Even though we may not have a choice in the challenges we face, we do have a choice in how we handle them.

Taking action to reduce stress is one way in which we can gain more control over our lives.

We feel stressed when our bodies are knocked out of balance by a stressor. Potential stressors are many and varied, ranging from immediate physical danger to long-term challenges.

Humans have an additional source of potential stress compared to other animals, because we can think about the future. Our ability to anticipate an issue or event can cause us stress, even if it never happens.

Seizures and stress

Currently there is limited scientific evidence to link seizures with stress. Some people with epilepsy, however, report that they experience more frequent seizures when they are stressed. How this might happen is unknown, but it is possible that stress-related seizures are caused by chemical changes in the brain which make it more excitable.

Can stress reduction lead to fewer seizures? Researchers have not yet answered this question. However, people who have experimented with relaxation and other stress-reduction techniques such as yoga have reported a subsequent drop in their number of seizures.

Stress management cannot replace medication, but taking steps to reduce stress may help reduce seizure frequency.
**Signs of stress overload**

Stress is difficult to measure because what is stressful for one person can have little effect on another.

One way to monitor a person’s level of stress is to look for physical symptoms such as tense muscles and frequent colds or flu, along with changes in psychological functioning, such as increasing irritability, memory problems, or constant worrying.

Other possible signs of stress overload are behavioural changes, such as difficulty relaxing and staying asleep, or an increase in alcohol intake.

**Reducing stress**

Stressors are an unavoidable part of life, but there are many ways to reduce their impact on well-being, and restore balance. These include:

- Exercise – regular sustained movement, whether gentle or intense, can reduce the impact of the stress response, and improve mood
- Meditation and mindfulness - techniques which slow breathing rate and quieten the mind can increase the ability to relax when it is needed
- Time management – establishing priorities and living a more predictable life can reduce stress
- Cutting back on commitments or rearranging commitments can be helpful to reduce stress caused by rushing from one commitment to another
- Connecting with other people – receiving and giving social support can improve mood and enhance well-being
- Psychological approaches – assertiveness training, mental imagery, anxiety management and work on self-esteem issues can reduce stress
- Physical approaches – massage, singing, dancing and other enjoyable activities can reduce tension and encourage a greater sense of wellbeing
- Maintaining a healthy sleep routine will help when stressful situations arise which can’t be avoided
- Always ensure that you take your medication on time.

**Other resources**

If you would like further help with managing stress there are many organisations that can help. The links below will take you to some websites where you can find helpful information:

- [www.beyondblue.org.au/resources](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/resources)
- [www.mindhealthconnect.org.au](http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au)
- [www.epilepsyaustralia.net](http://www.epilepsyaustralia.net)

**References**


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