

Maintaining wellbeing in the face of long term stress



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It can be difficult looking after yourself and feeling well when you're under pressure, especially over a long period of time or if you're experiencing multiple challenges like the drought, bushfires and COVID-19. It is normal to feel stress sometimes, but longer term, stress does not resolve without direct action. There are some simple things you can do to manage stress and maintain wellbeing.

Stress is a natural reaction

Stress is the body's way of creating the extra energy you need to help deal with challenges. Stress can be caused by any significant change in your life, whether that be related to your loved ones, prolonged uncertainty or ongoing pressures.

What you might be feeling

You will most likely have a range of feelings if you are continually under stress. Many of these feelings are normal as they are reactions to challenging circumstances. It is important to give yourself space and time to acknowledge these emotions so you can then manage them in a healthy way. Some common feelings you might have:

- worry and/or anxiety
- fear
- anger or irritability
- helplessness
- feeling overwhelmed

Physical reactions

Your body, as well as your mind, may be affected by stress. Common reactions include:

- heart palpitations
- fatigue, sleep disturbance or insomnia
- upset stomach
- frequent headaches
- muscular aches and pains

There are things you can do to manage your stress and look after your wellbeing;



Australian Red Cross / Aysha Leo

Slow down and check in with yourself

Stress can sharpen our focus onto a single task or a point in the future. This can be helpful for short periods, but it can also mean that you dismiss or miss important things, like checking in on how you are feeling and taking time out. Our priority tends to be 'fixing' the problem, which is often out of our control. In this mindset, leisure and pleasure generally take a back seat, even though taking time out and enjoying life is what relieves stress and helps us to cope. There are some easy things you can build in to your daily routine to maintain your own wellbeing.

Maintaining connections with your loved ones, friends and communities will help

Stress does not resolve without direct action, and reaching out to your loved ones and community is a great way to combat your stress.

- Spend time with your loved ones. If you are unable to see them, make regular phone or video calls
- Join a local community group whether in person, or online
- Talk in advance with loved ones about ways to defuse any difficult situations or anger
- Write a letter to loved ones
- Arrange play dates for your children, or yourself. If you are unable to travel, arrange for video play dates
- Watch your favourite TV show or sport with friends, in person or online

Wellbeing, pleasure and leisure

Enjoyment and prioritising your wellbeing is the best antidote to stress. Even with rest, stress tends to perpetuate unless deliberate steps are taken to address it. Doing things that you enjoy in times of stress is not a luxury – it's essential to manage your wellbeing.

- Make time to exercise
- Try meditation or mindfulness exercises
- Get outside
- Learn a musical instrument or language
- Read a novel, newspaper, magazine or comic
- Play board games, cards, or try virtual games of chess or scrabble
- Do some craft activities like knitting, crochet, colouring or drawing
- Cook a new recipe
- Take a course online

These are just ideas, so you may want to add your own relaxing, gentle activities that help you



Australian Red Cross/Dilini Perera

Where to get help

- Lifeline** A free 24-hour crisis support line
13 11 14 - lifeline.org.au
- Beyond Blue** Free tips and resources to help you look after your wellbeing
1300 224 636
beyondblue.org.au/drought-toolkit
- Kids Helpline** A free and confidential phone and online counselling service for young people
1800 551 800 - kidshelpline.com.au
- Farm Hub** Connects farmers to a range of services. **farmhub.org.au**

LOCAL INFORMATION