

Webinar Handout – Mental Health

From *Time out – COVID hits Aquatics – Mental Health*, December 16, 2020. Courtesy of Chris Rodrigues, City of Toronto Fire Department and Employee Assistance Program Counsellor

Is it Stress or Anxiety?

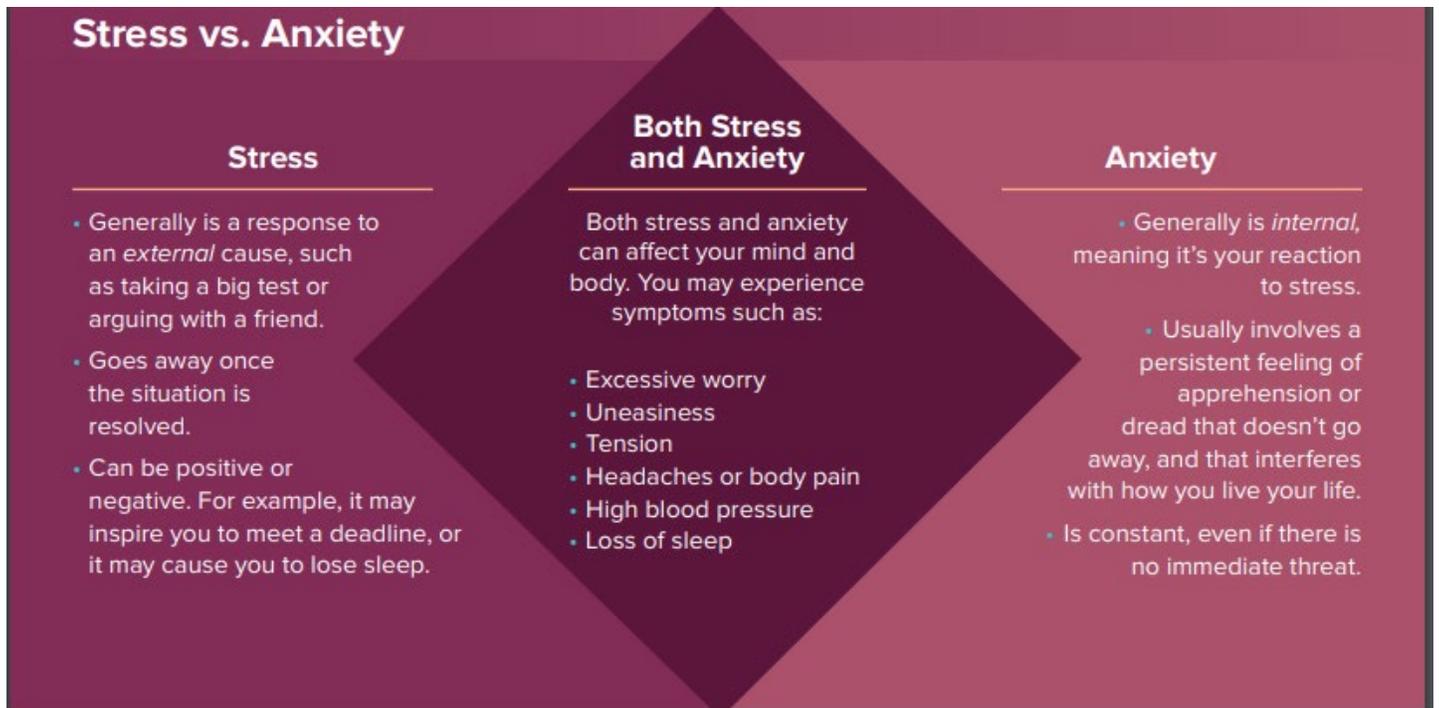
Life can be stressful. Stress is a part of life, and everyone experiences it from time to time. You may feel stressed about demands from work, family, COVID-19 or a life change.

What is stress? Stress is a response to external situations, such as having a great deal of pressure or many demands placed on you. Stress activates your “fight or flight” response. Stress may be momentary, short term or long term and chronic. Small amounts of stress help us to meet deadlines and be productive.

What is anxiety? Anxiety is your physical and psychological reaction to stress, and it can occur even if there is no current threat.

If that anxiety doesn’t go away and begins to interfere with your life, it can affect your physical health, causing headaches, digestive problems, a weakened immune system, reproductive difficulties, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and stroke.

You may also be at a higher risk for problems with your psychological health, including developing an anxiety disorder or depression.



(from NIMH 2020)

Coping with Stress and Anxiety

Learning to manage and reduce stress can help you to decrease your anxiety and improve your daily life. There are many different strategies, so find ones that work best for you. There are many resources available to help you learn more about stress and anxiety, assess your stress level and access help to support your mental health.

How do I Know when to Seek Help?

- Your anxiety causes you distress.
- Your anxiety becomes very intense and exaggerated, i.e., what makes you anxious causes little or no anxiety in most other people.
- It starts to interfere with your ability to function day to day at home with your family and with friends, at school, at work and at social events.
- You are struggling to cope.
- The symptoms of your stress or anxiety won't go away.

If any of the above describe you, please consider: your health care provider.

Signs of Stress and Anxiety

(If you have several of these signs, or if any are causing you distress or interfering with your ability to function, it is important for you to seek assistance from your doctor, nurse practitioner or mental health professional).

| Physical | Cognitive | Emotional | Behavioural |
|--|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to sleep patterns; insomnia or sleeping too much • Intense dreams and nightmares • Low energy; easily fatigued • Changes in appetite • Upset stomach, nausea, indigestion & diarrhea • Headaches • Feeling wound up and unable to relax • Muscle tension especially in face, neck & shoulders • Teeth grinding, jaw clenching • Biting nails, picking skin, pulling hair out • Chest pain or pressure, palpitations • Elevated blood pressure, racing heart, excessive sweating, shortness of breath • Trembling or shakiness • Dry mouth/ choking sensation • Startles easily • Susceptible to physical illness (e.g. colds, flu) • Loss of interest in sex | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent or constant worrying • Difficulty limiting or managing worries • Poor concentration/ easily distracted • Inability to focus • Impaired memory • Racing thoughts • Feeling like can't switch mind off • Getting "stuck" in thoughts and can't shift away from them • Feeling disorganized and scattered • Difficulty with problem solving • Impaired decision making • Second guessing • Loss of sense of control • Desire to make impulsive life changes (e.g. job, relationship) • Feeling unproductive and unable to accomplish tasks • Negative or cynical outlook • Apprehensive about the future or dwelling on the "what ifs" • Worrying that is out of proportion to the situation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nervousness • Feeling jumpy or on edge • Overly-sensitive, feeling vulnerable & insecure • Fearful, scared, frightened • Sad, down, blue, depressed • Loss of interest in hobbies, work, seeing friends • Loss of pleasure from usual activities and social interactions • Angry and/or frustrated • Feeling self-conscious or easily embarrassed • Feeling alone, isolated • Feeling numb or shut down • Excessive worrying about the future • Worrying that causes distress • Feeling unable to control worries or feelings • A sense of uneasiness or dread • Feeling easily threatened, overwhelmed or overburdened • Lack of motivation • Fear of losing control • Feeling unable to cope | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from social network • Limiting activities to reduce personal demands • Irritability; outbursts of anger and/or aggression • Argumentative or snappy • Blaming self or others • Over-reactive, defensive, thin-skinned • Critical – finding fault in others • Frequently in tears, crying or uncontrollable crying • Increased use of alcohol or drugs • Engaging in self-destructive or careless pursuits • Desire to avoid or escape from challenging situations • Excessive reliance on another person to cope • Increased tobacco or caffeine consumption • Restlessness, pacing, inability to sit still • Immobilized, frozen, unable to proceed |

Resources

Stress and Anxiety

- <https://cmha.ca/documents/stress>

The A to Z on Stress

- <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/stress>
- <http://www.psychologyfoundation.org/index.php/resources/kids-have-stress-too/>
- <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/understanding-anxiety>
- <https://www.anxietycanada.com/>
- <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/anxiety-disorders>
- <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/guides-and-publications/anxiety-guide-en.pdf>

Free and Confidential Information and Referral Services

- Connex Mental Health, Drug & Alcohol & Problem Gambling Helpline
1-866-531-2600
- 211 Ontario Helpline 1-877-330-3213
- Ementalhealth Ontario Mental Health Directory
- Children's Mental Health Directory (Ontario)
- Mental Health T.O. (Kids, Youth & Families in Toronto) 1-866-585-6486
- Rapid Access Addiction Medicine Clinics (Self-referral)
- Health Care Connect (Assistance in finding a Family Doctor or Nurse Practitioner)

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