



Welcome to Improving Health Together. This edition will focus on mental health promotion and the issue of stress.

People who experience poor mental health tend to experience worse physical health than the rest of the population. There is evidence that a healthier lifestyle will help improve not just physical health, but also mental health, mood and well-being. For example, regular physical activity reduces the risk of depression and has positive benefits for mental health including reducing anxiety, enhanced mood and self-esteem.

It is hoped that this factsheet will provide key professionals with information to enable patients/clients to make steps towards positive mental well-being. This may include: strengthening skills, increasing confidence and provision of information on the sources of help available.

Signposting to key services, e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau and debt counselling, etc., may be particularly relevant in today's economic climate.

Mental Health Promotion: Stress

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The aim of standard one of the National Service Framework for Mental Health¹ is to ensure that health and social services promote mental health and reduce the discrimination and social exclusion associated with mental health problems.

Mental health promotion involves any action to enhance the mental well-being of individuals, families, organisations or communities and is essentially concerned with:

- ◆ how individuals, families, organisations and communities think and feel;
- ◆ the factors which influence how we think and feel, individually and collectively;
- ◆ the impact that this has on overall health and well-being.²

Interventions to reduce stress can contribute to health gain through improving mental well-being, in addition to any impact they may have on preventing mental health problems. Stress can also impact on an individual's physical health and evidence suggests that sustained stress, or trauma, increases susceptibility to viral infection and physical illness by damaging the immune system, and a lack of control at work is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

Mental well-being is influenced by many factors - genetic inheritance, childhood experiences, life events, individual ability to cope and levels of social support, as well as factors such as adequate housing, employment, financial security. Everyone has mental health needs and therefore mental health promotion is universal and of relevance to all.

World Mental Health Day 10 October 2008
Making mental health a global priority -
scaling up services through citizen advocacy and action
www.wfmh.org/02WFMHDay08.htm
World Federation for Mental Health

Stress - who is at risk?

Stress is the reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. It arises when they worry that they cannot cope.

Stress is something we all encounter. Various life changes can sometimes cause stress, and negative social conditions such as unemployment, poor housing, noisy neighbours, relationship problems and difficulties at work can contribute to an individual feeling stress.

Stress also has a positive side. Indeed, some degree of stress or pressure is considered healthy. However, excessive stress can lead to fatigue, impaired judgement and decision making, exhaustion and the onset of serious health problems - both mental and physical. The psychological effects can be damaging. Increased anxiety, irritability, disturbed sleep, poor concentration and aggressive behaviour can increase the risk of accidents and disrupt relationships at both work and home.

Individuals under stress are often inclined to smoke more, drink more alcohol and consume excessive amounts of caffeine, thus increasing irritability and sleep impairment. Prolonged exposure to stress will increase the risk of serious mental health problems including depression and disabling anxiety conditions, as well as alcohol misuse.

What people feel is determined not just by events and changes in the outside world, but how they are perceived and how people respond to them. The important point is that the responses to stress can be recognised and, if necessary, skills developed to deal with it.

Early recognition of the signs of stress, anxiety and depression is the crucial first step in dealing with such problems and preventing them becoming more serious. Most people make a full recovery, often without having to take any time off work. However, individuals should be encouraged to seek help as soon as possible either via their GP or if in the workplace, staff support services where available.

Signs and symptoms

How your body may react

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breathlessness • headaches • fainting spells • chest pains • tendency to sweat • nervous twitches • cramps or muscle spasms • pins and needles • high blood pressure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeling sick or dizzy • constant tiredness • restlessness • sleeping problems • constipation or diarrhoea • craving for food • indigestion or heartburn • lack of appetite • sexual difficulties |
|--|--|

How you may feel

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aggressive • a loss of interest in others • irritable • taking no interest in life • depressed • neglected • bad or ugly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that there's no-one to confide in • fearing diseases • fearing failure • a loss of sense of humour • dreading the future |
|--|--|

How you may behave

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have difficulty making decisions • avoiding difficult situations • frequently crying • have difficulty concentrating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • biting your nails • denying there's a problem • unable to show true feelings |
|---|--|

National Stress Awareness Day

5 November 2008

Don't worry, take action

www.nationalstressawarenessday.co.uk



Citizens Advice Bureau

Within the current economic climate people may be worried about their finances, which in turn may affect their mental well-being and cause stress. Money worries can greatly affect individuals. There are support services available that are free and confidential. The Citizens Advice Bureau give free, independent and confidential advice (www.adviceguide.org.uk).

CAB helps people resolve their debt, benefits, housing, legal, discrimination, employment, immigration, consumer and other problems and is available to everyone regardless of race, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, disability or religion.

Advice is available face-to-face and by telephone. Most CAB offer home visits and some also provide email advice. How to find your local CAB, including those giving advice by email, is available on www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/getadvice.

Citizens Advice Bureau contact details:

Craven	01756 700210
Eastfield (outreach)	0845 120 2930
Filey	0845 120 2930
Hambleton	0845 122 8689
Harrogate	01423 567150
Richmondshire	01748 823978
Ripon	01765 603297
Scarborough & District	0845 120 2930
Selby	0845 120 3718
Whitby	0845 120 2930
York	0844 826 9705

Evidence Base - Positive Steps for Mental Health

A recent review on the strength of the evidence for the relationship between lifestyle and mental health concluded that there is good evidence to support the effectiveness of 'positive steps', although the quality and quantity of studies varies considerably³. The review suggests that the 'positive steps' approach may empower individuals to improve and protect their own and others' mental health, while recognising the importance of wider determinants. The strength of the evidence for individual positive steps is outlined below.

Exercise

- ◆ There is good quality evidence for a positive association, but not necessarily a causal link, between physical activity, exercise and mental well-being.

Diet

- ◆ There is limited and weaker, but promising, evidence for the relationship between good nutrition and mental health.

Alcohol

- ◆ As alcohol is connected to a range of mental health problems, e.g. depression, anxiety, sleeping problems, and bereavement, sensible drinking should be encouraged. Alcohol misuse can also exacerbate mental health problems and delay recovery. There is a clear relationship between alcohol abuse and social functioning and factors that influence mental health, e.g. violence, intimate partner violence and sexual abuse of children.

Learning

- ◆ There is good evidence that participating in learning throughout life reduces risk of depression, is associated with a wide range of mental health benefits and contributes to the adoption of healthy behaviours.

Creativity

- ◆ There is promising and some good evidence that creative pursuits improve mental health, limited but promising evidence that participation in the arts can reduce offending and re-offending behaviour and weak/mixed evidence that creativity can contribute to community level benefits, e.g. cohesion.

Spirituality

- ◆ There is good evidence that regular engagement in religious activities is positively related to happiness, life satisfaction, positive emotion and reduced risk of depressive symptoms.

Talking

- ◆ There is review-level evidence for the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic treatments for a wide range of mental health problems. Evidence that talking protects mental health in non clinical populations is limited.

Valuing yourself and others

- ◆ There is good evidence linking low self-esteem with depression, suicidal behaviour and eating disorders.
- ◆ There is good evidence that social trust is associated with higher well-being and a lower probability of suicide and psychological problems but weak evidence on causality.

Social Support

- ◆ There is good evidence, including some review level studies, that strong social networks and social support play a significant role both in preventing mental health problems and improving outcomes.
- ◆ There is mixed evidence that some types of social network have a negative impact on mental health, notably for women and marginalized groups.
- ◆ Social support and social participation do not mediate the effects of material deprivation.

Asking for help

- ◆ There is weak and limited evidence on the benefits of help seeking, although it is important to note that this reflects lack of research.

Getting involved and making a contribution

- ◆ Evidence for the impact of volunteering on well-being is mixed. On balance, informal care-giving has a negative impact on well-being.

Contact with nature

- ◆ There is promising but limited evidence that contact with nature produces mental health benefits.

Relaxing/taking a break

- ◆ There is good evidence that organisational and cultural factors in the workplace have a stronger impact on the mental health of employees than individual lifestyle behaviours but that exercise, socialising outside work, supportive colleagues, a healthy diet and achieving a work/life balance can improve mental health.

Key documents

Department of Health 2004
Choosing Health. Making healthy choices easier.
www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4094550

Department of Health 2001
Making it happen. A guide to delivering mental health promotion.
www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4007907

Royal College General Practitioners London 1999
Davies M, Chambers R. What Stress in Primary Care: a once in a lifetime programme that will help you control stress in your practice. ISBN 085084245X

References

- 1 Department of Health 1999. NSF for Mental Health.
www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4009598
- 2 Friedli, L (2000) Mental health promotion: perspectives and practices.
International Journal of Mental Health Promotion 3 (1) 20-24
- 3 Friedli, L (2007) Social Marketing and Mental Health Briefing, Care Services Improvement Partnership

Order your free resources

These are the resources recommended by your Public Health team for use with the mental health campaign.

Mental Health Foundation

020 7803 1101 to order How to Look After Yourself poster, booklet and postcards for World Mental Health Day Ways to look after your mental health poster
www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/look-after-your-mental-health/



Boiling Point—download leaflet, poster and postcards
www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/anger-and-mental-health



Downloadable stress factsheet
http://cks.library.nhs.uk/patient_information_leaflet/stress#279799000

To promote mental health in and out of the workplace, Community Links is delivering 2 day Mental Health First Aid training throughout Yorkshire and the Humber. For more information and course details contact:
Mental Health First Aid – Yorkshire and the Humber
Tel: 0845 838 9928 Email: mhfa@commlinks.co.uk
www.mentalhealthfirstaidyorksandhumber.org



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Tel: 01904 724004 Fax: 01904 627839
www.nyypct.nhs.uk/StayingHealthy

Websites

Mental Health Foundation

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/welcome/
A leading UK charity that provides information, carries out research, campaigns and works to improve services for anyone affected by mental health problems.



Mind

www.mind.org.uk/index.htm
Helpline, campaigns, networks and information on mental health issues.



Clinical Knowledge Summaries

http://cks.library.nhs.uk/patient_information_leaflet/stress#279799000
Practical & reliable information about common conditions which helps healthcare professionals make evidence-based decisions about the healthcare of their patients.



NHS Direct - Stress

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/articles/article.aspx?articleId=350
Find everything you need to know about medical conditions, symptoms, health tests, treatments, operations and services in the Health Encyclopaedia.



NHS Choices

Mental Health
www.nhs.uk/livewell/mentalhealth/Pages/Mentalhealthhome.aspx
A service that helps you to make the most of your health and get the best out of the NHS.



The Department of Health

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/NationalServiceFrameworks/Mentalhealth/index.htm
NHS Lifecheck
www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/NHSLifeCheck/index.htm



Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health

<http://www.scmh.org.uk/index.aspx>
Focus on criminal justice and employment, with supporting work on broader mental health and public policy.



The Royal College of Psychiatrists

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation.aspx
Campaigns and information to improve the lives of people affected by mental illness.



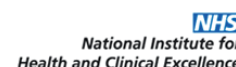
Health and Safety Executive

www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm
Information, guidance, good practice and standards on work related stress.



NICE Mental Health Guidance

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byTopic&o=7281
Guidance on Promoting Well-being at Work is due to be issued June 2009.



The Samaritans

www.samaritans.org.uk/your_emotional_health/managing_stress.aspx
Helpline, support and training to improve emotional health. Help on coping with stress.