – Newsletter from Anna Hinton, Health and Wellbeing Promotion Specialist

Let’s talk about stress… and building resilience

National Mental Health Awareness Day took place on 10 October

Being mindful of ‘stress’; what it means to you, how to recognise the signs, and how your mind and body react to it, then working out how to manage your own specific ‘stressors’, will help you feel happier and take care of your mind and body.

Preventing the long-term ill effects associated with stress is crucial to your wellbeing.

If you have paused to read this, you are probably feeling under pressure or feeling stressed. Whereas pressure can be a good thing, that gets you up, out of bed, functioning and doing what you do best, being stressed may mean you do not function to the best of your ability, and tipping into being stressed all the time will affect you quite negatively.

It may be helpful to remember that everyone reacts differently, and what causes stress in one person will not in another. It is not uncommon to hear people say “I couldn’t have coped with what they have coped with. They are so resilient”. Making small changes can support efforts to build resilience, and is one of the keys to preventing stress. Take just 10 minutes today to ‘press your pause button’ and to think about whether or not you are feeling under pressure, or tipping into feeling ‘stressed’.

Recognising the signs and symptoms of stress

Recognising signs early will help you figure out ways of coping and save you from adopting unhealthy coping methods. Early signs may include increased physical problems, as the physiological response to stress releases adrenaline and cortisol (commonly described as the ‘Flight or Fight’ response).

You might notice these physical changes first: shallow breathing, shorter breaths / breathlessness, faster breathing, dry mouth, raised heart rate – palpitations, chest pain – raised blood pressure, sweating, feeling faint, dizzy tingling, aching muscles, clenched hands, toes and other areas where tension shows, headaches, aching neck and jaw, upset digestion, butterflies, nausea or diarrhoea.
At the same time you may experience **emotional** changes in parallel with your physical changes. Others may notice these first, as you become easily upset and tearful, or irritable. You may lack confidence or feel unable to make decisions, feel anxious, lose your temper or just feel low and unable to relax.

**Mentally**, how you think changes too, as a result of the cortisol circulating in your bloodstream. You may think “I can’t cope, I’m useless, I’ll collapse; I’m having a heart attack”. You may find yourself forgetting things as your concentration is affected, worrying more about your memory.

Your **behaviour** may change too: you may start avoiding things or withdrawing from people. You may be drinking more alcohol or coffee, eating too much food high in sugar and fat, or just eating too little. You may not be sleeping.

![Fight or Flight Response](image)

**Stress at work**

Most staff members manage their workload and enjoy their work, feeling capable and competent, seeking guidance appropriately, receiving constructive feedback and adapting to their job as required.

The more experience someone gains within their role, or the more times someone does something well, the less that person feels uncomfortable or over-challenged and the more confident they feel, building self-esteem and resilience, enabling them to take on new challenges.
How does stress affect your performance?

If you recognise the signs of stress in yourself or your colleagues, what can you do?

Plan to do something; do not ignore the symptoms hoping things will get better. Take the time to read the information on ‘stress busting’ on the Centre for Occupational Health and Wellbeing intranet with the Trust’s Procedures on the Prevention and Management of Occupational Stress, or visit the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) intranet.

The NHS website offers advice and help too.

Preventing stress and building resilience

The key is to prevent the pressure building up leading to a crisis. Planning how to minimise the risk is very important.

Imagine three glasses of water: one is full to the brim, one is half empty and one is completely drained.

The idea is to integrate small resilience-building moments into every day, so that you never let the water in your glass, i.e. your resilience, run out and drain empty: people can’t run on ‘empty’.

Topping up throughout the day can really help to minimise the risks, build resilience and make a difference.

What is resilience?

Resilience is the capacity to cope with and become stronger as a result of experiencing and dealing with difficult events.

“The greatest glory of living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time you fall.”

Nelson Mandela

Strengthening resilience combines building inner strength with applying personal strength to challenging situations. The understanding and calculation is largely based on our confidence in knowing how to deal with a situation.

Below are 12 ways to keep your glass (your resilience) topped up

Take a break away from your work area, if only for 15 minutes, to change your energy levels and re-energise for the next session. If you are based in an area it is hard to leave, distract your thoughts from...
work, listen to music or a story on your mobile device, visualise somewhere peaceful and calm or chat about something outside of work.

Once away from work, even if you feel exhausted, go for a brisk walk, however brief, to maximise the release of endorphins that counter the damaging effects of adrenaline and cortisol and get a dose of Vitamin D. Get off the bus one stop early or try the ‘walk to work’ routes for all or part of your travel to or from work. Always take the stairs rather than lifts.

It is easy to hibernate in winter but getting out and about has a positive impact on your wellbeing

Use your commute for some ‘me time’ if possible, to do something you enjoy.

Ensure you eat healthily throughout the day, trying to keep your blood sugar on an even keel. Avoid the high fat, high sugar ‘hit’ you get from unhealthy snacks, and swap the biscuits for 6-7 unsalted almonds, an apple or a banana or, if on nights, a bowl of porridge, a Weetabix or Shredded Wheat instead of the biscuits and cakes.

*Research shows that you feel more tired once the sugar hit has worn off than you did before having it.*

Drink plenty of fluids and stay hydrated, but *avoid alcohol*, especially as a relaxant, as its effects can make you unwell; it can lead to disturbed nights and to drinking far more than you ever wanted to.

Work out how much is too much on the [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk) website.

Learn some brief relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and stretch exercises to rebalance your body, and try and do them every 3-4 hours.

*Quick relaxation exercise*

Take a good deep breath – breathe slowly and deeply, let your shoulders droop and sag, unclench your teeth by opening your mouth; allow the wrinkles in your forehead to un-wrinkled or really good at reducing anxiety.

[Try this breathing exercise video](#)

*Slightly longer relaxation exercise*

Take a deep breath in through your nose, hold it for a count of four, breathe out through your mouth for a count of eight, repeat three times and then focus on breathing more regularly.

*Stretch exercise for those who stand in their roles*

Stretch your body and focus on the difference you feel afterwards. Repeat every three to four hours.

Interested in your own resilience?

[Take a free resilience test](#) and understand which of the four components of resilience you draw on most: confidence, adaptability, purposefulness and /or the need for social support,

If you can’t avoid the things that make you stressed, try adjusting your attitude to them and challenge those stressful thoughts as they emerge. Take a couple of minutes to pause, take a breath and think about what you can do. Break the problem down into *bite-sized chunks* and tackle one bite at a time.

Anxious thoughts can take over your thinking leading to a *vicious cycle* of worry, anxiety and, potentially, depression. If this is happening seek help, so you can change your thought patterns.

Write down the changes you want to introduce, share them with colleagues and support each other to introduce the small changes you want to make by a certain date, such as New Year’s Day.
Key Resilient Thinking Skills – catch, challenge and change your unhelpful thinking

- Think flexibly
- Keep situations in perspective
- Be kind to yourself; what would you say to a friend thinking the same unhelpful things?
- Look for the evidence for and against your thinking

**Typical ways of thinking when overwhelmed and anxious**

- ‘I can’t stand it’
- Magnifying the awfulness
- Demanding-ness
- All or nothing thinking
- Blame and personalization
- Jumping to conclusions
- Labelling
- Focusing on the negative
- Emotional reasoning
- Over generalising

**Training and workshops for mental wellbeing**

If you are a manager of staff or a service, you can join the ever increasing number of managers who have attended the ‘creating a mentally healthy workplace’ workshops, which aim to:

- raise awareness of mental health
- explore what is meant by mentally healthy workplace
- understand the impact of work on mental health
- explore and understand the importance of manager behaviour for mental health
- plan how to positively influence the workplace.

The next workshop is scheduled for **22 November** – sign up through e-LMS

For further information contact **anna.hinton@ouh.nhs.uk**

**Feedback from these workshops includes:**

- ‘an essential workshop’
- ‘opened my eyes – the words you use are so powerful in making people feel listened to and appreciated’
- ‘I enjoyed the whole training and made me more confident to input into my team’.
Home life can be challenging at times, as can work life, so if you or your staff are struggling with stresses don’t forget the Employment Assistance Programme

Useful information, advice, guidance and support and on a whole range of personal issues that might be a source of stress at home, including money worries or relationships

A tip from a member of staff who says it has been an excellent resource: “it is a 24/7 helpline too – do persevere through the initial ‘call centre’ feel... it is incredibly helpful”.

**Asking for help**

Remember that everyone may need help, or guidance, or support or a place to talk at some point in their lives. Speak to your manager if you are beginning to feel overwhelmed so you can jointly find solutions, and if you don’t feel comfortable talking to your manager or close colleagues, find someone outside your team to help you talk about how you are feeling. Visiting your GP or the Centre for Occupational Health and Wellbeing may be a good place to start.

MIND

For information about services provided by the charity MIND, visit the MIND website.

MIND’s talking spaces

Meditation / Mindfulness apps

- [Three-minute Mindfulness exercise on YouTube](#) by Dr Mark Williams:
- [The Mindfulness App - Android / iOS](#)
- [Headspace](#) – sign in for free to access a simplified guide to what Mindfulness is all about
- [Mindfulness ‘TED’ talk by Andy Puddicombe](#)

The Centre for Occupational Health and Wellbeing facilitates Mindfulness courses three times a year at a greatly reduced cost of **£80** for an eight-week course.

The next one is in January on a Tuesday evening from 6.00pm to 7.15pm (start date TBC).

To be added to the waiting list for January, please email [anna.hinton@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:anna.hinton@ouh.nhs.uk)
Five ways to sustainable mental wellbeing

1. *Connect with people around you*; strengthening connections will support and enrich you every day
2. *Find an activity you enjoy* and make time to do it: “walking for health” significantly reduces anxiety and depression. For local organised activities visit [www.getoxfordshireactive.org](http://www.getoxfordshireactive.org). Do not underestimate the benefit of going for a 30 minute walk.
3. *Savour the moment*, and take notice of things around you throughout the day. As the saying goes, “look up and smell the roses” – reflect on your experiences and appreciate what really matters to you
4. *Try something new* or rediscover an old interest: set yourself a new challenge, perhaps cooking something new, an activity or course, de-cluttering or a workplace challenge
5. *Do something for a friend or stranger* such as volunteering. Saying ‘thank you’ is always welcomed; give a smile to everyone and a hug to those you love. It can be very rewarding to feel you have made a difference to someone else by simply being mindful of others.

Finally, try and find time for you and enjoy some ‘me time’ every day, whatever that may be…

Please print this newsletter and put it in your staff room.

The Centre for Occupational Health and Wellbeing

Email: [anna.hinton@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:anna.hinton@ouh.nhs.uk) Tel: Anna Hinton 01865 (2)23334