



STR8UP HEALTH

Stress

Mate māharahara

Stress is not what happens to us. It's our response to what happens. And response is something we can choose.

Maureen Killoran

What is stress?

Stress (mate māharahara) is your body's natural reaction to a threat or a demanding situation. It is normal to feel stressed from time to time, so you are not unusual or odd if this happens to you!

Stress can cause physical changes as well as changes to your mental wellbeing.

There are heaps of practical things you can do to help reduce your stress and manage it when it does pop up.

Remember, stress can also be a good thing – eg, it can motivate you to meet deadlines.



Here's our guide to:

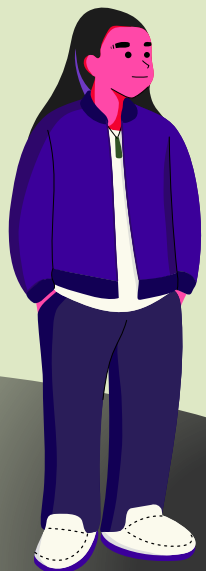
What you might experience if feeling a bit stressy, how stressful things can impact you and, most importantly, how to prevent and manage stress. We have also listed trustworthy services and supports you can contact.

1 Feeling stressy?

2 Sooo stressful!

3 Stress snacks

4 Finding services, supports, info



Key take aways (not the fast food kind)

Stress isn't always a bad thing!
Finding ways to deal with stress
will reduce the chance of illness
caused by long-term stress.

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Feeling stressy?

Imagine you're a caveman being chased through the night by a tiger – you would want your muscles, brain and hormones to work fast to ensure you can get away, right?

Stress triggers your body to fight or take flight. Your stress response is actually key to your survival! Although you don't need to run away from tigers anymore, your body can still have strong responses to real or perceived threats in the environment.

Stress over time adds up so, where you can, address the little things that stress you out before they become bigger issues. There is an increased risk of health conditions with long-term stress. These include high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes, depression or anxiety, heart disease, muscle tension, headaches, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), suicide in extreme situations and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Short term (minutes to hours) stress signs/symptoms

- heart pounding
- muscles tensing
- breathing quickening (hyperventilation)
- sweating
- butterflies or a funny tummy.

Long term (days, weeks, months) stress signs/symptoms

- headaches
- upset stomach
- dry mouth
- poor sleep
- chest pains, rapid heartbeat
- overeating or loss of appetite
- immune issues
- feeling tired, flat, down or worn out
- muscle tension, neck or back pain
- feeling anxious or jittery
- anger or irritability
- can't concentrate or focus
- skin infections, mouth ulcers, rashes
- reliance on coffee, energy drinks, sugar.

We're all exposed to things in our lives that can cause us to feel stressed out! Big feelings and thoughts can come from your personal experiences.

You might be trying to choose what to do when you leave school, your parents might be getting a divorce, or you might be struggling to make ends meet. Sometimes it is something you have experienced in the past that is causing you to feel stressed. Finding out what might be causing your stress can be the first step to working out how to reduce your feelings of stress.

Key take aways (not the fast food kind)

Big and little things can cause stress in your life.

It's normal to have things come up that bring on a stress response.

Working out areas of stress in your life can help you to self-manage stress.

What can cause stress?

Major changes or threats or minor problems can cause stress. Some causes include:

- health issues
- relationship problems
- arguments with friends or family
- work, study or exams
- grief and loss
- feeling unsafe
- financial issues
- becoming a parent
- deadlines
- natural disasters
- unrealistic expectations you put on yourself.

What causes stress for you may be a "walk in the park" for someone else. And some things that you "handle like a boss", might be really hard for others.



So you're feeling stressed or about to face a stressful situation? Try a stress snack! These are practical things you can do when you recognise you're stressed out before your stress response fully kicks in.

You have control over how you respond to a stressful situation! You can also find ways to manage the things you can't control to change your body and mind response. Stress loves to cause shallow breathing so any strategy that slows breathing is going to be very helpful. Try a few of the ideas below – often it's doing these consistently that makes the biggest difference as stress doesn't always have a quick "off button".

Breathing techniques



Deep breathing is easy and effective. Do this daily, and a few times a day if you're feeling really overwhelmed.

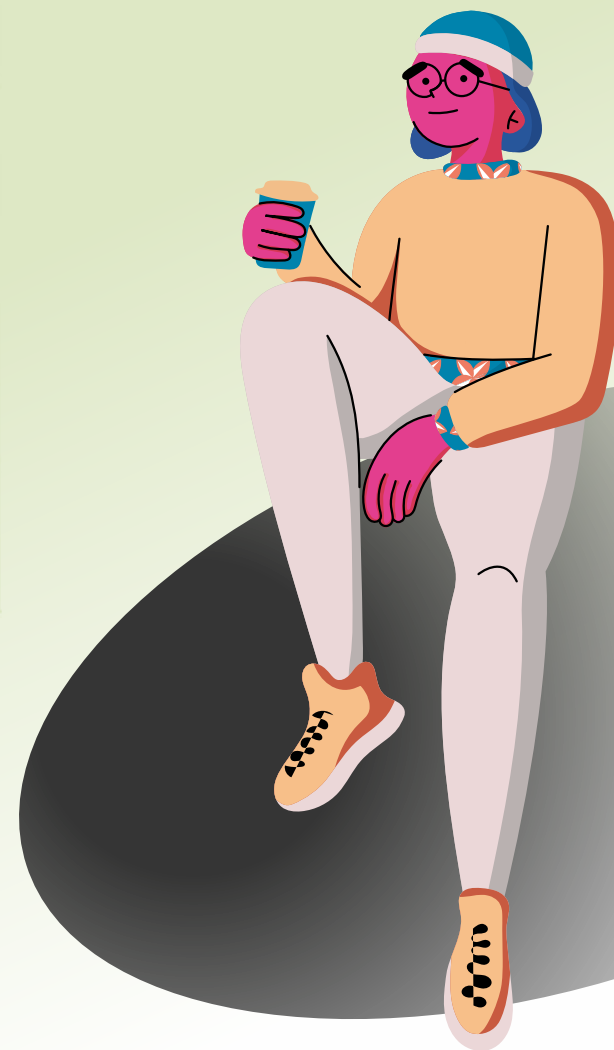
- Put a hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Breathe in deeply through your nose – the hand on your stomach should rise.
- Breathe out very slowly. Repeat.

Connect



Getting out into fresh air and green space has proven benefits for your mind and body.

You can also try connecting with yourself through mindfulness practices.



Music on



Listening to music you enjoy, particularly music that soothes you, can calm your nervous system and help reduce your stress levels.

You could search for a “Relax” playlist on Spotify or YouTube.

Physical activity



Try to do a small amount of physical activity daily. It can bump up the production of your brain’s feel-good chemicals, called endorphins, and reduces negative effects of stress.

Check out our physical activity resource for more info.

Write it down



Write down what is on your mind before you go to sleep or at the time of stress.

Writing how you feel about situations can sometimes help your brain feel calmer and for you to get clear on what things are bothering you.

Eat, sleep, repeat



Lack of good sleep can increase your stress levels. Learn about [good sleep habits](#).

A [healthy diet](#) rich in fresh fruit and vegetables and low in fatty, sugary and processed foods gives your body the nutrients it needs to help you manage stress.

Have a yarn



Talk to someone you trust – it might be a friend or whānau member – or, if things are really getting on top of you, talking with a clergy member, kaumātua, counsellor or your GP can really help.

Free call or text 1737 for 24/7 free trained support.

Take a break



Give yourself a breather.

Take a short break during the day at school, study, work or home to do something you really enjoy, or just unplug.

Make sure you plan for a longer break or two over the year to relax more fully.

Support ideas and info

Apps: See our list clinically reviewed apps [here](#), most of which are free!

Websites:

CALM – tools to help you manage stress and develop greater happiness.

Small Steps – practical tools, strategies and advice on stress.

Le Va Youth – navigating stress resources and programmes for Pasifika.

Mental Wealth – learn about different aspects of mental wellbeing.

Health Navigator NZ – stress pages.

Resources:

Whanaungatanga – guide to support strong healthy, well-connected rangatahi available in [English](#) and [te reo Māori](#).

Interactive Wellbeing Tools – National Academy of Sciences, America.

[Te Hikuwai Resources for Wellbeing – stress/tāmitanga](#) – Te Pou, NZ.

[Problem Solving Worksheet](#) – BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions.

Chat: Tell your doctor or [find a counsellor or therapist](#) to talk to.

Helplines: Free call or text 1737 any time, 24 hours a day.

Mental Health Foundation NZ
Depression Helpline: 0800 111 757
Lifeline: 0800 543 354
Samaritans: 0800 726 666
Youthline: 0800 376 633.

Watch [this](#) informative and practical video on stress.

Key take aways (not the fast food kind)

Use the help that's available.

There are lots of supports that make dealing with stress easier and help you feel less alone as you navigate stressful times.

You don't have to go it alone – support services, apps and resources can all help you help yourself when it comes to stress management.

Equip yourself with info and support to build confidence and take charge! Remember – everyone gets stressed and seeking help is healthy and normal.



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Key references:

<https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living/s/stress-topics/>

Doing what matters in times of stress: an illustrated guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020.
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<https://www.smallsteps.org.nz/>

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