

Mental Health Awareness Week: 14th - 20th May 2018



Mental Health Awareness Week is a national campaign run by the Mental Health Foundation. This year the theme is “STRESS: are we coping?” and the foundation has published 10 Top Tips to help manage and reduce stress. At Validium, the services we provide offer practical help with the real life issues that can cause stress along with counselling support to help deal with feelings and emotional reactions. The MHF Top 10 Tips are listed here, along with some information from Validium that can help you to cope with stress.

1. Talk About Your Feelings

Counselling is a non judgemental space that helps people to deal with emotional reactions, recognise negative thinking patterns, learn relaxation techniques, and challenge unhelpful behaviours. The qualified counsellors at Validium provide support with emotional issues including stress, distress or anxiety and can suggest strategies to manage the negative effects of these common but destructive mental health conditions. Talking to someone impartial can help defuse the situation, calm the emotions, to off-load or simply ‘get-it-off-your-chest’!

2. Keep Active

Physical activity and exercise won’t make stress disappear, but it can help deal with stress by providing a positive reaction in the body and in the mind. Taking time out to go for a walk, play sport or join an exercise class can reduce some of the emotional intensity, allow time to clarify thoughts and gives an opportunity to react more calmly to stressful situations. By being physically active the body releases beneficial hormones that create the ‘feel good’ factor which can enhance feelings of personal wellbeing and wellness.

3. Eat Well

Research shows that good nutrition is essential for our mental wellbeing and a number of mental health conditions may be influenced by dietary factors including Stress, Depression, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Alzheimer’s disease. Making healthy food choices and eating a wide variety of fruits and vegetables is important for physical and mental health also for overall wellbeing.

4. Drink Sensibly

In addition to the physical health risks, alcohol can have an effect on mental health because of how the brain responds to stimulus. Initially, this may enhance mood and reduce feelings of anger or stress, but regular or excessive alcohol consumption leads to changes in the brain, creating the need for more and more alcohol which leads to dependency or addiction. Water poses no such risks and has huge benefits for body and mind so can, and should, be enjoyed freely!

5. Take A Break

Practicing meditation, mindfulness or deep breathing exercises can calm the mind and lower the heart rate which really can help to reduce stress. There is a selection of audio podcasts on the vClub portal that you can use to take a break and boost mental wellbeing, including the new guided ‘Rainbow Breath’ mindfulness practice.

Find it on *vClub / Resources / Mental health & Counselling / Mental Health Awareness Week 2018*

6. Do Something You’re Good At

We can all get stressed, angry or anxious, particularly when things go ‘wrong’, and unless we manage those negative feelings they can overwhelm us. Regularly making time for playing music or sport, crafting, singing, cooking, reading, gardening or a hobby can provide valuable ‘down time’ from work and personal responsibilities. Doing things we enjoy can help to deal with negative emotions and with regular practice, our skills and ability improve too which can boost our sense of achievement and self worth.

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7. Keep In Touch

Technology helps us to communicate with each other, and every day millions of people use social media, apps, instant messaging and texts to connect with friends, family and colleagues yet loneliness has become a chronic problem in the UK and has a detrimental affect on health and wellbeing. Instant messages, tweets and online updates are useful ways to keep in touch but as humans, we thrive on social contact and having personal, rather than digital connections. Making time to be with friends, to socialise and enjoy each others company can help to reduce stress by boosting feelings of belonging and social connection.

8. Ask For Help

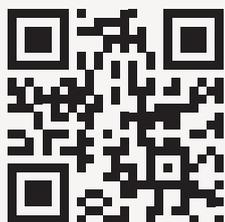
The old saying that “a problem shared is a problem halved” highlights the benefits of talking to someone when we have an issue, and sometimes just having someone to listen or act as a ‘sounding board’ can be hugely beneficial. At other times, everyday issues like money worries, relationship problems, parenting or caring for others, pressure at work or a sudden change in personal circumstances can cause stress, worry and sleepless nights. Remember that the Validium service offers practical information and guidance for the difficult situations, challenges and issues life throws at us.

9. Accept Who You Are

Accepting yourself simply means that you are true to yourself, and that your words and actions are an accurate reflection of who you are and what you believe in. As we age we come to understand ourselves better than we did in our youth, and this self-awareness can be an important factor in recognising the signs of stress and taking action to manage it. Rather than ignoring the symptoms, it can help to take a step back, take stock of your lifestyle, and consider what is happening to cause feelings of stress. Understanding and valuing your true self, being proud of your achievements and living life in-line with your natural character can help bring about balance and a sense of calm that can help us to be our authentic selves.

10. Care For Others

In our busy lives it can be hard to find the time to care for ourselves, let alone have time to care for or help others, but there is a strong association between good mental health and engaging with others, learning new skills, sharing knowledge and facing new challenges. Volunteering or joining community-based projects and social groups can provide a network of friends and acquaintances that not only reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation but can also enhance feelings of pride, self esteem and a sense of achievement, which are all important for emotional wellbeing.



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