

Wellbeing for the Bush

IDENTIFYING & MANAGING STRESS

Have you ever considered: “What actually is stress?” In this resource we define what it is, both the good and the bad; explore how it may present; look at the risks it poses to health care workers; and provide simple strategies to identify, manage and reduce its impact on your wellbeing.

“Stress is often described as feeling overloaded, wound-up, tense and worried, and occurs when we face a situation we feel we can’t cope with.”¹

- Not all stress is bad
- Stress can be helpful and can be an appropriate reaction
- When stress becomes excessive and too much (e.g. long-term, chronic stress) this can impact on both our mental and physical health.²

Symptoms of stress can include:

- **Physical:** headaches or other aches and pains, fatigue, upset stomach/diarrhoea, weakened immune system, muscle tension
- **Emotional:** anxiety, worry, irritability, depression/sadness, feeling overwhelmed and out of control, feeling moody and tearful
- **Behaviourally:** avoiding situations/people, increased drug and alcohol use, outbursts of anger, overeating or undereating and relationship problems
- **Sleep:** poor sleep, bad dreams
- **Impairment:** decreased attention span, poor memory and decreased concentration.

There are risks to ‘helpers’ during periods of prolonged stress:

- When you are helper/carer during periods of prolonged stress, your body is denied the chance to rest and recover and replenish reserves which are vital to your health
- Empathy and connection with others can increase vulnerability to personal distress
- Direct or indirect exposure to traumatic material can increase stress
- Living in the area, being invested in the community can increase the risk of prolonged stress.



Stress can occur when the demands of your internal and external environment exceed your perceived ability to cope



Stress balance: strategies to manage stress demands

- When helping others, self-monitoring and self-care are necessary to manage risks and demands
- Leisure and pleasure are useful to break the cycle and to allow rest, recovery and re-establish the internal and external balance
- Find out what “recharges” you and do it regularly.

Self-care - an everyday essential

- What is your self-care strategy for the start of the day?
- Check in with yourself each morning and after work
- Consider strategies for prevention or escalation e.g. humour, reflection
- Post stressor – listen, debrief, reflect, let go.

Establish work life balance as a life goal.

It is important to:

- Take breaks at work and away from work
- Debrief - know who to contact when you need to debrief
- Set realistic goals and standards
- Say “No”, politely but assertively; practise saying “No”
- Separate interests, social support outside work
- Share experience with trusted people
- Use services like Lifeline and the CRANaplus Bush Support Line.

Where to from here?

Self-care takes practice and planning

- Consider completing a self-care plan (check out our Self-Care Plan at crana.org.au/self-care-plan for an example)
- Relaxation/meditation/mindfulness
- Go outside – exercise or get into nature
- Social connections – hobbies, groups, family and friends
- Consider your eating, nutrition and sleep.

1. www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Stress
2. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress