

CARE & LEARNING SERVICE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ADVICE FOR

STRESS & YOUR SENSES

This advice sheet has been written as guidance for children who may be experiencing high levels of stress within their day-to-day life. It is also applicable for the adults around the child as those in a caring role can also experience high levels of stress.



What is stress?

It is an internal response to external events or stressors. It is our body's way of reacting to an ever changing environment. This response can be to both positive and negative events. Stressors can be physical, mental or emotional. Stress is an important part of everyday life.

Positive stress: is what makes us get out of bed in the morning. It helps us to get into the "just right" zone for carrying out activities. It gives us a sense of excitement and enjoyment. Our body's "fight or flight" response enables us to respond to danger.

Negative stress: is when the level of stress is overwhelming. It can occur when the stress response continues over an extended period of time or there are sudden, big stressors. This can impact on our emotions, body and behaviour. Also it can mean our body's "fight or flight" response is in overdrive.

What's the impact of negative stress on day-to-day activities?

Self-care: Stress can often impact on sleep patterns and can lead to insomnia. Stress can lead to altered eating patterns and negative food choices. Stress has also been linked to upset stomachs and constipation, which in turn may impact on our diet choices.



Productivity: Stress can lead to difficulties with short-term memory, distractibility, can impact on decision making and can cause headaches and anxiety. All these will impact on our ability to do work tasks, whether that is a job, school or housework.

Leisure: Stress can impact on our self-esteem and how much you enjoy activities. This may mean we are reluctant to join in leisure activities, do not feel up to socialising or do not prioritise exercise. Stress can lead to a loss of muscle tone and to weight gain, especially in the abdominal region and the waist, which can add to the negative cycle.

HOW CAN YOU USE YOUR SENSES TO MANAGE STRESS?

MOVE

This is probably the most important sense because it acts as the “gatekeeper” to our fight or flight response. It is important to include plenty of move opportunities throughout our day. Try to aim for at least an hour. This may seem like a lot but can be made up in small amounts, eg 5 minutes dancing around the kitchen in the morning, 10 minutes walking to school, etc.

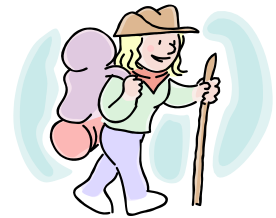
Formal Exercise: swimming, going to the gym, martial arts, team sports. Check out your local sports centre or contact your active schools coordinator for more ideas.

OUT AND ABOUT

Walking: you can increase the intensity of this in a variety of ways, eg carrying a heavy bag, going up and down hills, walking on different surfaces, such as sand

Parks: there are plenty of free play parks in the Highlands, which are fun ways of getting heaving work in to your day

Bike Riding: this could be a whole family activity.



WITHIN THE HOUSE

Gym balls are a fairly cheap piece of equipment that are readily available from sports stores or some supermarkets. Most balls come with activity ideas or there are lots available on the internet.

Movement games, eg Simon Says, obstacle courses, "If You're Happy and You Know It", Twister, hide and seek

Move around the house in a different way, eg crawling, hopping, walking backwards

Create your own gym corner, eg create weights out of water bottles. There are lots of exercises that do not need any equipment, eg jumping jacks, sit-ups, head stands, wheelbarrow walks

Exercise DVDs: there are lots available for all age brackets

Yoga: there are lots of different resources available online

Housework: most housework involves some element of movement, eg vacuuming, carrying things up and down stairs, dusting



MOUTH



Eating chewy food, eg liquorice.

Eating crunchy food, eg carrot sticks, celery

Sucking through straws: the thinner the straw the harder you have to work. Curly straws are hard work and can be fun to watch. The thicker the liquid the harder you have to work, so try yogurts or smoothies.

Diet: maintaining a healthy diet is very important to helping your body to fight stressors placed on it. For further advice on this contact your doctor or dietician.

Breathing: controlled breathing, eg deep breaths, can help to slow down your heart rate and reduce anxiety.

TOUCH

Heavy work for the hands (and upper body): food preparation, Playdoh

Fiddle toys: silly putty, stress / squeeze balls, Blue-tac

Massage: provides deep pressure

Head compressions: make sure your neck is in alignment (see picture)



LOOK

Technology can be very visually stimulating

Combining vision with movement, eg exercise videos, sports computer games, can be a fun physical activity

If you are having trouble sleeping, try to turn off all computers and TVs for at least 2 hours before bed

Using dimmer switches or lamps with lower wattage bulbs can help to create a calming environment

LISTEN

Music: this is trial and error as people's response to music is very individual. You could make up playlists of different music, eg calming, uplifting, happy or angry

You could even dance around to let off a bit of extra steam!

Sound: some people thrive off a loud, busy environment. However, when you are feeling stressed noise can often be a trigger



MY SENSORY STRESS RELIEF PACK

Keep a note of what you have tried and whether it works for you or not

WORKS FOR ME	NOT FOR ME
Move	
Mouth	
Touch	
Look	
Listen	

